

WRITING BETWEEN WEEKS 2 & 3

HELPFUL HINTS

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Today you received listener responses. Don't try to use every comment. Look for what repeats, what surprises you, and what feels true. This sheet gives you possible next steps, but you only need to choose one or two.

Shaping Your Story: Simple Next Steps

After you receive listener responses, don't try to fix everything at once. Read through the notes, notice what has energy, and choose **one or two** next steps.

1. Find the heart of the story

Ask yourself:

- What is this story really about?
- Why does it still matter?
- What do I hope the listener/reader receives?
- What changed — in me, in someone else, or in how I understood the moment?

Possible heart words: love, courage, loss, humor, resilience, belonging, forgiveness, surprise, wisdom, regret, gratitude, becoming.

2. Strengthen the opening

A good opening invites us in.

You might begin with:

- A moment: "The first time I saw..."
- A person: "My grandmother never..."
- A place: "The kitchen smelled like..."
- A problem: "I thought I knew what would happen."
- A surprising line: "I didn't know that would be the last time."

Ask: **Where does the story truly begin?**

3. Put us in the scene

Help us see, hear, and feel where we are.

Add one or two details from the senses:

- What did you see?
- What did you hear?
- What did the room, food, weather, clothing, car, street, house, or object look like?
- What did your body feel?
- What was the emotional temperature of the moment?

You do not need lots of detail. Choose the details that carry meaning.

4. Show us one important moment

Instead of explaining everything, slow down one important moment.

Try adding:

- A line of dialogue
- A gesture
- An action
- A facial expression
- A specific object
- A choice someone made
- What you noticed then
- What you understand now

Showing lets the reader/listener experience the story with you.

5. Use your real voice

You do not need to sound literary. You need to sound like you.

Ask:

- Does this sound like me?
- Am I saying what I really mean?
- Is there a place I'm holding back?
- Is there a place I'm explaining instead of trusting the story?

Authenticity matters more than fancy writing.

6. Choose active, specific words

Look for places where the writing feels flat or vague.

Instead of: "She was nice."

Try: "She slipped an extra cookie into my hand."

Instead of: "I was upset."

Try: "I gripped the steering wheel and couldn't speak."

Instead of: "It was meaningful."

Try: "I kept the note in my wallet for twenty years."

Specifics make the story memorable.

7. Consider the ending

A good ending does not have to explain everything. It can leave us with meaning, feeling, or a clear image.

You might end with:

- What you understand now
- A final image
- A line of dialogue
- A return to the beginning
- What changed
- What you hope someone remembers

Ask: **What do I want the reader/listener to carry away?**

8. Try a title

A title can help reveal the heart of the story.

Possible title sources:

- A phrase from the story
- A meaningful object
- A turning point
- A repeated line
- The deeper meaning
- A contrast or surprise

Don't worry about finding the perfect title yet. Try three and see what they reveal.

Revision reminder

You don't have to do everything.

For next time, choose **one story** and revise it by focusing on:

- ☐ the heart of the story
- ☐ the opening
- ☐ one vivid scene
- ☐ sensory details
- ☐ dialogue or action
- ☐ your real voice
- ☐ a stronger ending
- ☐ a possible title

The goal is not perfection. The goal is to help the story become more fully itself.