

Some tips and concepts to keep in mind as you embark on your first drafts

First drafts

“Silence the internal critic early in the process. The critic becomes useful only when enough work has been done to warrant evaluation and revision.”

—Roy Peter Clark

The Engine

“Who done it? Guilty or not guilty? Who will win the race? Which Man will she marry? Will the hero escape or die trying? Will the body be found? Good Questions drive good stories.

“This narrative strategy is so powerful that it needs a name and Tom French gave it to me: he calls it the “engine” of the story. He defines the engine as the question the story answers for the reader... The engine moves the reader across the arc from beginning to the end.”

—Roy Peter Clark

Roy Peter Clark’s Tool No. 1: Begin sentences with subjects and verbs.

Make meaning early, then let weaker elements branch to the right.

Think of the subject and verb as the locomotive that pulls all the cars that follow.

Voice

“Voice is the sum of all the strategies used by the author to create the illusion that the writer is speaking directly to the reader from the page.”

—Don Fry

“Voice is an effect created by the writer that reaches the reader through his ears, even when he is receiving the message through his eyes.”

—Roy Peter Clark

Rhythm

“This sentence has five words. Here are five more words. Five-word sentences are fine. But several together become monotonous. Listen to what is happening. The writing is getting boring. The sound of it drones. It’s like a stuck record. The ear demands some variety. Now listen. I vary the sentence length, and I create music. Music. The writing sings. It has a pleasant rhythm, a lilt, a harmony. I use short sentences. And I use sentences of medium length. And sometimes, when I am certain the reader is rested, I will engage him with a sentence of considerable length, a sentence that burns with energy and builds with all the impetus of a crescendo, the roll of the drums, the crash of cymbals—sounds that say listen to this, it is important.”

—Gary Provost, *100 Ways to Improve Your Writing*