

Assignments

Bookwriter – Pace and Rhythm in a Scene

Write a 3-person scene in 3 major beats:

1. All three are looking forward to a celebratory dinner at an expensive restaurant.
2. An argument erupts over where to go, and one person changes his or her mind about going after all, not wanting to take part in the rising conflict.
3. The argument between the remaining two people escalates, each blaming the other for the drop-out's decision. This becomes so heated that the friendship is clearly in danger. The drop-out again reverses course and decides to end the argument by agreeing to go, but only if he or she can select the restaurant.

The first beat should be relaxed. Tension is introduced by the second beat, and escalates until the climax of the third beat when the argument is on the verge of ending the friendship, followed by a very brief denouement as the original party pooper agrees to go after all.

The first beat should be longer than the second beat, and the second should be longer than the third. The dialogue should gain pace toward the final impending break-up – shorter lines exchanged rapidly until perhaps the last two or three sides consist of no more than one or two words.

If you can, get a couple of friends to read the scene with you. Work on it until you can feel the increasing pace of the dialogue and rapidly escalating nature of the conflict. Revise it as needed to accommodate the sense of speeding toward the end.

Composer – Rhythm in a Conflict Duet

Write a 32-bar A-A-B-A tune for two male voices, either two baritones or one baritone and one tenor. The voices are in conflict over something: which movie to go to, which baseball team should win the World Series, etc. Make it clear which voice is singing, i.e. put each voice on a separate vocal staff. The voices may alternate lines or they may overlap in counterpoint, your choice. Use melodic rhythm and the underlying accompaniment rhythms to indicate the rising tension in the argument.

If you are working with a lyricist, you may use the lyric below as your pattern (or give your music to your lyricist to set words to it).

Lyricist – Parallel structure and repeating rhythms

Please look at Beat 2 in the bookwriter's assignment above. Use this as the situation for your lyric.

Write four stanzas for the arguers, an A A B A song in which the A sections are rhythmically identical, syllable for syllable and stress for stress. The topic of this song is all about where to go for dinner, and why to go to that particular place. Create a grammatical structure that repeats in each A section, a phrase or parenthetical expression, a subordinate clause, even the entire sentence structure itself. Within the lyric create and underline repeating rhythmic patterns in the words, indicating where the stresses are by printing the stressed syllables in bold face type as the example in the chapter. Use meter to intensify the argument, especially at the end.

Option: If you are working with a composer, then fit lyrics to the music your composer has written OR – if the lyrics must come first in your collaboration, write the song as above for the composer to set. If the lyrics come first, you and the composer must agree before you begin whether the voices will alternate or overlap in counterpoint.