

1. Chapter 1: Nouns
 - a. SEE, SEEING, SCENE: Reread the scenes early this chapter – Paul Theroux’s bus ride in Turkey, James Salter’s hall at West Point, Arundhati Roy’s landscape in Ayemenem. Go sit somewhere distinctive – a favorite garden, a cathedral, or even a grungy inner-city laundromat – and notice what is special or evocative about the place. Use concrete, vivid nouns to paint a picture of the scene. Carefully choose a few idea / feeling / abstraction nouns to convey what makes the place unusual. It is a microcosm of something larger?

2. Chapter 2: Pronouns
 - a. FEED YOUR INNER CRITIC: Inspired by the examples given on p.58, go to a favorite restaurant for a meal. Write three capsule reviews – no more than a paragraph in length – each from a different point of view. Notice how the point of view changes the tenor of the review, and whether a certain point of view allows you to write in a way that sounds like you – or like a different you.

3. Chapter 3: Verbs
 - a. CONSIDER THE CATCHER: Using Roger Angell’s “In the Fire” as a model, watch one person do the same thing over and over. Perhaps it’s an athlete. Perhaps it’s a cashier at the grocery store. Perhaps it’s a parent at the playground, pushing a swing. Perhaps it’s a shoe salesman opening boxes for one shopper after another. Note the small shifts in the way the person does the action each time. Write a description of that person, capturing the smallest details of his or her movements with dynamic verbs.

4. Chapter 4: Adjectives
 - a. COCK YOUR GIMLET EYE: In personal essays or memoirs, the ability to deftly sketch character must be turned inward. Write down three adjectives to describe yourself. Consult a dictionary or thesaurus to refine them. These adjectives probably get at your personality. Next, write three adjectives to describe yourself to someone *who has never seen you before*. Imagine that that person is going to use your three words to pick you out from the crowd at a café. Is the second set of adjectives different from the first? Less interior, perhaps? Ideally, you will avoid adjectives that are vague (*short* or *male*), or that miss the chance to say two things instead of one (*statuesque*, for example gets a physicality and personality); *soccer dad* tells more than *male*).

5. Chapter 5: Adverbs
 - a. GET THOSE VALLEY GIRL *VERYS* OUT OF YOUR SYSTEM: In a short paragraph, write about one of your favorite possessions, using as many lame “degree” adverbs as you can. (These include not just *very*, *really*, *so*, *totally*, and *definitely*, but also *truly*, *exceedingly*, *extremely*, *largely*, *completely*, *absolutely*, *wholly*, *suddenly*, *gradually*, and the like.) Notice in what direction these adverbs push your writing.

6. Chapter 6: Prepositions
 - a. BEYOND BEYOND: Try writing a poem or a poetic ad mimicking Goodby, Silverstein's ad for Norwegian Cruise Line. Pick a common preposition (through? beside? before?) and tell a story with it.

7. Chapter 7: Conjunctions
 - a. SAVORING SUBORDINATES: Compose a few sentences – nothing fancy, just stream of consciousness – about your last meal. After you've written them, analyze the sentences for your use of conjunctions. If you write short, crisp sentences together by using subordinate conjunctions. If you already rely on subordinate conjunctions, try rebalancing your sentences with *ands* and *buts* and *fors* and *sos*. Does the change of conjunctions change your style?

8. Chapter 8: Interjections
 - a. MAKE A MONOLOGUE: Write a soliloquy like Catherine Tate's (p. 144-145) in which one person is recounting a conversation whose content is conveyed mostly with interjections. Let the monologue tell a story – let the choice and sequence of interjections tell the reader who the characters are, what their relationship is, and what the tone or mood of the conversation was.

9. Chapter 9: The Subject, The Predicate
 - a. SIX-WORD MEMOIRS: In 2006, Rachel Fershleiser and Larry Smith, editors of the Web-based *Smith Magazine*, reminded readers that Ernest Hemingway had told an entire story in six words: "For sale. Baby shoes. Never worn." They dared readers to top him by writing personal stories, and they published the best of the enthusiastic responses. Here are two Six-Word Memoirs that do the subject-predicate tango:

"Googled what he called me. Ouch." (Emily L.)

"My parents should've kept their receipt." (SarahBeth)

Using those as models, write your own mini-memoir – either seriously or in jest.

10. Chapter 10: Simple Sentences
 - a. WAKING UP TO SENTENCES: Take five or ten minutes to freewrite about your first five minutes today – your waking moments. Write in a stream of consciousness, and don't stop to correct or rewrite anything. Then analyze your sentences. Did you use simple sentences, or did your thoughts tend to tumble out in a jumbled sequence of clauses? Rewrite the paragraphs using only simple sentences (adjectives, adverbs, and prepositional phrases allowed!)

11. Chapter 12: Length and Tone
 - a. FROM DRAFT TO CRAFT: Using stream of consciousness, freewrite for ten or twenty minutes, without pausing, about a mentor or personality who has been a great influence on your life. Don't think about the sentences per se. Just try to write evocatively about the person. After you've finished, craft a character sketch of that person (much like that of Papa Correa on p. 214). Look carefully at the sentences. Mix long and short, complex and simple. Use subordinate conjunctions to help emphasize paradoxes or, perhaps, cause-effect relationships. Take command of your sentences – if you feel comfortable writing short and long, appositive and absolute, simple and complex,

staccato and fluid, you begin to have great freedom in writing sentences that will have an intended effect on the reader. This is the essence of craft!

12. Chapter 13: Melody

- a. CRASH, BANG, WALLOP: Find a scene that is a symphony of sound. (A busy street corner? A screeching subway? A quiet courtyard in which each footstep registers?) Tune into those sounds only. (Ignore the panhandlers, the change of the traffic lights, the people looking at you askance.) Find words that are onomatopoeic in some way, that suggest the sounds themselves. Write sentences whose rhythms evoke the sounds you are hearing.

13. Chapter 14: Rhythm

- a. TRY THIS EXERCISE in conveying psychology through rhythm: Observe two people in a park, at a ballpark, or on a dance floor. Are their movements quick and jerky or graceful and fluid? If the former, write a series of staccato sentences (short words, hard sounds, and short sentences). Eavesdrop. Is their conversation brusque or baroque? If the latter, write a series of sentences with a more lyrical, languid, or liquid rhythm (polysyllabic words, softer sounds, stretched-out sentences).

14. Chapter 15: Lyricism

- a. LOLL ABOUT IN SOME LYRICS: Take a look at your favorite songs and see if the composer uses metaphors in the lines. If you come up empty-handed, try these three:
 - 1) "Shelter from the Storm" by Bob Dylan
 - 2) "Just a Wave, Not the Water" by Butch Hancock
 - 3) "Hotel California" by Eagles
 - 4) "London's Burning" by The Clash
 - 5) "No Surprises" by Radiohead

15. Chapter 16: Voice

- a. EPISTOLARY VOICE: Go back through your texts, emails, notes, letters, or other things you have written to friends. Find some of these that express something of who you are and how you would like to keep in touch with people. Compare all of the different methods of communication. What is the same in all of these forms, and what differs? Look in particular at **style** (the vocabulary, the length of the sentences), **tone** (the attitude, be it earnest, excited, pissed off, or ironic), and **voice** (the overall sense of *you* that comes through with the words). Write down your observations.