



Narrative Modes

On the page, fiction takes many forms: Scene or scene fragment, exposition, narrative summary, excerpts from emails, diaries or letters, newspaper clippings—anything you want to include in a piece, you can.

The most commonly used narrative modes in fiction are scene, scene fragment, narrative summary, and exposition.

Scene—characters in action in a specific place and time. Scenes can have narrative summary, exposition, dialogue, thinking and feeling (interior monologue).

Example:

Harry unlocked his door and stepped in front of the cracked mirror. Goyle stared back at him out of dull, deep-set eyes. Harry scratched his ear. So did Goyle.

Ron's door opened. They stared at each other. Except that he looked pale and shocked, Ron was indistinguishable from Crabbe, from the pudding-basin haircut to the long, gorilla arms.

"This is unbelievable," said Ron, approaching the mirror and prodding Crabbe's flat nose. "Unbelievable."

"We'd better get going," said Harry, loosening the watch that was cutting into Goyle's thick wrist. "We've still got to find out where the Slytherin common room is, I only hope we can find someone to follow..."

Ron, who had been gazing at Harry, said, "You don't know how bizarre it is to see Goyle *thinking*." He banged on Hermione's door. "C'mon, we need to go."

(this scene continues but you get the idea)

J.K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* (novel)

Scene fragment—characters inserted into narrative summary to capture essential conversation or close-up action.

Ian appeared, head and shoulders first, climbing steadily, his shadow, cast by the car's headlights, reaching out towards her, lengthening as he reached the summit. He was nothing, nothing she recognized. A dark figure haloed in light. She waited, and couldn't speak.

"Sorry I've been so long," he said. "Just had to get out and walk, you know. I can't sit still when I'm like this."

And immediately he was Ian. Except that he wasn't Ian. As they waited for the car to pass, she was aware that a line had been crossed in her thinking about him.

Pat Barker, *Border Crossing* (novel)



Narrative Modes, Cont'd.

Exposition—gives the reader information needed to understand the story.

The small towns in central Illinois nearly all owe their existence to the coming of the railroads in the decade before the Civil War. I have always had the impression that Lincoln is in some way different from the others but perhaps that is only because I lived there. It is the county seat and has two coal mines, now worked out. It has never had any sizeable factories, and owes its modest prosperity to the surrounding farmland.

William Maxwell, *So Long, See You Tomorrow* (novel)

Narrative Summary—moves the story in time and/or place without going into details.

He spent one whole winter without lighting his stove, and used to declare that he liked it better, because one slept more soundly in the cold. For the present he, too, had been obliged to give up the university, but it was only for a time, and he was working with all his might to save enough to return to his studies again. Raskolnikov had not been to see him for the last four months, and Razumihin did not even know his address.

Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *Crime and Punishment* (novel)