

1

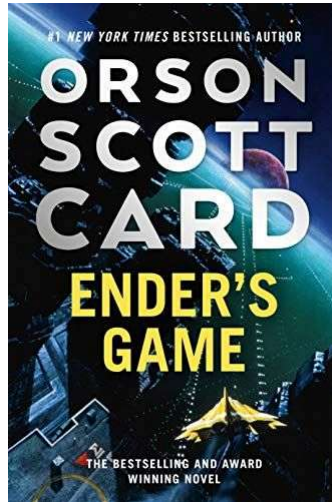
Content is King, But...

1. Character
2. Setting
3. Problem
4. Plot
5. Text



2

What do you see?



3

First Principle: Writing is **TELLING**



4

**Second Principle:
Give the Reader the **TRIGGERS****



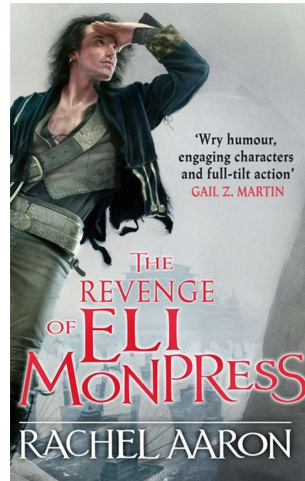
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What is Technique #1?

2,000 to 10,000



7

Technique 1: Sketch then Draft



8

Sketch Aid

Where are we?

Who is here?

What's the character trying to accomplish?

9

3 Main Types of Telling

- **Narrative Summary**
- **Narrative Detail**
- **Description**
- Exposition
- Commentary

10

Narrative = Events

Telling **what happened**
Then the **response** to that
Then the **response** to that
Then the **response** to that
Then the **response**...

11

Event Types

External

- Action
- Dialogue

Internal

- Emotion
- Thoughts

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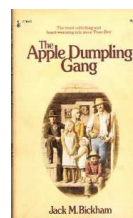
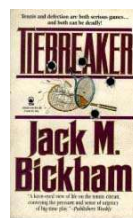
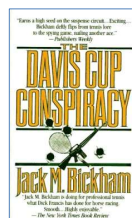
Narrative Summary vs Detail



13

What is Technique #2?

75



14

What is Technique #2?



15

Technique 2: Put Narrative in SR Order

Stimulus

Action, Dialogue, Emotion, Thought

Response

Action, Dialogue, Emotion, Thought

16

Stimulus then Response

In Order

(S) "Give me the keys," John said.

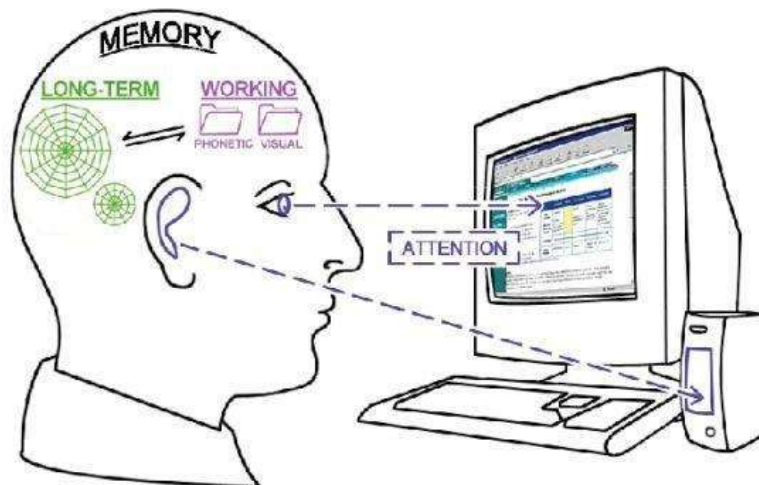
(R) "You'll have to shoot me first," Mary replied.

Out of Order

"You'll have to shoot me first," Mary said,
John having asked her for the keys.

17

Max Capacity = 7'ish or 2'ish



18

Stimulus then Response

Out of Order

I felt sick and turned away from Mary, trying to contain my tears.

Mary said, "Your note arrived too late. Mr. Darcy is now engaged to Charlotte!"

In Order

(S) Mary said, "Your note arrived too late. Mr. Darcy is now engaged to Charlotte!"

(R) I felt sick and turned away, trying to contain my tears.

19

Stimulus - ? - Response

In Order, but . . .

(S) Darcy went down on his knee. "Will you marry me?"

(R) Liz pulled the Glock out of her waistband. "You've got to the count of two. Then I'm going to put a bullet up your nose."

Internalization

(S) Darcy went down on his knee. "Will you marry me?"

(i) Marry him? The man who'd humiliated her sister? The man who'd wrecked her father's reputation?

(R) Liz pulled the Glock out of her waistband. "You've got to the count of two. Then I'm going to put a bullet up your nose."

20

SiR

Stimulus
internalization
Response

21

SiR, SiR not SRi, SRi

SRi

(S)“No, Darcy,” Jane said. “I could never bring myself to marry you.”

(R)“Can I not convince you to reconsider?” He put his hand on her shoulder. “Jane. Please.”

(i) Darcy could barely contain his relief. What if she’d said yes? An endless torment of bird-brained conversation.

She plucked his hand from her shoulder. “Mrs. Ships has a new cook. I’m dare not miss her crumpets. Good-bye, Darcy.”

22

SiR, SiR not SRi, SRi

SiR

(S) “No, Darcy,” Jane said. “I could never bring myself to marry you.”

(i) Darcy could barely contain his relief. What if she’d said yes? An endless torment of bird-brained conversation.

(R) “Can I not convince you to reconsider?” He put his hand on her shoulder. “Jane. Please.”

She plucked his hand away. “Mrs. Ships has a new cook. I’m dare not miss her crumpets. Good-bye, Darcy.”

23

Narrative Summary

Our ritual is to head to the park every day first thing in the morning. Stella’s baby brother, Finn, is typically the cause of any delay. Today, Finn projectile poops halfway across the room when I open his diaper, lines of runny brown clotted matter spraying across the changing table and onto his dresser, the carpet, his Mother, and who knows where else I will ultimately find the revolting remnants.

24

Narrative Detail

Our ritual is to head to the park every day first thing in the morning. Stella's baby brother, Finn, is typically the cause of any delay. Today, I open Finn's diaper, coo at him, and **he gets that look.**

"No!" I say. I grab for the edge of the diaper, but I'm too slow, and **he lets loose the poop cannon.**

I jerk back.

The projectile shoots out over the changing table, across the carpet, and into his dresser. It's swampy cottage cheese. It's sinking into the carpet.

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Narrative Detail

"Finn," I say. "Buddy. Really?"

A glob loosens itself from a knob of his dresser and falls onto to the cover of *Good Night Moon* lying on the floor below.

I sigh. **My hair falls in my eyes.** I loop it back behind one ear **and feel wetness.**

My stomach sinks. You've got to be kidding me.

I look at my hand. Poop. I feel my hair. Poop. Lots of poop. All the way down the \$90 dollar coloring I got taken for at Rise and Shine Salon.

26

Narrative Detail continued

I look down at the villain. "Mommy's going to Target today to see if they carry baby corks."

Finn gives me his toothless that-was-dynamite grin, then tries to wriggle over and high-tail his cherub butt out of there, but I hold him down.

I look around at the splatters and lumps. I'm going to be finding revolting remnants for weeks.

"Stella," I call out.

Stella's standing right behind me. "Mommy, Finn is disgusting. He's like a big pigeon that poops everywhere."

27

Narrative Detail continued

"Will you get me the Clorox wipes, please?"

She sighs heavily and rolls her eyes--she already has the wipes right there in her little hands.

28

Don't Be A SiR Nazi

SRI

(S) "No, Darcy," Jane said. "I could never bring myself to marry you."

(R) "Can I not convince you to reconsider?" He put his hand on her shoulder. "Jane. Please."

(i) Dear Lord, he thought, please.

She plucked his hand from her shoulder and cast it aside.

Mr. Darcy's breath failed him.

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3 Main Types of Telling

- **Narrative Summary**
- **Narrative Detail**
- **Description**
- Exposition
- Commentary

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Description

Sharing details to help readers form a **clear impression** of people, places, and things

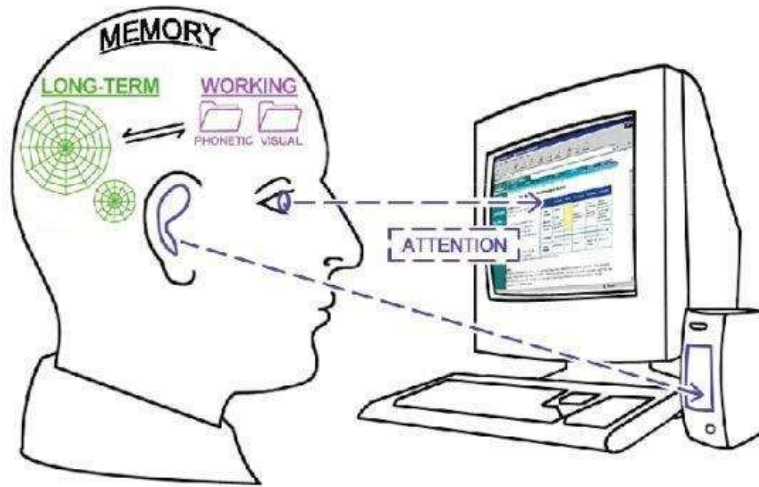
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Description



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Max Capacity = 7'ish or 2'ish



33

What is Technique #3?



34

Broad-brush + 1



35

Vivid?

“Jack Saunders was six feet three and a half inches tall, and weighed about a hundred and ninety pounds. His black hair always fell in a loose curl over his wide, irregular forehead, his deep-set black eyes peered earnestly at the world from under heavy brows. He had a large straight nose, and unyielding sort of mouth with deep corners and a full underlip, and a square, cleft chin.” (McGraw, p86)

36

Broad-brush + 1'ish

“Jack Saunders, an earnest giant of a man with a face like a crag and a black question mark of hair forever dangling over his brow . . .” (McGraw, p87)

37

Broad-brush + 1'ish

“Jack Saunders, an **earnest giant of a man with a face like a crag** and a **black question mark of hair** forever dangling over his brow . . .” (McGraw, p87)

38

Broad-brush + 1

Bob was a **big-hearted accountant** who loved pies.

39

Broad-brush + 1

Brent was a **small fussy man** who ironed his underwear.

40

Broad-brush + 1

Maxine was a **gray-haired retiree** who putted around town with her parrot in a golf cart she'd paid the lawn boy to paint—a hundred bucks for the cherry-red color, fifty for the flames licking the front end.

41

Broad-brush + 1

The FN P90, the *Mata Policia*, the cop killer, was **a compact submachine gun** that looked like a kitchen gadget with a can opener.

42

Broad-brush + 1



43

Broad-brush + 1

She was getting hot cocoa at Starbucks the first time I saw **her**. She wore black boots, a black leather jacket, and blue lipstick that matched her beautiful, haunting eyes.

44

Broad-brush + 1



45

Broad-brush + 1

Ramon was a mechanic in the bad part of town who sometimes chopped stolen cars. Every night he left the shop and came home to hold his baby son to the skin of his tattooed chest, to let the child know he was not alone, to feel, close to his heart, the only thing in the world he had left from Carilla.

46

Description



47

Less Is More

My coauthor has been criticized for the short chapters and the ultra-lean prose, but don't think for a minute that it is without purpose beyond a quick read for a harried reader.

"Most writers will tell you five to 10 things about a character or a setting or an action," he told me. "Fine for literature. But our approach is to pick the **one or two or three** that really count and discard the rest. It not only creates pace but it leaves images in the reader's mind that are concrete and unequivocal."

(Mark Sullivan, "What I learned from James Patterson")

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Technique #4: The Pause

Narrative

Narrative

Pause and orient

Narrative

Narrative

Narrative

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Technique #5: Use Tags

Observable,
concrete cues



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Character Tags

Props or clothing

- Huge sword
- Necklace of pommels
- Boots
- Hat

Phrase or speech habits

- “Steel’s the answer”
- 10-dollar words

Physical traits

- Snaggle tooth
- Height
- Ruined hand

Behaviors or mannerisms

- Stands too close
- Cracks knuckles
- Adjust clothing all the time

Obsession

- War
- Baking
- Aliens

51

Cluster Tags

Multiple tags but single dominant impression

- **Skeletal:** bony fingers, visible veins, paper-thin skin, knobs of bone at the neck, sunken eyes
- **Sloppy:** wrinkled shirt, jam on face, papers jammed into a pack

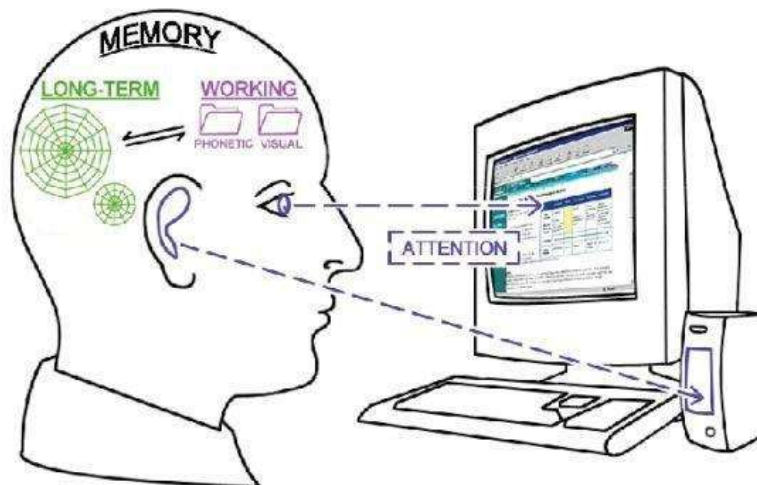
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What is Technique #6?



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Max Capacity = 7'ish or 2'ish



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Use A Spatial Order

Top to bottom

Bottom to top

Left to right

Right to left

General to particular

Particular to general

Zoom out

Zoom in

55

Spatial Order?

“Lane moved his hand away from the phone. He picked up the framed photograph. He held it two-handed, flat against his chest, high up, so that Reacher felt he had two people staring back at him. Above, Lane’s pale and worried features. Below, under glass, a woman of breathtaking classical beauty. Dark hair, green eyes, high cheekbones, a bud of a mouth, photographed with passion and expertise and printed by a master” (The Hard Way p15)

56

Top to Bottom

“Lane moved his hand away from the phone. He picked up the framed photograph. He held it two-handed, flat against his chest, high up, so that Reacher felt he had two people staring back at him. **Above**, Lane’s pale and worried features. **Below**, under glass, a woman of breathtaking classical beauty. Dark **hair**, green **eyes**, high **cheekbones**, a bud of a **mouth**, photographed with passion and expertise and printed by a master” (The Hard Way p15)

57

Spatial Order?

“The road was a cool, deep canyon through the firs, fragrant with fir-needles and earth and rain, alive with the small rustlings and whisperings of the breeze. Faintly at first, then more loudly as Ann neared it, the old pump by the spring sounded its repeated, bell-like note. There would be a tin cup hanging close by, as there always had been, and the water would be pure and icy cold, with just a hint of the taste of rust.” (McGraw p88)

58

Zoom In

“The **road** was a cool, deep canyon through the firs, fragrant with fir-needles and earth and rain, alive with the small rustlings and whisperings of the breeze. Faintly at first, then more loudly as Ann neared it, the **old pump** by the spring sounded its repeated, bell-like note. There would be a **tin cup** hanging close by, as there always had been, and **the water** would be pure and icy cold, with just a hint of the taste of rust.” (McGraw p88)

59

Spatial Order?

Before

It was a glorious day in dirt land. There was the dirt and rock at his feet. And dirt hills in the distance. And traffic motoring by that smelled like diesel. And the sun shining down out of a wide blue sky. And across it all the Wyoming wind was blowing, rolling across the unfettered land, for miles and miles, as far as the eye could see.

60

Spatial Order?

After

It was a glorious day in dirt land. There was the dirt and rock **at his feet**. And the **traffic** motoring by that smelled like diesel. And the **dirt hills** in the distance. And the sun shining down out of a wide blue **sky**. And **across it all** the Wyoming wind was blowing, rolling across the unfettered land, for miles and miles, **as far as the eye could see**.

61

Spatial Order?

She was getting hot cocoa at Starbucks the first time I saw her. She wore black **boots**, a black leather **jacket**, and blue **lipstick** that matched her beautiful, haunting **eyes**.

62

Technique #7: Concrete Metaphor

- She darted like a thrown knife.
- Hope flickered like a bad bulb—still there but unreliable.
- He came at me like a linebacker who had been waiting all day.
- He looked like a Dorito chip with legs.
- He trundled along like some stiff-legged rhino.

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Wrap: First Principles

1. Story is King, **but bad TEXT can kill your signal**
2. Writing is **TELLING**
3. Feed the reader **the TRIGGERS**

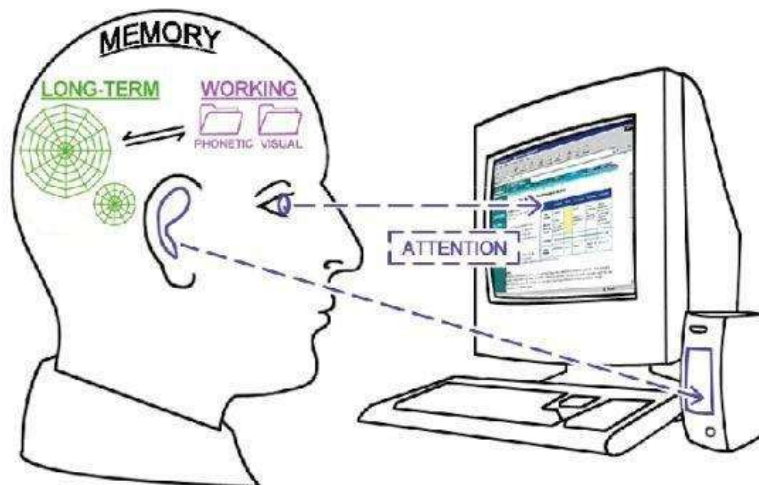
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Wrap: Types of Telling

- Events {
 - Narrative Summary
 - Narrative Detail
- Context {
 - Description
 - Exposition
 - Commentary

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Max Capacity = 7'ish or 2'ish



66

Wrap: Techniques

1. Sketch first, then draft
2. SiR order
3. Broad-brush + 1
4. The Pause
5. Use Tags
6. Use Spatial Order
7. Use Concrete Metaphors

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Next Steps

**Pick one technique
and use it in your next
writing session**