**Selected Resources – Narrative Nonfiction Tool Belt**

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Author of *Especially For You – Finding a New Purpose After Unspeakable Loss; Closer By The Mile*

Narrative Nonfiction Craft Tips

**Reporting and Interviewing**

* **Your reporting** should generate questions: follow them
* Careful sensory reporting loads you up with scene details
* **Art of interviewing**: intro🡪 adjustment 🡪 connection (or not) 🡪 revelation🡪 returning for more 🡪 synthesis
* “Columbo method” – clarify, ask to refresh
* Don’t lead them – always choose honesty, integrity

**POV decisions** – leading options for your narrative voice

* First person protagonist—you are it, telling your story
* First person witness—story of main character  
  told by another observing
* First person re-teller—third-hand, relayed  
  to narrator
* Third person omniscient: all knowing, narrator  
  bounces from perspective to perspective
* Third person limited (or close): narrator follows one character, action filtered indirectly through his thoughts and actions, i.e. interior dialogue
* Modulating your perspective, or POV, to zoom in and out on characters

Finally, **closing narrative distance** engages the reader.

**Three examples** moving closer to protagonist:

🡪 Distant:  
  
“She stood, walked across the living room, and pushed the door open. Snow was falling.”

🡪 A little closer:  
  
“She pulled her feet under her, pushed both hands against the cushion, and rose from the couch. She glided through the living room into the foyer and pushed on the door. It creaked open, wind hissed, and snow blew…”

🡪 Closer still:  
  
“The brocade of the couch upholstery pushed into her palms and she lifted herself off the couch. She glided over the soft give of the Persian carpet… grabbed the icy doorknob and twisted. The door creaked open. Wind whipped her hair across her eyes. Snowflakes burned on her cheeks...”

**Narrative nonfiction models**

Isabel Wilkerson, *The Warmth of Other Suns – The Epic Story of America’s Great Migration.*  
Her achievement is humanizing history with “a voice that echoes the magic cadences of Toni Morrison or the folk wisdom of Zora Neal Hurston’s collected oral histories.”

Dave Eggers, *What is the What, Zeitoun*  
Jon Krakauer, *Into the Wild, Into Thin Air*Tracy Kidder, *Mountains Beyond Mountains, Strength in What Remains, House*

**Long form narrative journalism**

David Halberstam, *The Best and the Brightest*  
Halberstam documented how the Vietnam war was a tragic miscalculation of an allegedly brilliant set of U.S. officials in the Kennedy Administration.

Lawrence Wright, “The Plague Year.” *The New Yorker*. January 4 & 11, 2021. Based on nearly a year of reporting on the pandemic, Wright’s full-length piece (taking up most of the issue!) details the mistakes and struggles behind an American tragedy. He skillfully weaves together profiles of virologists, Administration and public health officials, front line medical workers and many others, and occasionally switches to first person to reflect or while immersed in a key moment (yes—you can alternate POV successfully!)

**Creative nonfiction**  
  
Jeff Sharlet, *Sweet Heaven When I Die: Faith, Faithlessness, and the Country In Between*  
His collection of essays vibrate with all the madness and beauty, the melancholy and aspirations for transcendence, of American life. Sharlet delves into realms of faith and the absence of such that are rarely seen.

**Memoir**   
  
Tobias Wolfe, *This Boy’s Life*  
Mary Karr, *The Liar’s Club*  
Cheryl Strayed, *Wild*Michael Patrick MacDonald, *All Souls*  
Joan Didion, *The Year of Magical Thinking*

Suggested Resources  
  
**Narrative nonfiction/Literary journalism**  
  
Mark Kramer and Wendy Call, *Telling True Stories, A Nonfiction Writers’ Guide*  
William E. Blundell, *The Art and Craft of Feature Writing*

**Creative nonfiction, etc.**  
Lee Gutkind, *You Can't Make This Stuff Up: The Complete Guide to Writing Creative Nonfiction— From Memoir to Literary Journalism and Everything in Between*   
  
**Fiction craft**  
  
Lisa Crone, *Story Genius*  
John Gardner*, The Art of Fiction: Notes on Craft for Young Writers*  
Stephen King, *On Writing*  
Annie Dillard, *The Writing Life*