

# Writing Exercise

June 10, 2026

This **writing exercise** is designed specifically to demonstrate application of the techniques from “*How to Make Readers Care*.” The exercise encourages participants to use **direct and indirect characterization, action, dialogue, selective detail, contradiction, and stress behavior**—not just talk about them.

It is meant to be completed before the meeting, where participants will share their responses aloud and discuss how craft choices affected emotional impact.

## Objective

Write a fictional short story (750–1000 words) about a character who is forced into a situation that exposes a hidden contradiction in their personality. Consciously apply **direct and indirect characterization**.

## Your story should also include:

- A moment where dialogue reveals more than the character intends.
- An example of exaggeration or comparison.
- A selective detail that reflects emotional state.
- No more than **three direct labels** (e.g., “angry,” “kind,” “selfish”). Use them sparingly.
- A moment where readers must infer the character’s true motive.

## Example Story Situations for Inspiration (Optional)

- A school principal known for fairness must decide whether to protect their own child.
- A paramedic who prides themselves on calm control panics when the patient is someone they know.
- A retired athlete who claims they’re “over the past” attends a reunion.
- A loyal friend must decide whether to reveal a damaging truth.

## When you present your story, be prepared to discuss:

1. Where did indirect characterization carry the most weight?
2. Did you use direct characterization strategically—or lean on it?
3. What contradiction became clearer as you wrote?
4. What line or moment feels most revealing?