

# Writing Exercises: Abstraction, Structure, and Voice

March 11, 2026

These two exercises are designed to be completed after reading the Study Text and before the group discussion. You'll read your response aloud, so aim for something that sounds as good as it reads.

---

## Exercise 1 — The Grounded Moment (less Challenging)

Primary focus: The ladder of abstraction

Think of a small, ordinary moment from your own life — making coffee in an empty house, sitting in a waiting room, watching someone leave. Write a single paragraph of 5–7 sentences about that moment.

Your paragraph has one structural requirement: it must *start* with something concrete and sensory — a detail that can be touched, heard, smelled, or seen — and it must *end* with a sentence that reaches upward toward meaning, drawing a truth or significance out of that specific detail. The movement between those two points is entirely yours to navigate.

**A word of caution:** resist the temptation to decide what the moment *means* first and then hunt for a detail to illustrate it. That produces illustration, not discovery. Start with the real, physical thing and let meaning surface from it.

---

## Exercise 2 — The Three-Layer Scene (More Challenging)

Primary focus: Ladder of abstraction + sentence structure + register, working together.

Write a short scene fiction or drawn from life that depict a character — or yourself — at a moment of decision, loss, or quiet realization. The emotional stakes should feel real.

Before you begin, make one deliberate decision and commit to it: *who is the narrator, and how do they speak?* Casual and immediate? Measured and reflective? That choice is your register, and it should be consistent from the first word to the last.

Within your scene, your sentences must do all three of the following:

- **At least one sentence must be cumulative** — place the main clause first, then layer specific, sensory detail after it, moving down the ladder toward the concrete and particular.
- **At least one sentence must be periodic** — build through conditions, obstacles, or physical detail before the main clause arrives at the end, so that the final words carry the full weight of meaning.
- **The scene as a whole must move up and down the ladder at least once** — not all at one level, whether that's pure abstraction or pure catalog of detail.

Once you've written the scene, spend five minutes preparing a single sentence — not to read aloud as part of the scene, but to offer afterward — identifying one craft choice you made and why you made it. This could be a sentence you're uncertain about, one you're quietly proud of, or one that surprised you when you wrote it. That brief reflection is often where the best discussion begins.

---

**A note on both exercises:** neither asks you to write *about* these techniques — they ask you to write *with* them. The difference matters. You may find that one technique pulls you naturally while another resists. That resistance is worth noting; it's usually where the most useful conversation in the meeting will happen.