

STUDENT HANDOUT · UNIT I · FICTION



Session 3

Scene & Summary — When to Slow Down, When to Move

Sunday, May 31, 2026 · 4:00–5:30 PM · The Community Room

Student handout · readings · in-class practice · discussion questions · homework · worksheet

The Art of Telling

A free creative-writing salon for residents of 2601

Led by James F. Mulhern · Silver Current Press

Welcome to the Session 3 companion handout for *Scene & Summary — When to Slow Down, When to Move*. This is your take-home guide for today's salon — it gathers the main points of the lesson, the reading for class, the in-class practice, the discussion questions with room to write your own thoughts, this week's homework, and the Scene / Summary Diagnostic Worksheet for your private notebook. For the full session materials, reading companions, and course updates, visit companion.art-of-telling.com.

Main Points of the Lesson

Scene puts the reader in the room. Time slows; dialogue is heard; objects are seen; small gestures matter.

Summary covers ground. Time accelerates; events are reported rather than dramatized.

Why scene-heavy prose feels languid; why summary-heavy prose feels remote; why mature writing balances both.

The craft is in the *pacing* — knowing when to slow time down and when to compress it.

A diagnostic: mark every paragraph S or M. If all are scene, the draft has not yet found what to leave out. If only one is scene, the draft has not yet found where to slow down.

Reading for Class

- Katherine Mansfield, *At the Bay* (from *The Garden Party*) — [Project Gutenberg \(public domain\)](#). We'll read the opening pages aloud.

Mansfield is the writer Alice Munro called her teacher — the scene-to-summary alternation in *At the Bay* is exquisite. Watch how she opens entirely in scene, before any character has appeared, and only later shifts into summary once the story has earned the reader's trust.

Critical Reception (after our discussion)

Open this only after you've formed your own response — reading criticism first can crowd out your own voice.

- [Katherine Mansfield Society — on *At the Bay*](#) — the Society's scholarship and resources on Mansfield's life, letters, and stories, including critical work on *At the Bay*.

In-Class Practice

From the live site

Take a moment from your own life — one you have not yet written about, or one you began in Session 1 — and write it twice. Once as a one-paragraph summary, once as a one-page scene. We will discuss what each version makes possible and what it costs. Pen, paper, your notebook. Nothing needed beyond what is already in the room.

stays in your notebook. After the writing, two or three volunteers may read a short passage aloud if they would like to — we discuss what scene and what summary make possible. Nothing collected.

Discussion Questions

The four questions below are exactly as they appear on the Session 3 page. Use the space beneath each one to write your own thoughts before or during our discussion. Nothing here is collected.

Q1. In the Mansfield passage, where does she slow down into scene? Where does she compress into summary? Why there?

Q2. Read a page of writing you have done in this course — the Session 1 piece, or what you just wrote — or any page from the Mansfield. Mark each paragraph S or M. What does the ratio reveal?

Q3. What can scene do that summary cannot? What can summary do that scene cannot?

Q4. Is there a moment in something you have written (in this course or before) that you have summarized that should be a scene? Or scened that should be summarized?

Homework

The read

Read Anton Chekhov's *The Lady with the Dog* — one click from the Session 4 box below, or from the Readings page. Public-domain full text available through standard classic-literature archives.

The optional exercise

Optional: mark a page of your own writing (or any page) S or M, paragraph by paragraph, using the worksheet on the next page. Bring a sentence or two of reaction to class. Nothing collected.

Before Next Sunday — Session 4

Character & Desire — What Pulls a Story Forward. We close the short-story unit by looking at the engine of all narrative: a character who wants something and cannot easily have it. We will read Chekhov together and then write a short paragraph of our own in which a character wants something small and cannot get it.

Scene / Summary Diagnostic — for your private notebook

From the live site

Copy into a Word document. Use the table to mark a page of your own writing — or, if you do not yet have a page of your own, mark the first page of the Mansfield instead. This stays in your private notebook — never collected, never read aloud unless you choose.

Paragraph 1 — S or M? What does it do for the reader? _____

Paragraph 2 — S or M? What does it do for the reader? _____

Paragraph 3 — S or M? What does it do for the reader? _____

Paragraph 4 — S or M? What does it do for the reader? _____

Paragraph 5 — S or M? What does it do for the reader? _____

Paragraph 6 — S or M? What does it do for the reader? _____

Paragraph 7 — S or M? What does it do for the reader? _____

Paragraph 8 — S or M? What does it do for the reader? _____

Reflection: Which paragraph should be the opposite of what it is? Why?

Closing Note

Because there wasn't time to tell everything, the companion site — companion.art-of-telling.com — gathers session materials, reading companions, and course updates so residents can follow along and review after each Sunday.