

Jumpstarting your Writing

Learning to Write in an Elevator

When it comes down to it, many writers fail to make important use of setting. Certain settings provide a rich source of connotation for the reader. If care is taken in establishing the right sort of “confined geography” that a set of characters will occupy, the writer stands a better chance of tightening a story and creating coherence between message and form.

Take for example an elevator. An elevator is a fixed box containing not only a compression of space but also of time. Certain stories are perfect under such a setting. The character is limited by the space of the box--which serves as a microcosmic metaphor, a box of fears: of heights, of enclosed spaces, of crowds, of suffocation, of being trapped in a particular choice.

Exercise

Imagine a character suffering from some sort of anxiety (you pick the modern angst). Your character understands that a feared confrontation is imminent . Begin your story from the moment the elevator doors open to let our “passenger” on board. For the next 1-3 minutes this person will be riding up or down to the destination and fate.

- Who will be encountered?
- What will the character do in reaction?
- What will the strangers do?
- What will be said?
- What will be thought in the silences?
- What point of view will you as a writer use to approach this?
- How will the atmosphere within the elevator be used to heighten or relieve the tension?

End your story with the elevator doors opening to let out your character.

