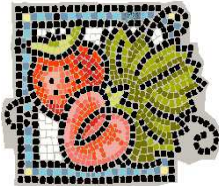


Collage: Composing Segments Around a Unifying Element

The term "collage" is usually associated with the visual arts as a **composition made of varied objects and materials unified by a common element**. This definition characterizes several forms of historically recognized "composed" writing, as well. Journals, diaries, observation notebooks, letters, poems and other kinds of written record-making often fit this description.



Collages can help present key ideas, unifying themes and underlying reasoning in a very clear, direct way. In an era of sound bytes, and in the ever shrinking time-frames of our lives, collages may be a crucial tool in successful communication for both writer and reader, at home and in the workplace.



Almost like a video or cinematic presentation, collages actually reflect a "train of thought" in much the way our minds process the ideas, memories, impressions, etc. that lead to the conclusions we make. When we can form effective collages, we are better able to explore and present ideas in ways that actually get the point(s) across efficiently and clearly.

Following these guidelines will help in learning to present material as a collage.

Segments (the groupings of words) should:

- be about 25-100wds in length
- be **self-contained**, that is be able to convey meaning and to stand alone with out an introduction or extra explanation
- intentionally leave out conventional transitions that might link regular paragraphs
- be able to contribute to the whole no matter in what sequence they are ordered
- have visual markers that separate the segments (extra space, a line, ornaments, etc.)
- be held together by a common thread, literary element, or property, like a theme, tone, voice, even, maybe, a repeated word
- all be related to a clear, concrete, thematic title
- be a mix of reflection, speculation, observation, dialogue, reportage or stream of consciousness, etc.
- allow the flow of ideas and language to influence the appearance (white space, font, etc.) grammar and other elements of construction or punctuation
- allow the reader to make their own conclusions, by avoiding stating, point blank, what the point of the writing might be. Let the writing as a whole "speak for itself."



Allow your intuition, instinct, hunch or "felt sense" to determine what finds its way into the collage--identify the common thread *after* the segments are clear. One of the main features of the collage is that it *intentionally moves away from the elements of a standard, 5-paragraph essay*. Try to withhold pre-judgment about the end product, and just see what happens. If the elements have clear shared qualities and are placed in a related sequence, there will be a wholeness to the overall piece. The collage form can be used in early stages of developing any kind of writing or as an end goal in itself. Even try mixing the order of segments to see how the overall meaning may change.