

MINI-LESSON



EXPOSITION

You have now seen the term **exposition** twice: At the beginning of the story arc, and as one of the five modes of storytelling. So which is it? It's both.

The part of a story arc called "exposition" is where the reader is figuring out who the characters are and what their situation is. But if you give too much information at once, without anything happening in the story, you'll bore your readers. One way to handle this is to give a chunk of exposition at the beginning, then squeeze in more throughout the story.

TWO RULES OF EXPOSITION

1. Only give information that's necessary to the story.

If your character's height does not affect the story, don't tell us how tall he is. If it really doesn't matter what town the story takes place in, leave that out.

2. Keep the story moving.

If you spend too much time in exposition, but nothing actually happens, your readers will get bored.

WAYS TO INCLUDE EXPOSITION IN A STORY

An Expository Paragraph

These often come early in the story, at a time when readers are trying to figure out what's going on. In "Frog" we see this on the first page:

I have always wanted my parents to let me stay at home alone, but they almost never do. I'm *thirteen*. It's ridiculous. They'll go to the store for 30 minutes or maybe let me stay home while they have a dentist appointment or something, but otherwise, if they're going to be gone more than an hour, they have a babysitter come over.

Between Lines of Narration or Dialogue

You can also squeeze exposition in between other things, like lines of narration or dialogue. The first example below shows exposition in the middle of narration. The second shows exposition placed in between bits of dialogue. (This example is not from a story we read.)

I turned it up loud—**they were always telling me to turn it down**—and danced around the kitchen.

“Wait for me,” he called. **Since his injury, Mattias had trouble keeping up with me.** “I have some news!”

Inside Dialogue

Characters can reveal information while they have conversations, like Bree does here:

“...Do you think I’m going to open the door to some serial killer or burn the house down or something? **I get good grades in school and I’ve never gotten in trouble,** but apparently I can’t be trusted...”

When you use this technique, it’s important to make the dialogue sound natural. For example, a character would never say, “Why do you always ask Chloe, a college student, to babysit me?” People don’t really talk like that, so only add exposition when it would make sense in the conversation.

Inside Interior Monologue

Finally, you can add exposition to the thoughts inside a character’s head. In this example, Bree is reacting to her father’s suggestion that they watch the show “Arthur,” and in her thoughts, she adds that she hasn’t watched the show in six years.

Ugh. *Arthur*? **The last time I watched that show was six years ago!**

What to Do Now

Look at the draft you’re working on for your story. Try using all four of these techniques to add exposition to different parts of your story.