

JOURNALISM CREATIVE STRATEGY: SYNECTICS

Synectics is a helpful brainstorming exercise used to stimulate creative writing by coming up with imagery and analogies. It is a formula for thinking outside the box to develop colorful descriptors. This strategy is particularly helpful for writing objectively. Sometimes it can be difficult to write with engaging language while keeping your focus on simply reporting the facts. This resource provides a step-by-step guide to synectics and how it can be used to improve journalistic writing.

THE PROCESS

We will start by laying out each step of the process. We will go into more detail on each step in the next section.

1. **Research and understand** the topic before applying the synectics method. For instance, if the Olympics are the topic, you would research everything that happened during the event, who the key participants were, how the fans reacted, etc.
2. **Choose** descriptive words and adjectives that come to mind when contemplating the elements of your story.
3. **Create** direct analogies by comparing elements of your story to things like machines, technology, animals, and nature. Make sure that you can personify whatever you are comparing your elements with.
4. **Personalize** the analogy by imagining what it would be like if you were the object or animal that was chosen in the previous step- consider the emotions it would feel if it were human.
5. **Combine** what you came up with in steps 3 and 4 to create **Compressed Conflicts**, which are concepts that seem opposite, and put them together in order to create descriptive phrases, like oxymorons.
6. **Pick** one of the compressed conflicts to create a second analogy.
7. **Use** the last analogy and/or any combination of items from the process to fuel the creative language in your story.

PRACTICAL EXAMPLE

STEP 1: RESEARCH AND UNDERSTAND

Let's imagine we are writing about the underdog victory of a high school's soccer team, the Wildcats, in the state's tournament. The Wildcats previously ranked average to below average in the state for the past decade and was not considered a threat by other teams as the competition approached. During the tournament, they won most of their matches by decent margins. In the end, the Wildcats beat last year's champions after the

game entered overtime. By using synectics, a journalist can dynamically convey the winning team's emotions and the public's reactions to their unexpected victory.

STEP 2: CHOOSE DESCRIPTIVE WORDS

When deciding how to write about this story, consider how astonishing this was to the community. Imagine how hopeful the team felt going into the match and how proud they felt after their win. Think about how the challenge must have felt insurmountable and momentous.

Astonishing, Hopeful, Proud, Insurmountable, Momentous

STEP 3: CREATE ANALOGIES

Using the adjectives from the previous section, come up with what objects or animals are like those descriptions. These will be the analogies used in the next step.

1. Astonishing like an **earthquake**
2. Hopeful like a **dream**
3. Proud like **royalty**
4. Insurmountable like a **skyscraper**
5. Momentous like a **coronation**

STEP 4: PERSONALIZE THE ANALOGY

What would it feel like to be these things? Focus on the emotions and why those particular emotions apply.

1. An earthquake feels unexpected and destructive. Its havoc can catch people off-guard.
2. A dream feels optimistic, possible, and idealistic.
3. Royalty feels prestigious and self-important. It feels like it has a sense of grandeur.
4. A skyscraper feels looming, imposing, and bulky. Its top feels unreachable when looking from below.
5. A coronation feels opulent and official. It feels like an enormously majestic display.

STEP 5: CREATE COMPRESSED CONFLICTS

The next step is to take these emotions and come up with compressed conflicts. Remember, these are two concepts that seem opposite and are then put together to make a descriptive phrase. Here are some examples:

1. Guaranteed/unexpected, restorative/destructive, prepared/off-guard
2. Defeatist/optimistic, unachievable/possible, practical/idealistic
3. Common/prestigious, humble/self-important, simplicity/grandeur
4. Distant/looming, attainable/imposing, manageable/bulky, close/unreachable
5. Modest/opulent, impromptu/official, meager/majestic

STEP 6: CREATE A SECOND ANALOGY

Now we are going to pick one of the compressed conflicts and pair it with a new object that lines up with it but is not connected to the first analogies.

After their meteoric rise through the tournament, the Wildcats' victory seemed to distantly loom like a gathering storm.

STEP 7: USING WHAT YOU CAME UP WITH

The analogies, adjectives, and compressed conflicts that we created can be used to add a vibrant flair to the story about the Wildcats' victory. In this way, synectics can help us produce creative ideas to convey the story.

Going through this process yourself will help you use creative language that will help make your stories stand out. Review the creative language that you have come up with at every step of this process and select any words or analogies that you like to use in your final story. Using this creative language, you will be able to tell a story that is both factual and captures the imagination of your readers.

PRACTICE NOW