

Unit #3 - Handout #1 – TIPS ABOUT EXPOSITION

Exposition Only When It's Critical. The trick with exposition is to write it without it being obvious that your only purpose in that particular dialogue is to tell the audience something they need to know. Never feel the need to get all the exposition out as quickly as possible. *Never tell the audience something until they absolutely need to know it. And then tell them only what they absolutely need to know.*

Make Your Audience Curious. The more you can make the audience curious, without bewildering them, the better it is for your story. When the audience is dying of curiosity to know what is going on, they are much more willing to sit and listen to exposition. It's different for an audience at the beginning of a show when they don't yet know the characters, haven't invested emotionally to the story or Lead's plight. Until they're invested emotionally in the story, it's better to keep the exposition to a minimum.

Introduce a New Character. The next time you watch a brand-new television series, see how they handle stranger exposition. Often a show will introduce a new employee who knows nothing about the staff's relationships to each other, and it's not straining the boundaries of credibility for one nurse to whisper to the new employee, "Stay away from Dr. Peters; he's trouble! Married Nurse Williams over there and dumped him. They have two kids even....I've hated him for every seven of the years he's been here." The audience accepts this stranger exposition because someone new -- just like the audience -- has to have things explained to them.

Link Exposition to Emotions. Exposition is more palatable when it rides into the scene on the back of emotions. For instance, can your character spit out your exposition in anger? Anger is one of the best ways to reveal exposition. For example: Bill and Jack are having an argument about Bill's relationship with Louise, and Jack says, "Bill, you've been dating this woman for six months and you have never slept over at her place. Why can't the two of you go there every once in a while and leave me in peace?" In this way, the exposition about them having dated for six months is incidental to Jack's point but the exposition is delivered just the same.

What if your character blurts out exposition in impatience? "Okay, Bill, I miss her too, but, hey, you've been dating for only six months. It's not like you two were together for ten years. Get over it, will you?" Again, the six months information is incidental to the point of the dialogue but the audience is given the information nonetheless.

Perhaps "amazement" can serve you. "You've been dating Louise for six months and you just now found out she has a wooden leg?"