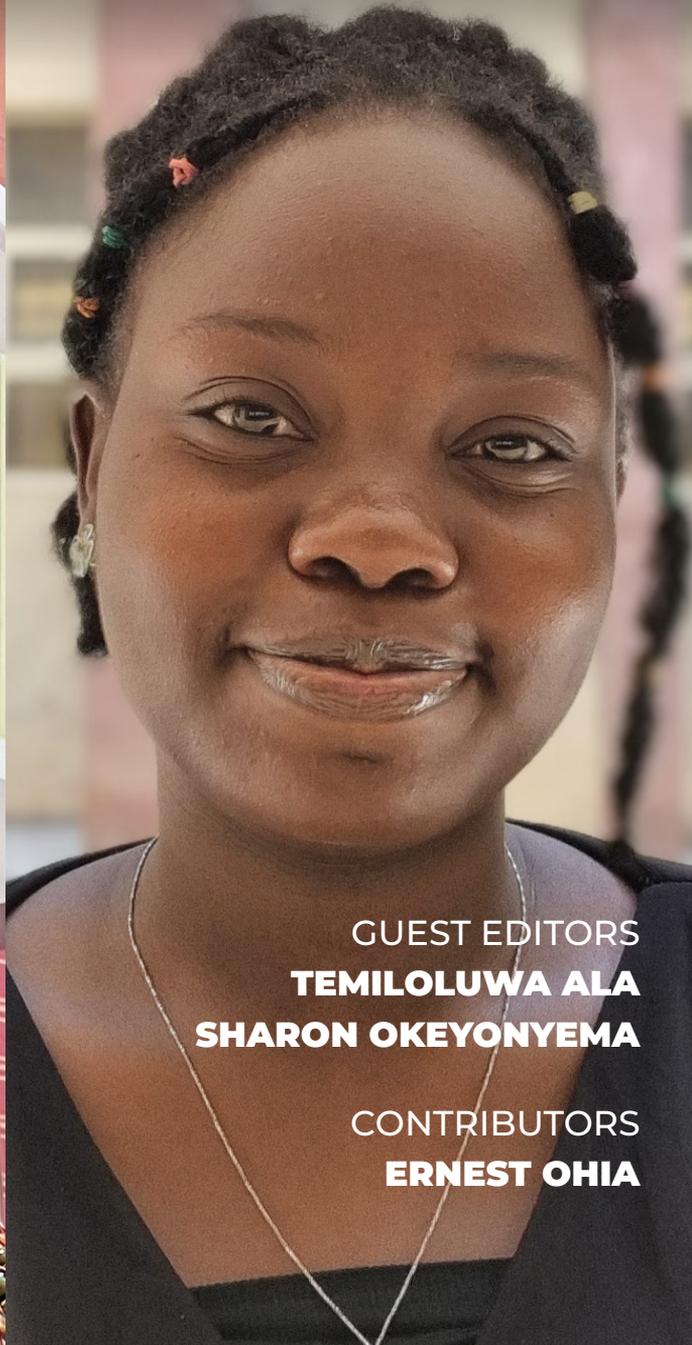


# theory of **craft.**

A NEWSLETTER ON MASTERING SKILL

## THE INTERSECTION BETWEEN STORYTELLING AND LANGUAGE



GUEST EDITORS

**TEMILOLUWA ALA**

**SHARON OKEYONYEMA**

CONTRIBUTORS

**ERNEST OHIA**

# About Theory of Craft

The *Theory of Craft* is a personal and knowledge development resource newsletter developed by Society for Book and Magazine Editors of Nigeria. The scope of the topics range from enhancing skills, cultivating talent, improving productivity, freelance business management and knowledge resources. The target audience is the editorial professional to assist them in mastering their skills. The newsletter is managed by members of the society who serve as guest editors. The ToC is a continuous professional development project.

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## Editor's Note

Stories are the easiest ways to capture people's attention. A good story is simply hard to resist to the extent that some people even share other people's stories for entertainment. This includes business owners, who use stories to capture their customers' attention, and can prove that this method works. However, just telling stories is not enough; rather, the way a story is told also matters.

In this edition of the Theory of Craft, we explore the intersection between language (how you tell your story and storytelling (the story you want to tell). You will read an article by Temiloluwa Ala, who delves into the importance of language in storytelling and how the choice of language affects the acceptance of stories by readers.

You will also read Sharon's interview with Ohia Ernest, an MFA student at the University of Alabama, who discusses how language influences a writer's narrative tone and authenticity. This interview will help writers understand the technicalities of the creative writing process and provide insights into how the manipulation of language defines the quality of a creative piece of writing.

In the How-To section, you will learn steps to consider when you are deciding on the choice of language for your stories. Finally, we hope that this newsletter provides you with practical knowledge, not just theoretical, to enhance the quality of stories you tell.

Thank you.

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### GUEST EDITORS

Temiloluwa Ala  
Sharon Okeyonyema

### EDITORIAL ADVISER

Anwuli Ojogwu

### PROGRAMMES COORDINATOR

Ogochukwu Chukwuka

### ICT/VIRTUAL LEARNING DIRECTOR

Osarieme Odu

### FOR MORE INFORMATION AND INQUIRIES

[programmes@sbmen.org.ng](mailto:programmes@sbmen.org.ng)

### PHONE

+234 908 599 9928

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by TEMILOLUWA ALA

“Meow meow meow meow meow meow...”

This is an excerpt from Sam Austen’s book, *Meow*. The only word used from the beginning to the end is the word “meow”, and people like this book. This question is why?

Storytelling is one of humanity’s oldest and most profound forms of communication. It transcends time, geography and culture, weaving tales that entertain, teach and inspire. At its core, storytelling is an art, and like any art, it is reliant on tools to craft it. On the other hand, language is the lifeblood of storytelling. It shapes how stories are told, infuses them with meaning and determines their potency. The choice of language can transform a simple narrative into a compelling tale that resonates deeply with its audience.

One of the most important aspects of language in storytelling is its ability to shape tone and voice. Like Sam Austen’s *Meow*, no one needs to be told that the story is about a cat. The tone of a story conveys its mood or emotional undercurrent, while the voice of the narrator shapes how the story resonates with the audience regardless of the genre. These elements of language work together to connect readers to the core of a story. Through language, storytellers can evoke feelings such as joy, fear, hope, or despair, creating a shared emotional journey between the narrator and the reader.

Furthermore, by carefully choosing words and crafting sentences, a storyteller can paint vivid imageries, breathe life into characters and immerse readers in the world of the story.

Language enables storytellers to communicate through events, the essence of human experience, fostering empathy and understanding in the process.

The process of selecting the appropriate language involves several critical considerations. First, the theme of the story guides the tone and style of the language. A tale of ancient myths may require grandiose and poetic expressions, while a modern drama might benefit from conversational and straightforward language. Second, the voice of the narrator and the tone of the narrative must be consistent with the chosen language to ensure authenticity and coherence. For example, a story narrated by a witty and sarcastic protagonist will differ significantly from one told by a solemn and reflective character. Finally, the intended audience plays a vital role. A children’s story requires simple, imaginative language, while a literary novel may embrace complexity and nuance. By tailoring the language to its purpose, character and audience, the story becomes more effective. For example, Sam Austen’s story about a cat, she uses imaginative language to convey the cat’s perspective, translating elements into human language for the readers.

In conclusion, language is the vessel through which the essence of storytelling is communicated. The choice of words, tone, and voice profoundly affects the narrative’s ability to captivate, engage and move its audience. Thus, selecting the right language is not merely a stylistic choice but a fundamental aspect of bringing a story to life.

INTERVIEW





## A CONVERSATION WITH ERNEST OHIA

Ernest Ohia Chigaemezu is a Nigerian memoirist, poet and editor. He is an MFA candidate in Poetry at the University of Alabama, and the poetry editor for ArtsLounge. He is also the design editor for Black Warrior Review and a Poetry reader for West Trade Review. Ernest's works are published and forthcoming on Lolwe, Agbowo, Arts Lounge Magazine, amongst others.

*As a poet and a short story writer, how did your interest in storytelling and language develop?*

I am a poet, and I used to be a short story writer. Currently, I write non-fiction and I am working on a memoir, so I consider myself a poet and memoirist. When I started out, I knew that for you to tell your story properly, you must have a good grasp of your diction. Writing or telling a story, requires you to know how to get to your audience, which means being mindful of what you hope to share with your audience. Once you know what you want to write about, the challenge becomes, how to say it. This is a big challenge for writers today as many struggle to connect with their readers through language. But when you master the art of storytelling and learn how to use language to convey a message or tell a story effectively, that is when you truly become a writer.

How does a writer's choice of language influence the tone of a poem or story?

I think that with language comes accessibility. I have read writers who think they are doing something beautiful with their language, but then it can alienate their readers and prevents them from connecting with their work. A writer's choice of language definitely impact the reader's understanding and it can open up or hinder the discussion being raised. I remember when I started reading Wole Soyinka. I loved his work because he has very good command of the English language. Still, it was difficult for me to connect with his works. All writing should be accessible to everyone. And this begs the question, "Who are you writing for?" So, I think it's important that a writer to consider language before starting any piece because it can hinder someone's interest in that piece, and that's the worst that can ever happen.

Many writers talk about "finding an authentic voice". What does authenticity mean to you and in your work?

I think finding an authentic voice is all about being vulnerable. It's not just about style. It's about making your readers trust you. As a writer, lacking that depth, lack-

ing soul would mean you don't have an authentic voice. For me, having an authentic voice means having that peculiarity that transcends how you write. It becomes what you write and how you present what you write, which is where vulnerability plays a huge role. Vulnerability also means owning your emotions and exploring those emotions in your writing. Non-fiction writers do this a lot. You have to tell your story in a way that your readers get to trust you.

Have you struggled with the right language or voice for your work, and how did you handle it?

Yes, many times. In the business of writing, language is the only tool we have. Handling that tension in my own work involves giving my pieces time. If I haven't written in a while, I start to lose my voice. The only way that I get better at writing again is by reading and writing more. Sometimes, I exhaust myself when writing, so I give my pieces some time to rest before revisiting them with a fresh pair of eyes. This allows me to pick out lines that don't work or rewrite a line that that needs improvement. That way, I maintain the authenticity of my voice and communicate effectively. Every time I write, I'm always thinking about my readers.

What advice would you give to writers trying to master the technical side of language without losing their unique voice?

By technical side of language, do you mean punctuation and other elements? I think that once someone has found their unique voice and written a few works, it's usually harder to lose it. I also suggest reading. Writers have to be readers first before they can become good writers. You have to read whatever stylistic choices or technical aspects of language that you admire. Take the time and energy to read writers who use the particular techniques you are aiming for. That way, you learn from these writers without losing your own voice.

So, my suggestion to writers is to read, read, read, and try out those things you

observe. Writing is a skill, just like any other skill. Mastery can only happen when you read and write more. You have to read to get it right.

How crucial do you think language is in determining the success or failure of a piece of writing?

Yes, the language of a piece can make or mar it, especially in terms of accessibility. I don't believe in gatekeeping knowledge, especially when it's from a different discipline. You shouldn't write with a particular class in mind. Whatever you are introducing – be it the character or the plot – you have the choice to make it as simple or as complex as you want. However, it is important to try to accommodate the diverse audience who will likely read your work.

## About the Guest Editor

**Ala Temiloluwa**, associate prose editor at Arcturus Magazine, is a passionate reader and creative writer with a B.Sc in Industrial Chemistry from the University of Ibadan. She launched her writing journey through short stories on her blog, The Led Lead, and has honed her skills through trainings like Shuzia's Writers Bootcamp and SBMEN's Editorial Workshop. With experience in content creation for Kian Consult Ltd and Xboffin Media, she also freelances as a ghostwriter on Upwork. Dedicated to nurturing potential, she thrives on helping others unlock their best selves.

**Sharon Onyinyechukwu Okey-Onyema** is based in Lagos, Nigeria. Her works often explore identity and belonging through speculative fiction. Her magical realist novella, *Hunting Tears*, published in 2017, made the longlist for the 2017 ANA Short Story Prize. Her stories have appeared in *Liminal Transit Review*, *Arts Lounge Magazine*, amongst others.

# HOW TO CHOOSE THE RIGHT LANGUAGE AND TONE FOR DIFFERENT STORIES

TEMILOLUWA ALA

## 1. UNDERSTAND THE GENRE OF THE STORY:

Each genre has its own language and tone. Historical stories require formal, era-specific language while thrillers benefit from concise, suspenseful language to build tension and excitement.

## 2. DEFINE THE STORY'S CORE THEMES AND MOOD:

Decide whether the story is lighthearted, dark, introspective, or action-packed. The tone should reflect this mood through word choice, sentence structure and rhythm to create the desired emotional impact.

## 3. CONSIDER THE NARRATOR'S VOICE:

The narrator's voice should align with the story's style and the author's intent. A first-person narrative may require a more personal, informal tone, while a third-person narrative might adopt a more detached, descriptive style.

## 4. IDENTIFY THE TARGET AUDIENCE:

Tailor the language to your audience. Use playful simplicity for children, relatable depth for young adults and nuanced complexity for adults. Understanding your audience helps in choosing appropriate language that engages them effectively.

## 5. RESEARCH AND IMMERSE IN THE SETTING:

For stories with specific cultural or historical settings, study the language patterns, dialects and idioms of the era or location. Integrate these elements to enhance authenticity and depth.

## 6. ADJUST TONE BASED ON THE STORY'S PROGRESSION: THE TONE SHOULD EVOLVE WITH THE NARRATIVE.

6. Adjust Tone Based on the Story's Progression: The tone should evolve with the narrative.

## 7. EXPERIMENT WITH SENTENCE STRUCTURE:

Vary sentence length and structure to match the story's pace and tone. Short, choppy sentences can convey urgency, while longer, flowing sentences can create a more reflective or descriptive tone.

## 8. INFUSE EMOTION THROUGH WORD CHOICE:

Use emotionally charged words to connect with the reader on a deeper level. The right words can evoke specific emotions and make the story more compelling.

## 9. TEST AND REVISE:

Write sample passages in different tones or styles. Share them with beta readers to gauge whether the language resonates as intended. Use their feedback to refine your tone and style.

## 10. STAY CONSISTENT:

Once the tone and language are established, maintain consistency throughout the story to avoid jarring shifts that can disrupt the reader's immersion. Consistency helps in sustaining the story's emotional and thematic integrity.

The Society for Book and Magazine Editors is a non-profit organisation that represents editorial professionals with headquarters in Lagos, Nigeria. It was founded in 2017 and registered in 2018 by Anwuli Ojogwu and Enajite Efemuaye. SBMEN offers training, resources and events to editors to enhance their professional development.



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