**CHARACTER EXERCISES**

**1. THE SPEECH**

Objective: Use exposition to learn a character’s past experiences.

Exercise: Write a speech (1 page) in which your character describes, explains, tells, or preaches about a specific event, experience, or idea. Here are some suggestions:

- Explain his/her FIRST LOVE AFFAIR.

- Recall his/her experience of DISCOVERING A DEAD BODY.

- Describe the BIRTH OF HIS/HER FIRST CHILD.

- Lecture on a situation of INTERNATIONAL MILITARY CONFLICT.

- Preach about the PRACTICAL VALUE OF ATHEISM.

Remember: The character is speaking to someone or even to a group of people. Decide who your character is addressing. The specifics of your character’s audience will affect word choice and presentation.

Hints: Use the character’s speech patterns and vocabulary - their voice.

**2. CHARACTER ENVIRONMENT (ROOMMATES)**

Objective: Explore the things people surround themselves with that define character.

Exercise: Describe a bedroom where two people live. They can be college roommates, siblings, lovers, husband/wife - it's up to you. You are to describe the room three times in script form (NO DIALOGUE - TWO PAGES MAXIMUM):

1) The first time the two people live in harmony.

2) The second, there has been a fight between the two roommates.

3) The third, one of the roommates has moved out.

Remember: The tricky part is you are to describe only the room. There are no people in any of these scenes. Use objects, furniture, clothes, etc… to differentiate between the two roommates. Don't just list objects. Write with a sense of discovery. The way in which you reveal information is important. It affects our understanding as well as our emotions.

Hints: Subtle, but clear, changes should occur to the room as their relationship dissolves. We should know from the descriptions who these people are, what happened, which one started the fight, what the fight was about and who moved out.

Questions that should be answered: Who are these two people? What are their ages? What do they look like? How long have they lived together?  What was the argument about? Who started it? How did they deal with it? Who moved out?

**3. CHARACTER INTRODUCTION**

Objective: Make your character stand out.

Exercise: Write a scene (1-3 pages) that introduces your character. Use description, props, wardrobe and dialogue that give your character a unique voice.

Remember: Introduction scenes are often scenes of the “status quo” - the character living his or her everyday life before the inciting incident propels the character into a new conflict.

Hints: Action speak louder than words. If your character is in a group, have them do something specific and unique that makes them memorable and interesting.

Example: COOL HAND LUKE (1967) - The opening scene to the screenplay by Donn Pearce and Frank Pierson originally had two sections of dialogue of Luke talking to himself as he cut off the parking meters. What you will read here is the way we see the final edit of the film. Clearly, dialogue was unnecessary to illustrate Luke’s tragic flaw: defiance.

FADE IN:

EXT. SOUTHERN CITY STREET EXTREME CLOSEUP PARKING METER (NIGHT)

Its irritating head opens a glaring red eye: the red flag pops across the entire screen:

VIOLATION

INSERT: PARKING METER SUPPORT (NIGHT)

CLOSEUP of a pipe cutter attached to the meter neck, metal slivers curling out.

CLOSEUP PARKING METER (NIGHT)

as the meter head falls out of FRAME.

NEW ANGLE ON METER (NIGHT)

as it falls to the ground amidst a forest of meter stands and Luke's hand comes into the FRAME to pick it up and we see LUCAS JACKSON in CLOSEUP for the first time. He is cheerful, drunk, wearing a faded GI Field jacket. A bottle opener hangs on a silver chain around his neck.

Suddenly the beam of headlights crashes in, FLARING the SCREEN.

ANGLE ON PROWL CAR (NIGHT)

sliding up to us, headlights glaring, red toplight revolving menacingly. TWO OFFICERS, black shapes, get out and start warily toward Luke.

ON LUKE (NIGHT)

illuminated by the headlights. He grins as the Officers approach, lifts a bottle of beer, opens it and drinks, smiling. On his smile, FREEZE FRAME. ON THE FRAME SUPER-IMPOSE MAIN TITLE.