

# Patterns for Dealing with Typical Situations at Creative Writing Classes

Aleksandra Vranić  
aleksandra.vranic@paneurouni.com  
Pan-European University  
Faculty of Media  
Slovakia

## ABSTRACT

If teachers approach students with respect and appreciation and if they are able to notice and emphasize their values, this can support and encourage students in the creative process. The teacher is the one who creates a pleasant atmosphere in the class and encourages the creation of texts. But sometimes, despite this, problems arise. This paper brings four patterns of teaching creative writing that can help with these problems. They form a pattern sequence starting with *Plan Adjusts to Needs*, after which the other three patterns, *Support Unblocks*, *Creativity Outgrows Activity*, and *Praising Those Who Dare Encourages Those Who Don't*, can be applied. The application of these patterns is demonstrated as a pattern story of one creative writing class. The author of the paper derived these patterns from more than fifteen years of teaching creative writing and drama on daily basis.

## CCS CONCEPTS

• **Software and its engineering** → **Patterns**.

## KEYWORDS

creative writing, teaching, organizational patterns, collaboration

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

Creative writing is a set of techniques that can stimulate literary creation, or, more simply stated, writing. These techniques can be used not only in belletristic writing, but also in writing technical and scientific texts. Creative writing can be used to solve particular problems that arise during writing (e.g., writer's block), to develop the skills necessary for literary creation, but also to support the creation of an intended literary work.

Creative writing classes should have a pleasant and friendly atmosphere. Students must feel good there so that they can unleash their creativity. The students should be assured their work

will not be criticized or ridiculed. Spelling mistakes should be ignored. No remarks regarding handwriting should be given. Instead, they should be praised for what they achieved and encouraged to continue. Of course, this is not to say that the teacher must not suggest improvements or warn about mistakes. Quite on the contrary. However, this has to be done in a sensitive and constructive way.

In more general terms, the following principles should be followed regardless of the age and position of the students: freedom of learning and creation, positive relationship between the teacher and the student, removing obstructions while writing, and individual approach to students and internal motivation. Exactly these principles led the author of this paper in establishing her method of teaching creative writing adapted to the needs of students [33]. She has been using this method successfully for more than fifteen years with all age categories: children in elementary schools and high schools, university students, school teachers, and adults in general. She established classes of drama and creative writing at an elementary art school and taught them there for 14 years. She established a course entitled Creative Written and Oral Expression at the Slovak University of Technology in Bratislava (Slovakia) and taught it there for three years.<sup>1</sup> She organized a focus group on creative writing with patterns at AsianPLoP 2024 [34]. She gave classes of creative writing within her Erasmus+ mobility [42]. Currently, she employs creative writing techniques in several courses at Pan-European University (Bratislava, Slovakia).

Creative writing classes are more significant than just for teaching how to write poetic texts, stories, or drama plays. Through them, students also practice perceptive, communication, and social skills. They develop empathy and learn how to cooperate, listen to others and accept other opinions, discuss, etc. Often, students want to perform drama plays they wrote. Drama patterns [37, 41] can help them with this. Drama patterns themselves open a plethora of possibilities to learn about seemingly unrelated things including programming [35, 36, 39, 44], organizing people in software development [43, 45], or even how nonlinear systems work and how to regulate them [16–19, 35].

Despite a pleasant atmosphere at creative writing classes, despite the teacher having a positive relationship with the students and providing support to them in their work, and despite the students cooperating well with each other, things might not go as planned. This paper brings four patterns for dealing with typical situations at creative writing classes. Effectively, these patterns are a special kind of organizational patterns, which are best known in software development [4, 8–10, 14, 15, 22, 23, 29, 30, 46–50].

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<sup>1</sup>is.stuba.sk/katalog/syllabus.pl?predmet=401408

The rest of the paper is structured as follows. Section 2 provides a pattern story of a creative writing class. Sections 3–6 describe the patterns for dealing with typical situations at creative writing classes that occur in that pattern story. Section 7 relates the approach proposed in this paper to what others have done. Section 8 concludes the paper.

## 2 AT A CREATIVE WRITING CLASS

Once upon a time at a creative writing class,<sup>2</sup> the author of this paper, as a teacher at that class, offered the children<sup>3</sup> a hat full of words, a creative writing technique (invented by the author of this paper) to stimulate writing prose in general, and short stories in particular. In this technique, a student pulls out usually five to eight words from a hat that usually contains several dozens of words (see Figure 1). The words are usually nouns and may be quite unrelated to each other. The student then writes a story using all of the words. The words can be exchanged for other words if the student wants that.



**Figure 1: A hat full of words (in Slovak).**

Just as the class begins, Sofia announces that she is not in the mood of writing prose but poetry. Right after that, Martin announces that he wants to write a fairy tale. Richard is not in the mood for writing and thinks he doesn't know how to write stories. This is where the problem arises: the teacher has a work plan, but

<sup>2</sup>This is a story is based on trues events, although they did not happen at the same class.

<sup>3</sup>These were eight to eleven years old children attending drama and creative writing classes in one elementary art school in Bratislava, Slovakia.

students refuse to cooperate. The teacher must approach the problem sensitively and flexibly. Despite the teacher intended to use one specific technique, the plan suddenly changes.

The teacher offers Sofia, who wants to write poetry, the surrealist poem technique (see Figure 2), which she agrees with. Martin, who wants to write a fairytale, is offered the fairy tale cocktail technique (see Figure 3), which he gets intrigued by. Both these techniques (invented by the author of this paper) are based on pulling out words and phrases from a hat and putting them together. The difference is that in the surrealist poem technique, the hat contains unrelated words and phrases, while in the fairy tale cocktail technique, it contains names of fairy tale characters, objects, and sentences.

The teacher speaks to Richard, who is not in the mood for writing at all, and offers him drawing. Richard enthusiastically agrees and creates not just some drawing but a whole comics, by which he effectively develops a story. These are all instances of the *Plan Adjusts to Needs* pattern (see Section 3).

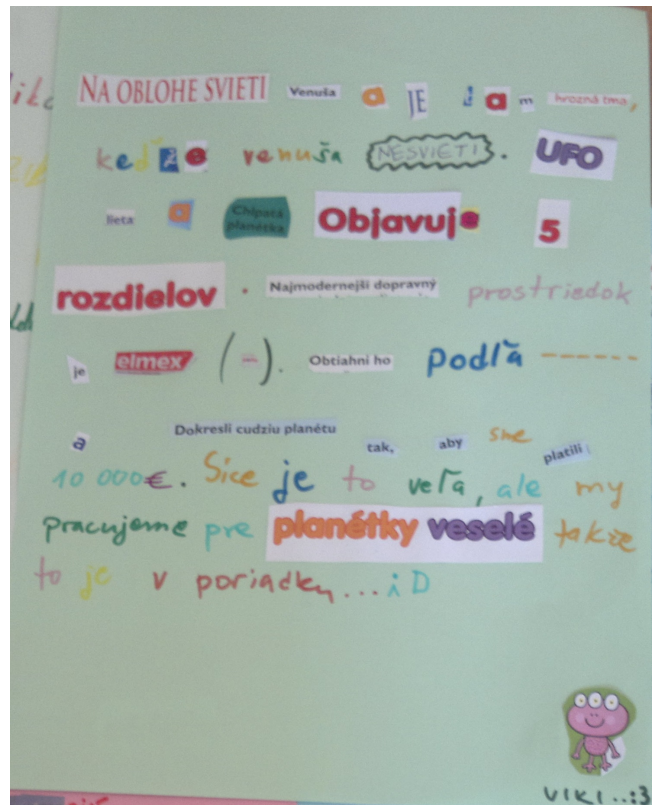


Figure 2: A surrealist poem (in Slovak).

After fifteen minutes, Samuel declares he can't continue with his story. He asks the teacher for help. The teacher looks at Samuel's work and discusses with him what's the problem. Is it that he doesn't know how to resolve the collision, how to create tension in the story, or how to end the story, etc. Already during the conversation with the teacher, Samuel gets an idea and continues his story. Anna and Lea also become blocked. The two of them, in turn, get interesting ideas from automatic writing and drawing, in which





Figure 3: A fairy tale cocktail (in Slovak).

they simply write and draw whatever comes to their mind without trying to make any sense of it (see Figure 4). This is an instance of the *Resolving Writing Crisis* pattern (see Section 4).

Mia comes to the teacher and shows her story, which is already finished. The teacher reads it and praises Mia for creating an interesting story. But Mia wants to write more. There are twenty minutes left to the end of the class. The teacher offers her to write a haiku, providing a short explanation of how these famous three-line Japanese poems are structured. This is an instance of the *Creativity Outgrows Activity* pattern (see Section 5).

As it is good for writers to expose their work to others, the teacher asks the students to read what they wrote. Many students are looking forward to it, but Maria and Robert are ashamed to read what they wrote in front of others. They are quiet and shy students, but they write very interesting and unusual stories. The teacher understands them. She tells them that they don't have to read what they wrote and that, instead, she will take a look at them. The last students read their texts with joy. The teacher praises each text. A pleasant atmosphere is created and the children are happy. Suddenly, Maria announces that she also wants to read her story after all. Maria reads her story and the teacher praises her. Maria is happy. At that moment, shy Robert smiles. He also wants to read his story. He receives great praise from the teacher and applause from the other students. This is an instance of the *Praising Those Who Dare Encourages Those Who Don't* pattern (see Section 6).

Sections 3–6 describe the patterns of teaching creative writing that occur in this pattern story. The patterns are introduced in the example based pattern form, first introduced with respect to drama patterns [11, 41, 43], and later used also with game patterns [38]. In order to more understandable, the context part of the pattern description is exemplified rather than being presented in general



Figure 4: Automatic drawing followed by writing (in Slovak).

terms [11]. The problem is presented as a conflict of the two most prominent contradicting forces.

### 3 PLAN ADJUSTS TO NEEDS

As the story of one creative writing class (presented in the previous section) tells, at the beginning of the class, the teacher offers to the students a hat full of words, a creative writing technique suitable for writing prose, and short stories in particular. In this technique, a student pulls out usually five to eight words from a hat, which are all nouns, and writes a story using all of them. The other students accept this, but Sofia announces that she is not in the mood of writing prose but poetry.

Here, the teacher acts as a plan enforcer, while Sofia acts as a plan violator.

*Forces:*

The plan enforcer proposes a plan,  
but a plan violator rejects it.

*Resolution:* The plan enforcer suggests other activities to the plan violator, which are still within a greater scope of the plan. By this, the plan enforcer subtly improves the attitude the plan violator has towards the plan.

As observed in practice, the plan violators tend to get back to the initial plan on their own.

This is a pattern called *Plan Adjusts to Needs*. Here are some other examples of this pattern:

- Martin wanted to write a fairy tale instead of a short story. The teacher offered him the cocktail story technique, which is interesting and encourages to write. Martin wrote an interesting fairy tale, which had a plot and its resolution, and thus he fulfilled his task even though through other means.
- Richard was not at all interested in writing. The teacher offered him just to draw, which Richard accepted. However, he made an interesting comic, in which there was a story with an interesting plot. In both cases, the author has encountered this situation many times in her classes and this solution has always proved to be very successful.
- Sofia wrote a surrealist poem, but after finishing it, she noticed that all other students were writing stories, she decided to write a story, too. And so she, too, worked on the plot in her story.

Speaking more generally, in order for students to develop a particular skill, they do not all have to do it in the same way and at the same time. Maria Montessori also supported such an approach to teaching [24].

#### 4 SUPPORT UNBLOCKS

As the story of one creative writing class (presented in Section 2) tells, Samuel declares he can't continue with his story. He is blocked, yet he is expected to finish the story. He asks the teacher for help.

Here, Samuel is a support seeker and the teacher is a support provider.

*Forces:*

The support seeker works on the text under the support provider's supervision, but suddenly gets blocked and cannot continue asking for help.

*Resolution:* The support provider talks to the support seeker about the problems with the text until the support seeker comes to some unblocking ideas.

This is a pattern called *Support Unblocks*. Here are some other examples of this pattern:

- Anna felt a crisis when writing the story. She blocked and had no idea at all. She wrote a few lines and named three characters, but she had no idea what kind of a situation could arise in the story. The teacher first tried to encourage her through conversation, but she did not succeed. Anna wanted to invent some unusual situation. The teacher advised her to try automatic writing or drawing, which she gladly accepted. In the process, she invented a very interesting situation she was satisfied with.
- In the beginning, Lea had the same problem as Anna. She also tried automatic writing, then drawing, during which she came to an idea, but the idea seemed uninteresting to her. The teacher felt that Lea did not want to continue this story of hers, so she advised her to write a completely different story with a different topic, which Lea managed without any problems.

It happens that some, most often younger students want to write only prose or comics (see Figure 5), but refuse to write poetry. The teacher should accept this and be patient because the student may

just be in a kind of a sensitive period for this particular kind of expression, similar to childhood sensitive periods identified by Maria Montessori [25]. When a writing block lasts longer and students have lost the motivation to continue with a particular text, the teacher should give them the opportunity to write something else. They can return to the original text on another occasion if they want to, but they have to know they don't have to do that. Student should not create under pressure because that will block them even more. They will develop all necessary abilities and skills even if they switch to different stories. Even if students only draw during the whole class or do some other activity seemingly unrelated to the class, they should not be prevented in doing so. Maybe at the next class or some other day they will get an idea how to continue their writing.



Figure 5: Drawing comics instead of writing poetry (in Slovak).

#### 5 CREATIVITY OUTGROWS ACTIVITY

As the story of one creative writing class (presented in Section 2) tells, while the other students are still working on their texts, Mia

has already finished her story. The story is complete and leaves no space for meaningful changes. But the creativity rush makes Mia eager to write more and she asks the teacher for another task. The teacher offers Mia to write a haiku, which she can complete in the remaining time, providing a short explanation of how these famous three-line Japanese poems are structured.

Here, Mia is an activity seeker and the teacher is an activity provider.

*Forces:*

The activity seeker has completed an activity,  
but wants to create more.

*Resolution:* The activity provider offers to the activity seeker such an activity that can be completed within the remaining time.

This is a pattern called *Creativity Outgrows Activity*. Here are some other examples of this pattern:

- Another student, Nina, likes to write poems and writes them quite quickly. With Nina, the pattern had to be applied repeatedly, with a different writing technique each time. This is a kind of echoes of the same pattern. Echoes are one of the fifteen fundamental properties of things that do have life as identified by Alexander [1].
- Sometimes, two or more students finish their writing earlier and at the same time. In this case, it proved useful to engage them with writing a collective text.

The activity provider should approach each activity seeker individually and select an activity corresponding to their writing skills and abilities. To be able to do this, the activity provider should be ready with a choice of creative writing techniques.

## 6 PRAISING THOSE WHO DARE ENCOURAGES THOSE WHO DON'T

As the story of one creative writing class (presented in Section 2) tells, When the teacher asked the students to read what they wrote, Maria didn't want to do so. The teacher accepted this and simply had a look at the story Maria wrote. The last students read their texts and were praised by the teacher. Suddenly, encouraged by what she saw, Maria announced she also wanted to read her story.

Here, the teacher is a requester, the students who read what they wrote are attempters, and Maria is a nonattempter.

*Forces:*

The requester wants the nonattempter to try an activity,  
but the nonattempter doesn't want to do so.

*Resolution:* The requester praises the attempters for their tries, which encourages the nonattempter to try, too.

This is a pattern called *Praising Those Who Dare Encourages Those Who Don't*. Here are some other examples of this pattern:

- As Maria read her story, Robert, who didn't want to read his story either, got courage and read his story. He received great praise from the teacher and applause from the other students. This is a kind of an echo of the same pattern.<sup>4</sup> Echoes are

one of the fifteen fundamental properties of things that do have life as identified by Alexander [1].

- This pattern is not limited to reading own texts publicly. It extends to other public performances. It occurs at drama classes, too. Those who initially don't want to take part in the scenes (which are, by the way, based on drama patterns [41, 43]) fairly quickly ask to be involved in them after they are assured they are allowed to just observe them.

The author of this paper sees this pattern all the time at her classes. In her experience, the resolution often comes at the next class. It's important to have patience.

## 7 RELATED WORK

A positive attitude of the teacher towards the students is very important in creative teaching. This was pointed out by the psychologist Maria Montessori, whose method is based on the belief in the creative potential of children, in their desire to learn and the right of each child to an individual approach [24]. Maria Montessori also noticed that children have their sensitive periods for different activities [25], which are particularly pronounced in young children, proposing that the teacher should be observant of them and adapt the teaching activities accordingly. Maria Montessori noticed how quickly children learn when they are supported in their sensitive periods, while missing those periods is very dangerous and potentially irreversible. For example, if in the corresponding sensitive period, a child could very quickly learn a foreign language, but if prevented from this at that time, the child could completely lose interest for that language or foreign languages in general. The patterns presented in this paper are in accordance with this.

Carl Ransom Rogers, one of the founders of humanistic psychology, emphasized that the educational process should be based on mutual trust, respect, and balance between the teacher and a student. He advocated an approach in which teachers and students worked together, learning from each other, and in which teachers often acted as guides rather than authoritative instructors [27]. The patterns presented in this paper exhibit the same spirit.

Simeon Marinković [21] emphasizes the importance of freedom in creation and of a positive attitude to students. He criticizes conventional teaching in schools and offers a creative way of teaching that could motivate and encourage children to create texts. Unlike the patterns presented in this paper, Simeon Marinković did not deal with situations that may arise during the teaching of creative writing and how to solve them.

Zora Bokšan Tanurđić focused on creating group scenarios by students [28], emphasizing that a pleasant atmosphere in the class is necessary for this, so that students can create without stress, and that the teacher should approach each student individually. While this is in accordance with the patterns presented in this paper, unlike these patterns, she does not deal with how the teacher is to proceed in cases when students refuse to write what they are required or when they want to write something else.

Eva Machková [20] and Josef Valenta [31] also deal with creating collective scenarios by students. Unlike the patterns presented in this paper, they do not assume that there could be problematic situations where a student would want to replace one activity with another or that a student could get blocked while writing.

<sup>4</sup>This also occurs with the *Creativity Outgrows Activity* pattern, described in Section 5.



Duška Bojović gives advice on how to encourage children to create stories and poems [2, 3]. This includes motion, music, and drawing. As indicated in the patterns presented in this paper, students often spontaneously reach for drawing when they can't focus or when they become blocked.

Zbyněk Fišer [6] and Eva Eliášová [5] introduce some techniques of creative writing. Unlike the patterns presented in this paper, they do not deal with how to conduct creative writing classes, nor with the teacher's approach to students.

## 8 CONCLUSIONS AND FURTHER WORK

If teachers approach students with respect and appreciation and if they are able to notice and emphasize their values, this will support and encourage students in the creative process. The teacher is the one who creates a pleasant atmosphere at classes and encourages the creation of texts. But sometimes, despite this, problems arise.

This paper brings four patterns for dealing with typical situations at creative writing classes. They form a pattern sequence starting with *Plan Adjusts to Needs* (described in Section 3), after which the other three patterns, *Support Unblocks* (described in Section 4), *Creativity Outgrows Activity* (described in Section 5), and *Praising Those Who Dare Encourages Those Who Don't* (described in Section 6), can be applied. The application of these patterns is demonstrated as a pattern story of one creative writing class (presented in Section 2). The author of the paper derived these patterns from more than fifteen years of teaching creative writing and drama on daily basis.

While one line of further work is certainly to seek for other patterns that will elaborate the resolutions established by the four identified patterns, patterns of collective creative writing should be also explored. In such a setting, for the individual actions of each participant, peripheral perception of what other participants say, write, or show plays a significant role similarly as in agile software development [26, 32]. Specialized patterns of creative writing could help in writing good use cases— which in effect are generalized stories of using software systems— especially when nonprofessional software developers are involved [40]. Also, different ways of conveying patterns of creative writing could be considered [7, 12, 12, 13].

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