

2 Imperfect perfection

Learning objective

- Understand how writers can use adverbs, adverbial phrases and sentence length to control the pace of action in a narrative

On pages 54 and 55 you learnt about the idea of utopia: a world that is perfect in every way. However, writers often portray societies or worlds that are far from perfect – places where everything seems to have gone wrong. These are called 'dystopias'.

Activity 1

In the book *Gone*, the author Michael Grant describes a world with no adults – a perfect world, you might think! However, it is far from being a perfect world.

- Read the text below. It is one student's summary of the book's opening.

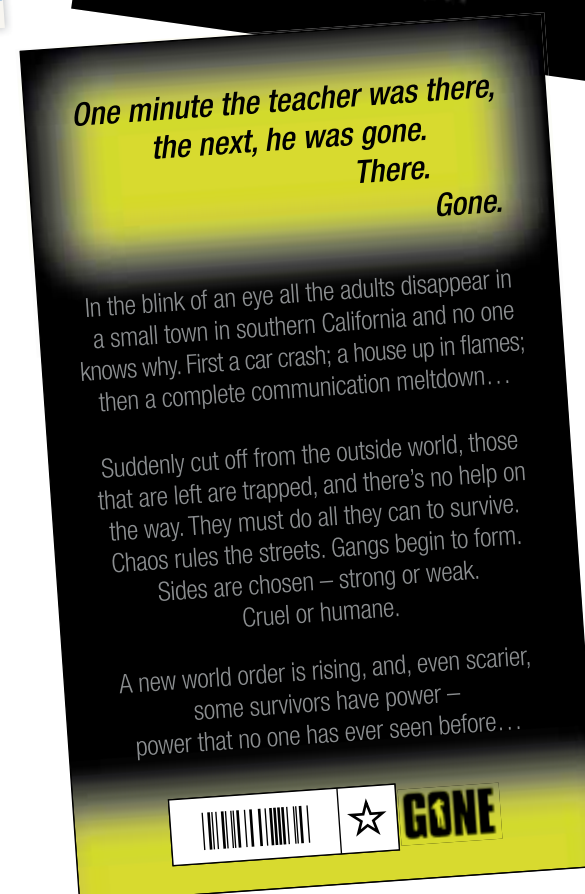
This book is about a strange series of events in a small town in southern California when all the people over the age of fifteen disappear. Unexplained events take place starting with a car crash, then a house burning down and finally the breakdown of all means of communication. Isolated from the rest of the world, people begin to panic. The book is about how people form groups to survive, either by behaving in a kind and humane way, or by being cruel and ruthless.

- Now read the book's blurb on the right. It was written to encourage new readers to buy the book.
- Compare the quotations below, taken from the student's summary and the book blurb.

The book is about how people form groups to survive, either by behaving in a kind and humane way, or by being cruel and ruthless.

Gangs begin to form. Sides are chosen – strong or weak. Cruel or humane.

- Which do you think makes the book sound more exciting?
- Look carefully at the text which you feel is more exciting. How has the writer suggested that the novel is set in a world of fear and danger?



WRITER'S WORKSHOP: Creating a sense of drama

Writers of dystopias make a range of choices to create a sudden transformation: a world that is changing almost beyond recognition.

How can I use adverbs and adverbial phrases to give the reader a sense of a rapidly changing world?

You can use **adverbs** and **adverbial phrases** to add more information about a verb or an adjective. They are a great way of adding detail to a text and can appear almost anywhere in a sentence. Adverbs and adverbial phrases can give information about:

- the **order** in which events take place:

First a car crash; a house up in flames; **then** a complete communication meltdown...

- when** or **how quickly** the action is taking place:

Suddenly cut off from the outside world, those that are left are trapped.

In the blink of an eye all the adults disappear in a small town in southern California and no one knows why.

adverbs related to time

adverbial phrase which helps to show manner

adverb related to manner

Why do you think the writer chose to place the adverb or adverbial phrase at the beginning of these sentences? Where else could they be positioned in the sentences? How would this change their effect on the reader?



How can I structure my sentences to create a sense of drama?

You can use **sentence structure** to create a fast-moving, dramatic pace in your writing. For example, look at the sentences in the second paragraph of the book blurb.

Suddenly cut off from the outside world, those that are left are trapped, and there's no help on the way. They must do all they can to survive.

These longer **complex sentences** explain the situation to the reader.

Chaos rules the streets. Gangs begin to form. Sides are chosen – strong or weak.

The writer then uses three short **simple sentences** to describe the sudden and dramatic changes in the world of the novel.

Cruel or humane.

Finally, the writer uses a **minor sentence** – a sentence which contains no verb – to emphasise the stark choice which people face in this desperate and dangerous new world.

Practise reading this second paragraph of the blurb aloud to make it sound as dramatic as possible. How does the sentence structure help to make it sound dramatic?

What do better writers do?

Better writers:

- use adverbs and adverbial phrases to signal in what order, or when, or how quickly events take place. They can use them to control the pace of the action in a narrative.
- control the pace of their writing through their choice of sentence structure. They can use short simple sentences to create a sense of sudden and dramatic change. They can use minor sentences to emphasise a dramatic idea or moment in the story.

Activity 2

- 1 Look carefully at the sentences used in the student's summary of the book opening from Activity 1 (page 58). How are they different from the book blurb?
- 2 Can you find any other specific words and phrases in the book blurb that are used to engage new readers? Look particularly for words that add pace by focusing on time.



Activity 3

Look again at the sentences from the blurb of *Gone*, below.

In the blink of an eye all the adults disappear in a small town in southern California and no one knows why.

A new world order is rising, and, even scarier, some survivors have power – power that no one has ever seen before...

- 1 Try experimenting with the sentences by:
 - a adding or removing adverbs or adverbial phrases
 - b restructuring each sentence as a sequence of simple and/or minor sentences.

In how many different ways can you rewrite them?
- 2 Look at the changes you have made to the sentences. Annotate your sentences to show:
 - a the changes you have made
 - b the different effects your changes have made to their impact or meaning for the reader.
- 3 Plan a story in which a character wakes up one morning and finds a suddenly and dramatically changed world. Decide:
 - a what has changed
 - b how this change affects the main character and the people they are close to.
- 4 Write a dramatic blurb to tempt readers to read the story you have planned. You could use:
 - adverbs and adverbial phrases to suggest the sudden and dramatic change
 - short simple sentences to explain the consequences of the change
 - minor sentences to focus the reader on the impact of this change.

CHECK YOUR WRITING

- ➡ Read your blurb aloud with a partner. Discuss what is good about your blurb and what could be improved.
 - Does it sound dramatic?
 - Have you used adverbs, adverbial phrases and different sentence structures to create or highlight sudden and dramatic change?
- ➡ Write one or two sentences reflecting on what you have done well and one or two sentences about what you might be able to improve, and how.
- ➡ Re-draft your blurb, making the improvements you want to make to your writing.