

Creative Writing

Mike Howarth

Patricia Cornwell: story opening

Win Garano sets two lattes on a picnic table in front of the John F. Kennedy School of Government. It's a sunny afternoon, mid-May, and Harvard Square is crowded. He straddles a bench, overdressed and sweaty in a black Armani suit and black patent-leather Prada shoes, pretty sure the original owner of them is dead.

Patricia Cornwell: story opening

He got a feeling about it when the saleslady in the Hand-Me-Ups shop said he could have the “gently worn” outfit for ninety-nine dollars. Next she pulled out suits, shoes, belts, ties, even socks. DKNY, Hugo Boss, Gucci, Hermès, Ralph Lauren. All from the same celebrity whose name I can’t tell you, and it occurred to Win that not so long ago, a wide receiver for the Patriots got killed in a car wreck. One eighty, six feet tall, muscular but not a moose. In other words, about Win’s size.

Patricia Cornwell: story opening

He sits alone at the picnic table, more self-conscious by the moment. Students, faculty, the elite — most of them in jeans, shorts, carrying knapsacks — cluster at other tables, deep in conversations that include very few comments about the dull lecture District Attorney Monique Lamont just gave at the Forum. No Neighbour Left Behind. Win warned her it was a confusing title, not to mention a banal topic for such a prestigious political venue. She's not going to appreciate that he was right. He doesn't appreciate that she ordered him here on his day off so she could boss him around, belittle him. Make a note of this. Make a note of that. Call so and so. Get her a coffee. Starbucks.

What we learnt about the Cornwell story development.

- Sharp opening
- Extra background to grip
- Return to scene

I believe she is using a hard hitting News Story structure start for impact.....

The **WHAT** system (as taught to journalists)

- **What** is the Story? The Intro must tell what is happening. It must be complete, concise and correct. It should say Who dis What, Where, When and How. If this is done well, the first area is self-contained and can be used on the front page as a taster; or for a Stop Press Column

The W-H-A-T system

- **How** did it happen. What happens next?
Explain the story and give it the most important background information

The W-H-A-T system

- **Amplification.** Tell the story again by amplifying the points made in the intro. Take them one by one, in order of importance.

The W-H-A-T system

- **Tie Up** loose ends. Give additional or extra background information. + Climax

The W-H-A-T system

WHAT is the Story? The Intro must tell the story in a nutshell.

How did it happen.

The explanation.

AMPLIFY each

Intro point
in order.

TIE up

all the

loose

ends.