

Writing Bird by Bird with Particles & Fields

“ . . . [T]hirty years ago my older brother . . . was trying to get a report on birds written that he’d had three months to write, which was due the next day. . . . [H]e was at the kitchen table close to tears, surrounded by binder paper and pencils and unopened books on birds, immobilized by the hugeness of the task ahead. Then my father sat down beside him, put his arm around my brother’s shoulder, and said, “Bird by bird, buddy. Just take it bird by bird.”

Anne Lamott. *Bird by Bird: Some Instructions on Writing and Life*

Particles: Because the parts of speech are the fundamental building blocks or quanta of writing, I call them writing particles. And while they fill massive dictionaries, they can be grouped into just three types of particles or TAGs:

<u>Things</u>	Nouns, pronouns, adjectives & articles
<u>Actions</u>	Verbs & adverbs
<u>Glue</u>	Conjunctions, prepositions & interjections

Fields: We use TAGs to create paragraph fields that engage the reader much as magnetic fields attract and repel depending on orientation. Some of the more important fields, sometimes called organizational patterns or developmental methods, are listed below:

Description Central to all engaging writing are the objective and subjective descriptions that focus our attention on important details.

Narration Telling a story—once upon a time . . . —with Conflict, Complications, Crisis, Anticlimax & Resolution: C³AR.

Argument Making an argument with Claims, Reasons, Evidence and Warrants: CREW.

Comparison & Contrast Thing One is like Thing Two, but Thing One is also different from Thing Two.

Cause & Effect Thing One causes this. Thing Two causes that. And where is the Cat in the Hat?

Process Thing One does this, and then it does that; Thing Two does this, and then it does that. Which leaves us where, exactly?



Definition Categorizing and distinguishing one thing from another, like my definitions of particles & fields.

Classification & Division Groupings like this of particles, fields & prose.

Examples & Illustrations Examples and illustrations, like the one below, that frequently help by creating a mnemonic way of remembering something that is easily forgotten or hard to understand.

Prose: We use particles to craft sentences that we weave like threads into paragraph fields that we sew together into essays and articles, short stories and theses, memoirs, histories and novels. And if we pay attention to the craft of writing and humbly practice our skills, learning writing proficiency much as one learns to play a musical instrument, we can find our voices and learn to engage our audiences, changing our lives and theirs.

