

Ingredients:

An approach
A retreat
A return

To make an approach, you'll need:

Concrete, sensory details

To make a retreat, you'll need:

A reaction that prompts the character to figure out what the other character meant

A variety of perspectives (e.g. Assessing, denying, confirming, recognizing)

A "but" reversal

A rhetorical question or two for the ending

To make the return, you'll need:

An action, gesture, or staging change

RECIPE

Directions:

Find a passage in your story (or insert a new passage somewhere) in which somebody does or says something. It really doesn't matter, as long as there is an external stimulus that the POV character can react to. Your story's point of view doesn't have to be in first-person like Munro's. You can choose to shorten the narrative distance by zooming into the character's mind in third-person.

Create a sense of approach by describing the concrete, sensory details observed by your character. Obviously you want to stick to significant details (those that underscore the retreat that follows), but don't skimp on the details, otherwise you won't create the sense that the character is highly observant and therefore deeply engaged, which in turn creates the feeling of "movement" in the approach.

Make your character react (in the way Dick was embarrassed). Remember that drama resides most strongly in reactions. This reaction will serve as the trigger for your character to retreat and try to figure out what the other character meant, what the essence of their behaviour is, and how this essence reveals their expectations.

You can come up with your own ways to vary your character's perceptions, but you might start by using Munro's pattern as a template: Assess-Deny-Recognize-Confirm-Assess-Deny-Recognize-Confirm (disguise the second confirmation as a rhetorical question). If you use Munro's passage as a template for practice, be sure to include that turn that happens with the "but" sentence (But that was a little far-fetched.). The word "but" creates a strong reversal.

Make your character return in some physical way through a gesture or action or a change in the staging of the scene (like how Dick moved from standing to seated beside Lois's mother).