

Writing Exercise: Voice -- Sustaining the note

From John Gardner's *The Art of Fiction*.

This one gives us practice in sustaining a voice:

7. Write a monologue of at least three pages, in which the interruptions—pauses, gestures, description, etc.—all clearly and persuasively characterize, and the shifts from monologue to gesture and touches of setting (as when the character touches some object or glances out the window) all feel rhythmically right. Purpose: to learn ways of letting a character make a long speech that doesn't seem boring or artificial.

What is a monologue? Think of it as if a character in a play addresses the audience directly to tell the story – they are still in character, still in costume. For example the “Mouth” in Samuel Beckett’s “Not I.”

If it's easier, you can imagine someone telling a story on a long car trip, or on a boat waiting for the tide to turn (the character of Marlow in “Heart of Darkness,” or the narrator in the short story “Stuart”).