StoryPlaces Toolkit: Guidance for Authors

storyplaces.soton.ac.uk

To be effective locative stories should work in tandem with their locations and landscapes, both in terms of practicality (navigating the story and the landscape) and aesthetically (using the landscape to emphasise the themes and meaning of the story, and vice versa).

Aesthetically your story has the potential to create new fictional layers on top of the real landscape, or reveal layers that have been lost to history. For example, the story can draw attention to things that have appeared in the landscape, or things that have disappeared, contrasting now/then and revealing connections between different views or interpretations of a place. Be aware of the relationship between what you are writing and its place, harmony between the two will create a sense of connection in your reader and increase their feeling of presence. Discord will be jarring, and will draw attention to the dual nature of their experience, although that might be appropriate for some stories.

On a practical level locative story authors have three ways of controlling or influencing their reader's navigational paths through the story. They can use **narrative logic** (such as one page unlocking another) to restrict the choices that a reader can make, they can use the **landscape** to encourage readers to move through particular routes and visit pages in a particular order, and they can use the **writing** itself to influence reader decisions – using titles, hints and the content of pages to encourage readers to follow certain paths, or help them to decide between paths.

In general, being more open (using writing or landscape to control reader movement through the story) will result in more interactive stories with the reader feeling greater agency and ownership of their experience. If this is your goal, then you should use narrative logic sparingly.

On the other hand, if you are writing a linear story you will probably use narrative logic as the main way to control reader progress, but make sure that this matches the way in which the landscape influences navigation. If they are at odds (linear pages that are scattered, or which require doubling back) it will be frustrating for your reader.

Key Pragmatic Considerations

- **Points of Arrival/Departure** - think about where readers will start and end your story (which may be in more than one place), and how well these match the normal ways that they arrive in or depart from a place. For example, think about starting near a standard point of entrance, and finishing near to the same place (as people often leave by the same route they arrive).

- **Be Mindful of the Reader's Effort to Move** - readers are more likely to choose a page that is nearer to them than one that is further away, and may ignore optional pages at a distance altogether. Avoid sending them on zig-zagging routes, or making them double-back too much.

- **Consider Total Time to Read** - Also consider the total time it will take to experience the story, does it fit with the normal time constraints that people visiting that location will have (i.e. is your story a diverting 30 min, or a more committed multi-hour experience?)

Other Pragmatic Considerations

- **Use Landscape to Control Navigation** - for example, laying pages along paths so that they are typically read in a particular order, looking for loops in the landscape that could be used to help readers revisit pages, or placing key choices at junctions and crossroads.

- **Identify and Use Bottlenecks in the Landscape** - bottlenecks such as gates, lone paths, or passes, are good places to put important narrative information, as most if not all of your readers will pass through them and read any pages placed there.

- **Identify High Cost Locations** - certain locations are difficult to reach (they may be far away, up a steep hill or steps, or be otherwise inaccessible), these should only be used as optional pages in your story, and might be considered as rewards for reader effort.

- **Consider Points of Rest** - consider places where your readers can easily stop, sit, or pause, and consider using these for longer sections of text. You may also like to consider longer pauses, such as lunch or drinks breaks, and where these could occur within your story.

- **Be Mindful of Fair-weather Readers** - think through how your story might be read - or what readers might skip - in bad weather

- **Consider Accessibility and the Reader's Safety** - on their walk will the reader be alone or in a group? Is the story location visible and well-populated, or hidden and lonely? Will the reader have access issues, e.g. wheelchair user, or a family with a buggy?

Aesthetic Considerations

- **Narrative Areas** - consider how you might use the landscape to create narrative areas, for example, stages of a journey, or areas with different themes or tones. It will help readers if important transitions in your narrative match transitions in physical space (from one area to another).

- **Identify Points of Interest in the Landscape** - and consider how you want to use them within your story. An important landmark demands attention within the narrative, you can use this to naturally draw readers to particular points, of flag important events. On the other hand, ignoring points of interest creates a disconnect between the story and the landscape - which may also be useful.

- **Consider the Theme/Tone of the Space** - and its relationship to the theme/tone of the narrative. Remember that the space will change, as it is experienced at different times of the day or season of the year, and in different weather conditions.

- **Use Diegetic References Carefully** - diegetic references are mentions of the real world environment within the story (e.g. "consider the apple tree at the centre of this yard"). They can create a strong connection between the story and the place, but be mindful of how the landscape might change, and consider how the story would be affected (for example, if the tree was cut down).

- **Write to Hold Attention** – both the device the reader is using and events in the landscape are likely to be a distraction to your story (e.g. alerts, messages, conversations), so consider ways in which you can hold attention (e.g. using style and pacing, or engaging subject matter), and/or write in such a way that less attention is required to be successful (e.g. using a poetic form, using multimedia, or brevity – punchy instalments of around 150 words are very effective).