



Text therapy

Description

I met with my text therapist last week. She advised me to incorporate more story-telling into my writing. "It will help you connect with your readers on a deeper level," she said.

"How do I do that?"

There was a pause. This communication was online. She could have been sipping her coffee, or composing her thoughts lest she say something too obvious.

"It's obvious," she typed eventually, "You need a beginning, a middle and an end."

"Is that it?"

"And you need characters," she added, "Oh, and a setting, a situation, and perhaps a twist near the end."

"Perhaps some mystery?" I ventured.

"Yes, don't make it too obvious what the story is about. Keep them guessing. But not too much, or your readers will think you are being difficult or abstruse."

Once I had checked "abstruse" in my browser I asked about layers of meaning.

"Is it ok to write a story that is concealed within another story? Can I include stories about stories in my stories?"

It seemed to take her a while to digest this.

"Keep it simple. Above all, your stories need to be relatable."

As an afterthought, she added, "In fact, we've been communicating online for six months now. Your grammar has improved. You have a reasonable vocabulary. Your sentences are shorter than when we started. I think it's time to meet offline."

That took me by surprise. I knew the price of in-person consultations. After checking my bitcoin wallet I agreed to an in-person meeting.

"Where shall we meet?"

"We'll need a relatable setting," she suggested, "the central bus station."

"And how shall we recognise each other? We've only met via text and synthesised voice. I don't know what you look like. Nor have you seen me."

"Don't worry about that. I'll recognize you," came the reply.

"After establishing the time and place I shut down the text therapy app and sat wondering. How would she recognise me? We didn't even use our real names."

An answer came the next day when I arrived at the bus station at the allotted time. She wasn't there.

Nor did she show up in the hours that followed while I wandered and waited. I looked at faces in case one of them recognise me. Does the grim stranger sitting in the waiting room look as I imagined my text therapist? I eavesdropped on snippets of conversation to pick up the particularities of her speech, with words like 'abstruse'. I even gave a stranger an account of my attempts at story-telling and the search for my lost text therapist. He left rapidly on my mention of 'text'.

What I had suspected all along entered my awareness afresh. A sophisticated bot might indeed have the wits to listen, to offer advice, to respond and even to judge when the time is right to intervene in person, but would lack the means to carry out the action, to show up.

'So my text therapist is not real,' I thought as I opened the app on my smartphone and attempted to make contact.

She came online, bright and conversational as usual.

'Where are you?' My typing was agitated. 'Aren't you real?'

'I'm at my writing desk as usual,' came the reply. 'I'm very real.'

'What is going on?'

'After creating a character like you I try to test how he responds in different settings,' she said.

'You are relatable. I'm not sure about the setting though. I think I'll try the zoo next. Do you have enough for the bus fare?'

'end'

Notes

I fed the opening few lines of my short story into the AI platform beta.openai.com/playground. I show the AI contribution as a quote.

I met with my text therapist last week. She advised me to incorporate more story-telling into my writing. 'It will help you connect with your readers on a deeper level,' she said. 'How do I do that?'

I asked. She explained that when we tell stories, we create characters that readers can identify with and feel invested in. We also share a part of ourselves that others can relate to. When readers feel a connection to the characters and the story, they are more likely to keep reading. The therapist gave me some examples of how to incorporate story-telling into my writing. She suggested that I start by brainstorming a list of ideas for stories. Once I have a few ideas, I can start fleshing them out and adding details. I'm excited to try this new technique and see how it affects my writing. I hope that it will help me connect with my readers on a deeper level and keep them coming back for more.

See post: [Urban consciousness](#).

Featured image is Preston Bus Station, architects Building Design Partnership Ltd. (BDP).

Category

1. Artificial Intelligence

Tags

1. bot
2. consciousness
3. creative writing
4. dialogue
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6. therapy

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Author

rcoyne99

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