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## In Other Words: A Personal Glossary

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There was a moment, a few years ago, when an accidental comparison opened a fast understanding. I was in my office, talking with an undergraduate student about her manuscript. She had a fine idea but the writing was wooden. Every bit of exposition sounded like speech-making. Every bit of narrative was summary at best. There were statues of information but no movement. We weren't on the same page about how to get the parts to work together.

“Do you know what hocketing is?” I finally asked.

I knew my student was in the college bell choir and I myself had learned the word just the day before, listening to a bell choir on Minnesota Public Radio. Obviously, the announcer said, no one bell carries more than one note. No one bell can carry a melody. But listeners perceive a melody from the interplay of the one notes coming from multiple places. Simply put, hocketing is the technique of making disparate parts create a linear song that, frankly, exists nowhere except in the listener's head.

“Yes!” she said. The revision was a success.

A short while later, in a meeting with another student, who was working on a memoir of his mother's cancer, I asked if the disease was a key-change in the existing family tune, or a whole new song.

“Oh,” he said. “Now I get it.”

I have the good fortune to teach at a college with a strong music program. Physics majors worry about which ensemble or choir they get into. Writing majors are forever on orchestra tour. And it occurred to me that there is a whole vocabulary in music that would apply, easily, to talk about writing.

Crescendo is rising action or building tension. Harmony is subplot. Coda is denouement (more or less). Moreover, there are whole vocabularies in photography, wood-working, pottery, dance, even baking with ancient stoneware that we can use to help talk about the ways we think about words. Just as any metaphor is an act of making something more clear, the use of vocabulary from other arts has a way of giving just that right nuance, that right edge for clarity.

A complete glossary would be impossible. But here are a few terms, picked for no other reason than I like them and seem to use them a lot. I offer them just to give a few examples of the idea.

Dance (from Wikipedia)—

- **BACKLEADING:** In social dancing strongly relying on leading and following, this term means that the follower executes steps without waiting for or contrary to the lead of the leader. This is also called anticipation and usually considered bad dancing habit. An exception would be to avoid a collision with another couple the leader hasn't seen (this is usually just to stop the leader performing specific steps rather than the follower actively executing steps).
- **CLOSED CHANGE:** Closed change is a basic step in the Waltz. The man steps forward on either foot whilst the lady steps backward on the opposing foot (e.g.: the man steps forward on his right foot whilst the lady steps back on her left). They will then step to the side on the other foot, and conclude the figure by closing the first foot beside the second (hence the name "closed" of the step). Each step takes up a full beat of the music.
- **COMPRESSION**—the term has several meanings.
  - Compression is a type of physical connection, opposite to leverage, in which a stress exists at the point(s) of contact directed towards the contact point(s). The term is frequently used, e.g., in swing dance community.
  - Compression is lowering the body by bending the knees in a preparation for a step. The term is mostly used in describing the Rises and falls technique of ballroom dances of Standard (International style) of Smooth (American style) categories: waltzes, tangos, foxtrots.
  - Compression is a hip action in Latin dances.
  - An action to achieve a graceful sway.

Pottery (from Wikipedia)—

- **CRAZING:** A glaze fault characterized by the cracking of fired glazes and due to high tensile stresses. (W)
- **DUNT:** A crack caused by thermal shock, especially if ware cooled too rapidly after it has been fired.
- **FLUX.** substance that promotes fusion in a given mixture of raw materials. (W)
- **SOAKING** is a period during a firing cycle when a constant temperature is maintained.

Music (from Wikipedia)—

- **ACCELERANDO (accel.)** Accelerating; *gradually* increasing the tempo
- **FORTISSIMO (fff)** As loud as possible
- **LENTISSIMO** Very slowly
- **OBBLIGATO** Required, indispensable

Photography (from Ritz Camera)—

- **AMBIENT LIGHT:** The light in the scene, as opposed to the light provided by the photographer with flash, photofloods, etc.
- **BURNING-IN:** In darkroom work, giving additional exposure to a portion of a print made from a negative to add density and tonal information. Often used to balance tones in contrasty scenes. The same term is used in digital darkroom programs.
- **COMPOSITION:** The arrangement of subject matter, graphic elements, tones, and light in a scene. Can be harmonious or discordant, depending on the photographer, his or her mood, and the subject at hand. There are no set rules, just suggestions; successful compositions are ones that best express particular feelings about the subject or scene.

Comparison is often the doorway to understanding, and there is an argument that we only understand through comparison. There are the broad strokes: I understand sweet because I have tasted bitter; I

understand light because I have been in the dark. But there are nuances too. I understand love because I have seen the limits of friends.

So perhaps another music example is unsurprising. Talking with a student about her work, a competent but not extraordinary paper that was dealing with an extraordinary idea. We were talking about her sentences—all of them nearly identical in length and form. I asked her to break them up and add them together in new ways. I asked her to listen to the cadence of her words.

She nodded, dutifully. I knew she would try but did not understand why.

“Wait,” I said. “Have you ever heard the Pat Metheny song “First Circle?””

“No,” she said.

I called it up on Youtube.

“Count this out,” I said.

Her face wrinkled after just a few measures.

“I can’t!” she cried. Then she paused. “That’s the most interesting rhythm I’ve ever heard.”

I called up the sheet music—alternating measures of 12/8 and 10/8 time.

“Ok,” she said. “Ok, ok, ok...”