

### **Writing Your Own Short Story**

Writing a short story is a great opportunity to let your creative imagination soar. Many short story writers write short stories to make an interesting point about human nature or to simply explore an interesting theme or idea. Think about some of the short stories you have read- what do you think was the author's motive?

Short stories can take many forms: science fiction, adventure, mystery, drama, romance, you name it! Whatever form you choose, remember that your word count is limited. Every character in your story, every event, and every word needs to have a point. There is no room in short story writing for nonsense and ramble! This being said, remember that all aspects of your short story need to capture reader's attention and engage their emotions.

#### **Before you Begin...**

##### ***Choose a Focus***

- Begin by thinking about a message (theme) you want to convey in your story. Some examples of popular messages in stories are: *it doesn't matter who wins, it is how you play the game, jealousy can be the strongest emotion, revenge is key, or with every love comes heartbreak*. Your message will be your direction or focus as you continue to develop your characters, conflict, etc.
- If you are stuck on where to begin, think about some of the events and people you surround yourself with everyday. Think about a common message that you live by or a theme that can be pulled out of your own memories and experiences.
- If this doesn't help, watch TV and read magazines. Something in our current events may serve as a springboard for your imagination. You can also read more short stories (I have a lot!). Find an author you like and think about what you like about his/her style. Perhaps you can mimic that!
- After you have discovered your message, ensure that you have characters (people), a setting (place), an activity, and a conflict. These elements are essential to any short story.

##### ***Organizing your Genius Ideas***

- Remember, once you have some of these ideas in your mind, your first step is to use the plot diagram to organize the story and ensure all of the essential elements are included. After this point, think in detail about the following items:

##### ***The Beginning...***

- Decide if you want your short story to focus on character, setting, or an event. Which of these elements will be the focus? Remember that your goal is to still get your message across so think about which one of these avenues will help you accomplish this. Example: If you want to focus on character as the main element in your story, begin by placing your character in a certain environment that would cause him/her to react a certain way. Also, you may choose to focus on a setting where something unusual happens.

- Remember, the beginning needs to hook your readers in. Do this by starting in the middle of an event, or by vividly describing a person or environment. You can also begin by starting in the middle of an amusing dialogue between characters (more on dialogue to follow).

### ***Characters...***

- The most important thing about characters in your short story is to remember to show, not tell. By this I mean to reveal a lot of your character's traits and quirks through their actions and what others in the story might say about them rather than you describing them in full detail. A little description won't hurt, but don't carry on forever. Remember that your reader needs to identify with the main character.

### ***Design the Setting...***

- Again, do not begin your short story by describing in your own words the environment in which the story occurs (*Avoid the following: This story takes place in the woods, by Thompson, Manitoba, on a quite summer night*). Instead, have the character reveal some of the aspects of their surroundings, such as the temperature, what they see around them, the year, the season, etc. Also, the actions of the characters will reveal a lot about setting. For example, if your protagonist is going ice fishing, then your reader is likely to know it is winter time.

- It is always exciting to allow room for your reader to use their imagination to visualize the setting.

- If you can, use figurative language to describe the setting. This will add interest and sophistication to your short story. An example of this would be: *The air was warm and sticky, like the steam off of a boiling pot of water.*

- Remember, that the setting should jive with the characters.

***A Conflict is Brewing...***

- Like characters and setting, you want to show your readers the conflict, through the actions of the characters and not by telling them what conflict is going to occur.
- The conflict (whether it is internal or external) needs to be set up early on in your short story to add tension and suspense. Through these events (rising action), readers learn a lot about your character.
- Your focus should be on the build up to the climax or turning point when the author resolves the conflict and a message is conveyed. This is the *theme*. This message should not be made explicitly clear but left up to the reader to identify.

***The Point of View...***

- The reader identifies with the point of view from which the story is told. When choosing the point of view, think about how it will help convey the message and connect to the reader.
- Remember, first person uses “I” “me” and “my”. This form (when the story is told from the main character’s point of view) draws the reader into the story.
- Third person point of view is when “he” “she” and “they” are used. This gives readers an opportunity to explore all characters and events from an outside point of view.
- Be sure to be consistent with the point of view that you select.

***Dialogue...***

- The dialogue is a very important part of your short story. It adds life to your characters! Dialogue is extremely effective when you are creative with it, by paying attention to vocabulary, colloquialisms (slang), mannerisms, tone, contractions, etc.
- Keep the dialogue short and realistic to characters.
- Have your characters interrupt each other to add realism.
- The purpose of the dialogue is to keep the short story going and advance the actions.

How to Write Dialogue

- Always place dialogue inside quotation marks.
- If you introduce the speaker first, place a comma after the introduction, before the quotation.

*Example: Brett responded, "..."*

- If you put the dialogue before introducing the speaker, place a comma inside the quote (inside the quotation marks) before introducing the speaker.

*Example: "Oh, I thought you knew that already," replied Tom.*

- Sometimes, if your quotation is quite long, you can break it up by introducing the speaker in the middle of the dialogue. Be sure to place a comma inside the quotation mark before introducing the speaker followed by a comma after the speaker, and then quotation marks to resume the dialogue.

*Example: "I imagined that would happen," said Mark, "I just didn't think it would happen this quickly."*

- You do not always need to state the speaker. If only two characters are engaging in a conversation, you may decide to not include the speaker's name after every quote. Be sure you are starting a new paragraph every time the speaker changes so your reader can keep track of which character is speaking.

*Example:*

*"Oh."*

*"Really...I couldn't believe it either, can you?"*

*"No, I can't"*

*"It is still so shocking. I wouldn't have expected him to do that."*

*"I know, now what?"*