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Tips for Writing Short Stories

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Writing short stories is a great way to start a writing career or hobby. Maybe your ultimate dream is to write a novel. Starting with short stories will help you get a feel for how to structure a narrative, and what challenges and obstacles you will face in crafting your tale.

That doesn't mean that writing a short story is easy. To tell a good story in fewer words, you need to do everything you can to connect with your reader and keep them turning the page. Short stories are not the same as novels, and you need to write them differently to be successful. Here are some tips for writing short stories that will help you become a better writer.

Write

One of the hardest parts about writing any kind of story is actually sitting down and writing. You might have great ideas and a great theme, but if you don't put pen to paper (or fingers to keyboard) then you aren't going to tell your story. If you are busy, then carve out even a small section of time each day to write. All stories, whether short or long, [require dedication](#) for getting those words out of your brain and onto a page.

Relatable Characters

Every story has characters. If the readers don't care about your main character, then they won't care about your story. It's that simple. Try to make your characters as life-like as possible. Give them characteristics that you recognize in people you know. The more "human" they seem, the more your readers will be able to empathize with them and relate to the story.

Get Into Your Story Quickly

With a short story, you don't have much time for a preamble. Get the plot going immediately by plunging your main character right into the problem that has to be solved. It can be a goal to achieve, like getting their wife's ring back from a thief, or choosing between two possible lovers. The plot should be clear almost immediately so that you can start to grow your story. If you need a backstory, then hint at it with vague memories or dialogue, such as "Fred had seen the signs of abuse before, and these were obvious." The reader knows that he's either been in or seen abusive relationships and they don't need to know the details.

Keep It Tight

Your story can't have anything that doesn't drive the plot forward. There is no point. If you waste time on superfluous things, you will end up writing a novella and possibly boring your reader. Everything that happens in your story should be a part of your setup, including descriptions.

For example, you should always adhere to literary principles like Chekhov's Gun. This principle is based on making sure that everything you describe in your story is eventually used as part of the plot. For example, if a gun appears near the beginning of the story, then it must go off by the end. You can [improve your story using Chekhov's Gun](#) to make sure that everything you put down is relevant. By keeping this principle in mind at all times you will cut out all of the fat and leave only the sizzling meat in your narrative.

Narrow Your Narrative

With a novel, you can spend time with secondary characters, fill out backstories, and build entire worlds. With a short story, you don't have time for any of this. It can be hard to have characters work through complex political situations in a fantasy world, or solve a world-saving problem in only a few thousand words. Instead, keep your narrative and your character base narrow. You should have one main character who interacts with very few other secondary characters. The problem to solve should be smaller in scale. Your timeframe should be brief as well. Make it a slice of the main character's life, such as a day or even a few hours or less.

Write Effective Dialogue

When you watch a play, a lot of story gets told in those three to five acts. The reason for this is that it is almost all told in dialogue and action. Your short story can be like this. Move the plot along with crisp dialogue that's realistic and engaging at the same time. You can use dialogue for exposure, instead of describing something with flowery words. Instead of writing a character's internal dialogue, have them say what they are thinking out loud. It will bring your characters and your story to life, making them more exciting and relatable to the reader.

Edit, and Then Edit Some More

Your story isn't finished when you write the last word. In fact, the process is only getting started. Then comes the [time to edit](#). This means reading it over meticulously and changing every word and sentence until everything is perfect. This is also the time when you will cut out any parts that don't serve your plot. If you are in doubt, then cut it and move on. You should only have room for the important stuff. Editing is what transforms your original idea into an engaging and well-crafted short story.

Writing is hard, and it can be a challenge to even know where to start. However, by following these tips, you can write an amazing short story that will be fun for you and exciting for your readers.

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