

WRITING A BETTER SHORT STORY

Adapted from "5 Secret Tips To Writing A Successful Short Story" and "How to Write Better Short Stories"

Pro Tips

1. Focus on just one conflict that drives the characters.
2. Give your main character motivation. Actions without motivation feel random. What does your protagonist want? Eliminate fluff by focusing only on scenes that help the protagonist achieve his/her goals.
3. Consider writing a catchy first paragraph. Add something unusual, unexpected, an action, or the conflict. Begin with tension and immediacy.
4. Show, don't tell. Rather than feed your readers information about the weather, population statistics, or how far it is to the grocery store, substitute descriptive details so your reader can experience the location the way your characters do.
 - (Not so good) I saw my neighbor's dog attack a squirrel.
 - (Better) The squirrel's frantic movements ceased as the dog's jaw clamped around it.
5. Incorporate sensory detail (using the 5 senses). Consider multiple senses when developing your setting.
 - (Not so good) The pie on the table looked delicious.
 - (Better) The warm smell of apples and cinnamon filled the small kitchen.
6. Write meaningful dialogue. Again, show, don't tell.
 - (Not so good)
 - John sat up and took a deep breath, knowing that his confrontation with Mary had to come now, or it would never come at all. "Wh- where are you going?" he stammered nervously, staring at his feet.
 - (Better)
Deep breath. Now or never. "Wh- where are you going?" John stammered, staring at his feet.
7. Create conflict. Conflict produces tension that makes the story begin. Tension is created by opposition between the character and the conflict.
 - Present a universal struggle that readers can find meaningful, even if the details of the struggle reflect a unique place and time.
 - Convince readers that the outcome matters because someone they care about could lose something precious. Trivial clashes often produce trivial fiction.
 - Make sure your conflict has a genuine purpose. Conflict moves your story along. Meaningless conflict will be boring, contrived, and perhaps even annoying to your readers.

Rookie Mistakes

1. Too many characters
2. Too heavy on exposition and backstory. There is no mystery in your story. You explain too much too early. Use only details from the setting, dialogue, and tone to *help you tell the story*. Cut out extra fluff.
3. Creating a main character that the reader does not care about. Engage the reader's emotions. Don't just write about emotional characters. Write characters that create emotions in the reader.
4. Your main character lacks complexity. They are, in fact, boring. Your character should have depth. People are complicated! In order to develop a living, breathing, multi-faceted character, it is important to know way more about the character than you will ever use in the story.
5. Your story lacks direction because it is padded with fluff. Determine what you want your story to do, then stick to it. Make every sentence count. If you over-stuff your plot by including too many distractions, your story will feel overloaded and underdeveloped. Shorter Is Sweeter. Resist the urge to go on and on.
6. You didn't spend time on the title. This can be one of the most difficult—but one of the most important—parts of writing your story.