

Story Writing

What is a story?

A **story** is a connected series of events told through words (written or spoken), imagery (still and moving), body language, performance, music, or any other form of communication. You can tell a story about anything, and the events described can be real or imaginary; and covering both fiction and nonfiction. There are stories about all things and all times; past, present and future. Whenever you're telling somebody about a series of events, you are telling a story, no matter what the subject nor when they occurred. As such, stories are of great value to human culture, and are some of the oldest, most important parts of life.

Difference between a short story and a Novel:

The obvious difference between a novel and a short story is that short stories are short and novels are long. Short stories can be 1,000 to 20,000 words. More average is 3,000 to 5,000 words. A novel can be anywhere from 60,000 to over 120,000.

A short story has one main character and the story is told through that character's point of view. Often it is told in first person or limited first person. A novel has a cast of characters and the story can be told from any of those characters' viewpoints.

A short story usually takes place in a few hours or days in few settings. A novel can take place over a short period of time or it may cover years or generations in many different settings, countries and even planets.

A short story has one theme, whereas a novel can explore different themes and has more breadth and scope.

5 Elements of a short story

1. **Character:** A character is a person, or sometimes even an animal, who takes part in the action of a short story or other literary work.
2. **Setting:** The setting of a short story is the time and place in which it happens. Authors often use descriptions of landscape, scenery, buildings, seasons or weather to provide a strong sense of setting.
3. **Plot:** A plot is a series of events and character actions that relate to the central conflict. The plot supports the substance of the story. Plot is organization. Events are the things that happen and need to be organized so that the reader can understand the character's internal experience and emotional truth.

4. **Conflict:** The conflict is a struggle between two people or things in a short story. The main character is usually on one side of the central conflict. On the other side, the main character may struggle against another important character, against the forces of nature, against society, or even against something inside himself or herself (feelings, emotions, and illness).

5. **Theme:** The theme is the central idea or belief in a short story.

Conclusion:

Stories are a major part of every aspect of our lives, from what we read to what we do to what we talk and think about. They're also crucial to our understanding of history and culture, and have been recorded and passed on since man's earliest days. Stories have always been and will always be at the core of not only literature, but life!

EXERCISE for students: **Character creation**

Live with your Character.

As you build a character (or several characters) you should be able to see them and answer questions about them. As you take action and make choices during the day, do the same with your character.

You get dressed—what does your character put on?

You go to the library or the lab—where does the character go?

You play Frisbee—does your character play any sports?

What does your character do for fun? To play? Who does s/he play with?

You turn on your MP3 player. What kind of music does your character like? Listen to?

What songs does your character have on his/her player?

At all meals—choose your own food and then ask your character(s) what THEY would eat from what is available.

What has the character got in his or her pockets? Book bag?

What is important is NOT what the character did, but what you learned about what you know about the character

Class activity for Class:

Bring in a character sketch. Include not only your observations and what you know, but look for physical details. If you can find a picture in a magazine that looks like your character, cut it out (if this is reasonable, you own the magazine) and include it. Or, if you can draw, sketch out what the character looks like. What clothes/furniture/food/music/movies/etc.

In class, you will introduce your character. Then each person will ask random questions.

Examples: What is her favorite color?

When did he wake up this morning?

Cross at the corner or jay-walk?

Brand of toothpaste?

Answer each question immediately, spontaneously. If you have a good sense of the character you should be able to do this even when the question is unexpected.

Next activity: Students are instructed to write a chain story while sitting in a circle. Each student is asked to add his or her own sentence and pass it on to the next student. The sequence of the story must be maintained.