WRITING TIPS:

What is fiction?

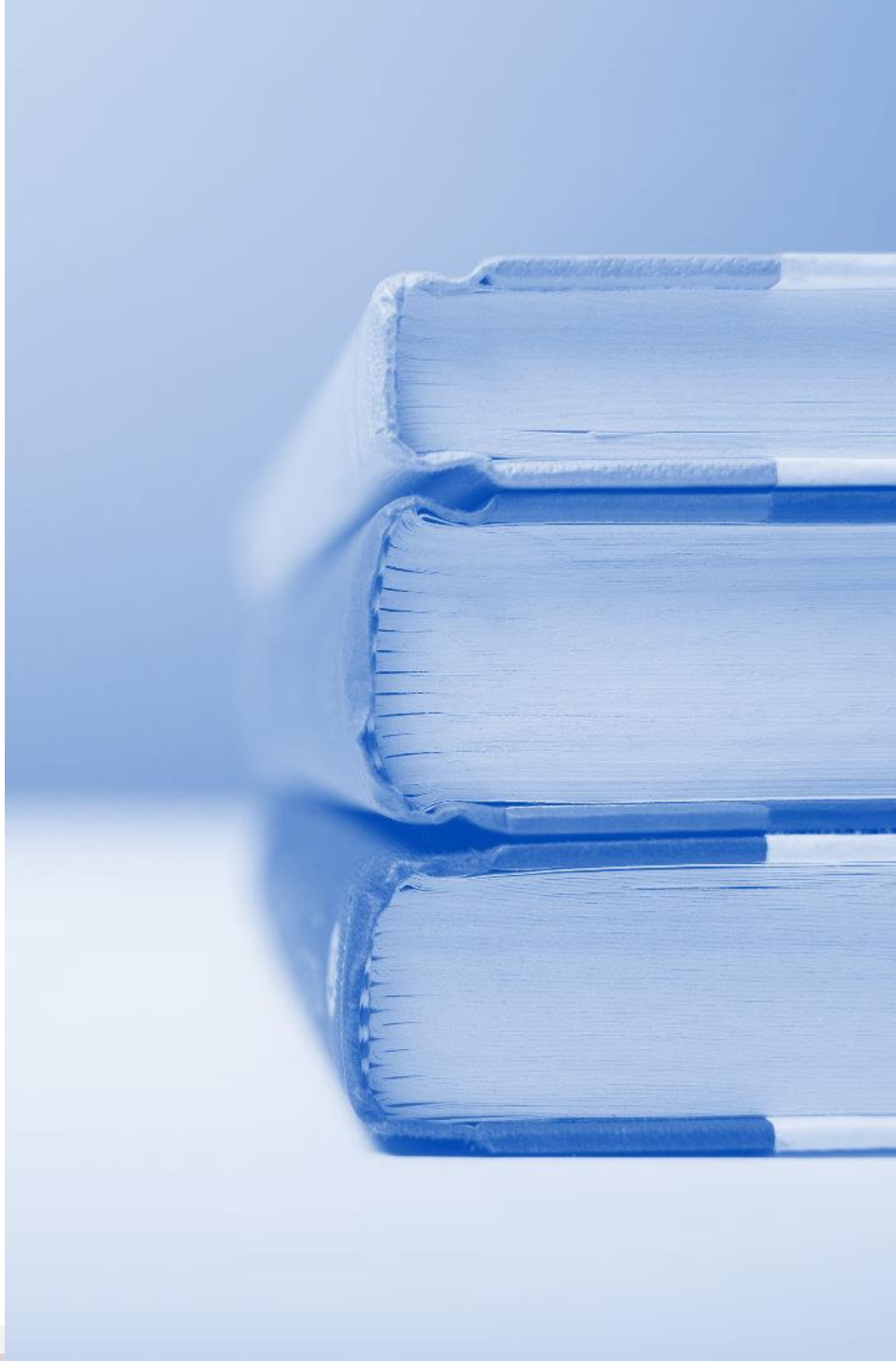
Fiction

Most people assume they understand the meaning of “fiction”, creative writers, it’s a term that requires precise definition.

Fiction refers to stories that originate in the mind of the writer are crafted into written narratives. While these stories may incorporate elements of truth or be inspired by real events and people, the fiction writer transforms these realities to create an imaginary story.

For example, if you were to write about an interesting experience your son conducted in university lecture or an enjoyable trip with the family, you would be writing nonfiction. This classification holds if you include dialogue and vivid descriptions that give it a fiction appearance. Only when you rework that real-life material into an imaginative narrative do you create a piece of fiction.

Nonfiction can have fictional elements, but these elements are typically used to enhance the narrative rather than alter the factual basis of the story.



WRITING TIPS:

Basic Story Elements for Children's Stories

Basic Story Elements for Children's Stories

In a story, the characters, the setting, the themes, and the plot all work together like pieces of a puzzle. The characters are the people or animals in the story, and they do things and make choices that move the plot along. The setting is where and when the story takes place, which can affect how the characters behave. The themes are the big ideas or messages the story wants to share, and these are shown through what the characters do and what happens to them. The plot is the sequence of events that happen in the story. Everything is connected because the characters live in the setting, the plot shows what happens to them, and the themes are revealed through their actions and the events.

Characters:

Characters are the lifeblood of fiction, whether they be human or animal. Casts are generally small in stories for young readers, often limited to a main character and one or two others. As you'd expect, the main character is presented in more detail than are background characters.

When you create characters for your own stories, remember that what a character thinks, feels, says, and does is often more important than what he or she looks like.

Setting:

The term "setting" refers to a story's time and place, which can sometimes include weather conditions. Settings can serve different purposes in a narrative. In some stories, the setting acts as a simple backdrop, providing a basic sense of place without much detail. For instance, in a home-and-school-centered story like "Sindy Lou and the Dark Place," the author may only sketch a general idea of where the events occur. On the other hand, some settings are crucial to the plot and directly relate to the story's conflict. Consider the rain-swollen creek in "The Wreck of Monique's Antiques." Here, the setting is described in detail because it plays a vital role in the story's events. Additionally, settings can add color and atmosphere to a story, enhancing the reader's experience by making the world more vivid and immersive.

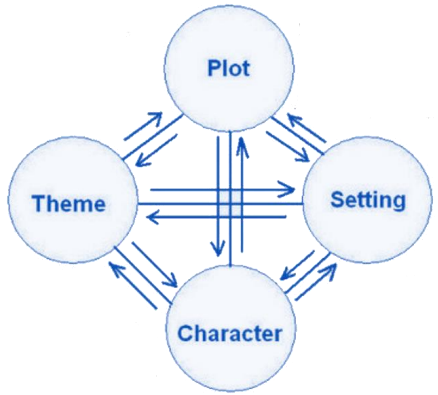
Basic Story Elements for Children's Stories

Theme:

The main idea or theme is the heart of the story. While the primary purpose of a story is to entertain, stories often still carry moral or ethical messages. Even though stories for children no longer need to point to an explicit moral, they are more satisfying when the main character shows some healthy growth or change. What has the protagonist learned from their experiences? Have they gained insights about themselves, others, their world, or perhaps the larger world beyond? This growth or change adds depth to the story and makes it more rewarding for the reader.

Plot:

The plot of a story is like a roadmap of what happens from the beginning to the end. It's important because it keeps the reader interested and excited to find out what comes next. For early readers, the plot needs to be clear and easy to follow, with events that are fun and engaging. A good plot helps the characters grow and learn, and it makes the reader want to keep turning the pages to see how everything turns out. Without a strong plot, a story can feel boring and confusing, so it's essential to have a plot that is lively and well-organized.



Basic Story Elements for Children's Stories

Here's a simple structure of what a plot should consist of, especially for to create stories early readers will enjoy:

Introduction:: Beginning: Introduce the main characters and the setting. Let the reader know who the story is about and where it takes place.

Rising Action: These are the events that build up the story, creating suspense and leading to the climax. Conflicts and challenges are introduced, making the story more engaging.

Climax: This is the most intense and exciting part of the story, where the main conflict reaches its peak. It's the turning point that determines the outcome of the plot..

Falling Action: After the climax, the falling action includes events that lead to the resolution. It ties up loose ends and shows the consequences of the climax.

Resolution: AKA, the denouement, the resolution is where the story concludes, and conflicts are resolved. It provides closure and reveals the final outcomes for the characters

Subplots: (for mid-grade to teens) These secondary storylines run parallel to the main plot. They add depth and complexity to the story, often using supporting characters and conflicts.

Themes : Themes are the underlying messages or central ideas explored in the story. They reflect the author's insights on life, society, or human nature, giving the story deeper meaning.

SEE EXAMPLE ON NEXT PAGE

Basic Story Elements for Children's Stories

Sample: a structured plot for a story about the redwood forest

1. Introduction

Set the Scene: Introduce the redwood forest and its inhabitants.

Character Introduction: Brave Little Redwood dreams of growing tall and strong like its elders.

Inciting Incident: Smoke in the air. The Brave Little Redwood notices smoke and alerts the forest animals.

2. Rising action

Forest Meeting: Sage the Owl calls a meeting to discuss the approaching fire and what can be done.

Gathering Resources: Sprout the Squirrel gathers water from the creek, and animals dig firebreaks

Teamwork: Animals work together to clear dry leaves and create safe zones.

3. Climax

Fire Approaches: Flame the Fire reaches the forest, and animals fight to protect their home.

Rainy Arrives: Rainy the Cloud comes just in time, bringing rain to help douse the flames.

4. Falling action

Aftermath: The fire is put out, and the forest animals assess the damage and begin to rebuild.

Lessons Learned: Brave Little Redwood reflects on the importance of teamwork and bravery.

5. Resolution

New Growth: New sprouts begin to grow, symbolizing hope and renewal.

Celebration: The forest community celebrates their survival and unity.

6. Subplots

Brave Little Redwood's Growth: The journey from being a small tree to understanding its role in the forest.

Friendship and Cooperation: Developing relationships among the forest animals and learning to work together.

7. Themes

Bravery: Facing fears and standing up to challenges.

Teamwork: The power of working together to overcome difficulties.

Resilience: Recovering and growing stronger after a disaster.

Environmental Awareness: Understanding the impact of fires on forests and the importance of conservation.

WRITING TIPS:

Assignment: Bringing It All Together

Assignment: Brining It All Together

In this assignment you'll find specific pointers to aid you in the writing of your story. Plan to read through them now. Then get your story down on paper and refer to them again as you revise:

Use Words as story-starters

This is a springboard to help stimulate your creative adrenalin. For a story, below is a list of 10 words that have no obvious relationship to one another. You may choose as many as five of those words and try working them into a story for your readers; or you may choose a single words as an idea-starter, letting it suggest other words and concepts via the process called *clustering*. Both approaches will be discussed as you read further.

Use readership as a guide to your story's length

Your manuscript may run to 1.,000 words if you're writing for children older than eight or nine; otherwise, for good market-length practice, try to keep it under 750 words. Your story can be totally-out-of-this-world fantasy or very realistic here-and-now. As you begin developing your idea, keep in mind the basic four-part structure (inlay on this picture), and remember that if you write fantasy, your story must abide by its basic rule: it must be consistent and logical within its framework.

WHISPER	SLIDE
FLAG	CUP
PATCH	SING
LEAP	BRUSH
CANDLE	FLOAT

Assignment: Brining It All Together

Step 1: Exploring story ideas

Finding an Idea: Free Association as a Creative Source:

What is being encouraged in this assignment is to unlock your writer's imagination by means of the technique known as *free association.* This means allowing your thoughts to wander, letting one thing lead to another. As you do so, certain ideas will begin to connect; out of a seemingly random collection of elements, the vague pattern of a story idea will emerge. If you decide that pattern has possibilities, your next step will be to develop it into a three-part story in a conscious, controlled way.

Choosing words from the list. As a new writer, you'll find this process easier if you begin with something concrete, rather than just snatching ideas out of thin air. In selecting 4-5 words from the list we've provided, you'll be equipping yourself with some specifics on which your imagination can go to work.

Indeed, some of you may recognize this form of idea-starter as a device often used by professional storytellers with a live audience of children. The storyteller asks the youngsters to call out a list of words, and then, on the spot, delivers a story that uses all the words involved. (This may not always result in a literature, but it certainly keeps the storyteller on their toes, and it delights the children.)

Select only a few words

A major difference here is that in your finished story, you needn't actually use any or all of the words with which you began—unless, of course, it's natural to do so. Nor does your story have to be for young children.

Assignment: Brining It All Together

Consider multiple meanings

Finding links and connections: Begin by studying the list carefully, making a note of any connections that occur to you., no matter how unlikely. You'll realize that some of the words have more than one meaning, and also that many can be used either as verbs—action words—or as nouns. You can ***flag*** a train, for example, get tired and feel yourself begin to flag. You can drink from a ***cup***—or cup your hands around a fragile Christmas tree ornament. A middle-grade story character might ***slide*** into second base; a younger one might await his turn on a playground slide. ***Brush*** could suggest a whole host of possibilities; a teenage girl brushing her horse; a character pushing his way through heavy brush; a brush with danger or romance or celebrity.

Look for story builders: conflict, action, setting

Consider each word on the list as a possible story element. Which words could suggest the *conflict* or the *problem*? Which words could suggest an interesting *setting*. Which could suggest a *character's actions*? Jot down any ideas that come into your head as you look over the list. At the same time, avoid forcing a story simply to accommodate your initial choice of words. Each time you choose from the list should occupy a logical place n your narrative. If there's a word/concept that doesn't fit, discard it and think again.

Look for story builders: conflict, action, setting

Clustering. Which words could suggest the *conflict* or the *problem*? Which words could suggest an interesting *setting*. Which could suggest a *character's actions*? Jot down any ideas that come into your head as you look over the list. At the same time, avoid forcing a story simply to accommodate your initial choice of words. Each time you choose from the list should occupy a logical place n your narrative. If there's a word/concept that doesn't fit, discard it and think again.

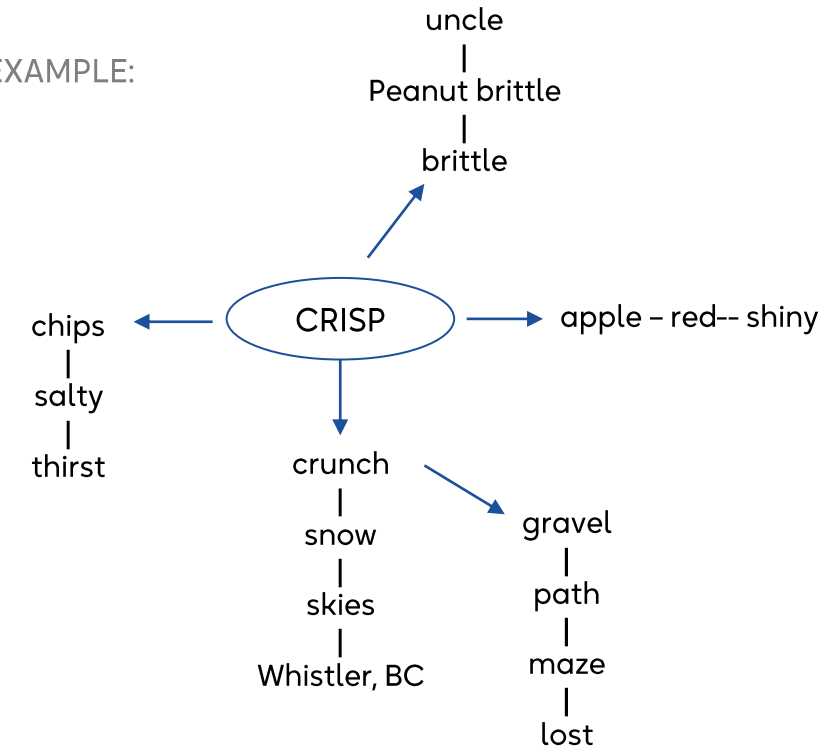
Assignment: Brining It All Together

Tips for creating story ideas

Clustering. Another way to use the list as a story-starter is to select a single word and make it the center of a ***cluster*—a form of brainstorming used by many professional writers in search of ideas.**

Begin by writing down your chosen word, then let it evoke other words quickly, without stopping to think, connecting them to the original word with lines or arrows. If a secondary word, immediately suggests another, scribble that word down and see where it leads you. Whenever you find yourself pausing for more than a second or two return to the central word.

FOR EXAMPLE:



Assignment: Brining It All Together

Where does your imagination take you?

Try it for yourself. After a couple of minutes, stop and study you cluster. Is there a story idea there, or a memory that might suggest one? (In the example, the this writer remembered her bachelor uncle who always brought her family a box of peanut brittle when he came to visit; skiing down Whistler Mountain in BC.; a recurring dream about an evergreen maze.)

If you don't see anything that sparks your imagination, choose another word from the list and begin another cluster. Chances are you'll wind up with more than one story-starter—and perhaps with some ideas for nonfiction as well. Be sure to note and file them all.

Arranging you story elements. Whichever approach you choose , you next step is to organize the specific words you've come up with into a sequence—the chain of events that will form your story's plot.

WRITING TIPS:

Shaping Your Ideas

Assignment: Brining It All Together

Step2: Put your ideas into a 4-part structure

Shaping You Ideas

The heart of a successful story for young readers is a main character confronting a challenge of some kind. There's something they need or want (or perhaps something they hop to avoid) in the face of ***difficulties.*** As explained earlier, this is the story element called ***conflict.*** Your own challenge as a writer is to set up that conflict early in your story (***beginning),*** develop it by putting further obstacles in your character's way (***middle***), and then resolve the problem convincingly, ideally by means of your character's efforts and actions (***climax and ending***).

Think about your reader's age

Decide on an age for your main character—and thus your reader. Before you go further, settle on the age of your protagonist. If you character is six or seven, your story will be for youngest readers (4-7); if hey are 14 years or older, your target audience will be teens. Establish a basic readership level now will help you plan your story's length and complexity.

Put your story in scenes

Think "scene." Mos of what happens in a children's story is shown to the reader rather than told. That is, the typical story consists of several dramatized scenes—moment-by-moment action taking place in a definite setting, complete with movement, dialogue, and the thoughts and emotions of the main character. Each scene has beginning, middle, and end.

Once you've come up with a story line that pleases you, run it through your mental video. Which aspects of your story can be summarized in a few lines of narrative and which merit full treatment of dramatized scenes?

Assignment: Brining It All Together

Step2: Put your ideas into a 4-part structure

In pondering this question, keep the eventual length of your manuscript in mind. If you're writing for youngest readers, two or three short scenes will be all you can manage and still stay within your 750-word maximum. Longer stories for middle graders and teens may run as many as five or six scenes linked by brief transitions. For this assignment, it's a 1000 word limit, and therefore you should limit yourself to three or four scenes.

Don't over-explain your story's background

Sneak explanatory facts into you're here-and-now scenes. What about background information the reader will need in order to make sense of your story's events? New wrtiers sometimes weigh down their story openings with lengthy explanations. Think instead of starting with a dramatized scene. Often you can do this through dialogue.
"It never got this cold in Florida." (your character has recently moved);
"Coach Morrisey wants me to try running hurdles this year" (your character is a member of the track team, coach by Mr. Morrisey).

Step 5: Compress the story's time to one day if possible

Limit your story's time span. One of the surest ways to achieve the lively forward pace young readers demand is to give your story a brief time frame. A story whose action takes place over weeks or months is almost bound to sag and drag in spots. ***For maximum impact and immediacy, try planning your story so that the action begins and ends in the course of a single day—or several day at most.*** This may be a challenge, but it will ensure a sharp, clear focus, and it will also help you stay within your target word count. That's important not just for this assignment but for stories you may want to submit to gatekeepers in the future. Editors have definite length requirements, and a manuscript that exceeds them simply won't be considered.

Assignment: Brining It All Together

Giving you story a short time span doesn't necessarily mean that all the elements of your plot have to occur in the space of a few hours. As mentioned, you can provide background facts in the course of your story's here-and-now action –and that includes the roots of your protagonist's problem or challenge.

Writing Tips: 3-Scene Story

If your story develops a sprawl, try compressing it into just three scenes.

1. OPENING: introduce main character and problem/challenge.
2. SECOND: escalate and complicate the problem.
3. THRID: resolve the problem.

Assignment: Brining It All Together

Step 6: Let one character own your story

Write from you main character's point of view. Most stories for young readers are told from the viewpoint of the main character. That, the reader experiences the events of the story as if he or she actually were that character, seeing and sensing and feeling only what that character sees, senses, and feels. What you as the writer gain by this is technique is your reader's identification with your hero or heroine, and involving "I-am-there" feeling that greatly enhances the impact of your story.

New writers are sometimes tempted to try writing from several points of view. When you reread your draft, though, you'll see that when you switch from Aunt Molly to Jeremy (your young protagonist, the character you want the reader to identify with) to Jeremy's younger sister and back again, you're diluting the effects of your story. Maybe you're having fun moving from one character's mind to another, but what about your young readers? Who are they in relation to the action from one moment to the next—the kitchen, the front porch, the backyard? In fact, do you—the writer—know exactly where you are?

A single viewpoint will help organize your story

One of the great things about telling a story from within the mind and perception of a single character is that you almost automatically organize your narrative around that character, and thereby clarify and simplify your story's structure. You can see what's offstage (and thus can be dealt with briefly) and what's on—the scenes you need to dramatize fully. So what may at first strike you as a limitation—"Do I have to stay with just one character?"—turns out in the end to be where you need to be. If you're like most writers, you'll also find that this sense of involvement with your main character actually increases and intensifies the pleasure you get from storywriting.

Assignment: Brining It All Together

Should you write in the first person—I, my, me—as if you actually were your character, or should you use the third person—he, him, his? As you'll see from many stories for young readers, the perspective is varied, written both ways; for now, just choose the method that feels comfortable to you. In a later lesson, I will talk more about his matter of "voice" and the advantages and disadvantages of the two methods.

Step 7: look for your story's theme

Decide what you protagonist will have learned by the end of your story. As explained earlier, a successful story should leave the reader with a takeaway point, or theme, though that point will rarely be spelled out in so many words. A list of common themes for young readers might include the following: Honesty is usually less work than lying. (i.e. *Kookie Koala and the Pack of Lies*, by Phillip Reed); the unknown is scarier than the unknown (The Case of Stolen Dreams, by Annie Mack); courage isn't the absence of fear but the absence but the willingness to face it (A High-Flying Hiccup, by Annie Mack).

For most writers, the theme of a story is something that emerges only gradually from the development of characters and plot—healthily so, since starting with the predetermined lesson or moral is apt to result in a stiffly written, predicable tale.

Make sure your main character grows and/or changes

One you've completed a first draft of you story, though, ask yourself how you main character has been changed by its events. Is he or she exactly the same at the end of the story as he/she was at the beginning? If so, you may need to give more thought to the way in which the story problem is resolved. Perhaps you've made things too easy for your character, relying on coincidence or on outside forces (including helpful adults) to bring about a happy ending. Or may be you've idealized your young character, not allowing ordinary faults and weaknesses – no room for growth.

Assignment: Brining It All Together

At the same time, unless you're writing lighthearted fantasy, beware of a story resolution that brings about a complete transformation in your charact and the situation. Even young children know that people don't change overnight. A small, satisfying step forward for your protagonist will make an equally satisfying ending for your reader.

IT'S TIME TO DRAFT YOUR ASSIGNMENT

Now you should be ready to lay out your story on paper, beginning with the words you chose or developed form the list and acting on the pointers given to you in this planning section.

Here they are again:

- Play "what if?" with your story idea.
- Work with a credible, child-sized problem.
- Use scenes to show rath than tell.
- Work background fats into your scenes.
- Establish a sense of your story's time and place.
- Limit your story's time span.
- Write from the viewpoint of your main character.
- Define your story's theme.

Assignment: Brining It All Together

Adjust your word length to your readership

Remember that you story an be for any of the three main age groups, also that it can take any form that appeals to you—mystery, humour, science fiction, everyday reality. As noted earlier, your finished manuscript can run 1,000 words, though if you're writing for young children you should try to keep your story between 500-750 words.

As you write, try to keep an eye on your story's proportions. Some writers prefer to lay out their story in full and then cut back as necessary. Most writers, though find it helpful as they compose a first draft to have at least a rough idea of the space available to them for each portion of the story. Here are some beginning/middle/ending length guidelines, expressed in terms of double-spaced printed pages.

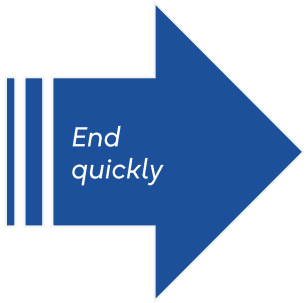
Start your story close to the main action

A fast getaway. As a rule of thumb, a story's beginning section—the opening scene or scene-plus-narrative that introduces the main character and establishes a conflict—should occupy no more than a fourth of the whole (⅕ is even better). If you're aiming at a 4-page, 1000 word story, that means allotting just one page at most to your opening. A challenge? Yes! But the sooner you master it, the sooner you're apt to produce a publishable story. Editors look for reader-involving opening that make a main character and story situation come alive in a minimum of words.

Build drama to a peak

Cut to the chase. Think of devoting the bulk of your story's space to its middle section, in which you'll develop and escalate your character's conflict and bring it to a dramatic moment of resolution—the story's climax. In a 1000-word manuscript, if you've manage to limit your beginning section to one page, you'll have almost three full pages available for the bulk of your story. Why? Because once you've writing your climax, your ending itself needn't take up more than a paragraph or two—sometimes no more than a few words.

Assignment: Brining It All Together



Over and out. Once the story conflict has been resolved—once the little pig's brick house has withstood the wolf's furious breath, once Cinderella's slipper has been shown to fit—there' usually no need to follow your characters into the future. The reader's questions have been answered; he or she is ready to go on to something else.

Styling Tips

Verb Tense – Present or Past?

You can write your story in the present tense (He read and writes every day) or the past tense (She read and wrote every day). Whichever you choose, be consistent once you've made the decision.

WRITING TIPS:

Writing Checklist

omera

Checklist

Once you have your story written down, you'll want to reread it to make sure it contains all the basic story elements covered in this exercise. Set the manuscript aside for a day or two. When you return to it, give it a fresh reading and then try to answer the question on the follow checklist.

If some of your answers are a bit tentative, you may want to do some revising before you go on to polish your story. As an aide to your revision, review the pointers about "Shaping Your Ideas".

- ❑ Does the story proceed logically from beginning to middle to end?
- ❑ Does your main character face a conflict (a challenge or dilemma) that is introduced early in the story? Is it satisfactorily resolved at the end of the story.
- ❑ If you've written fantasy, does it establish and sustain its own logic.
- ❑ Have you tried to stay within the viewpoint of your main character?
- ❑ Have you made use of dramatized scenes to show, rather than tell, your story?
- ❑ Does the dialogue sound natural?
- ❑ Does the story read well out loud?
- ❑ Have you given it a title?
- ❑ Is it within the word count (500-1000 words)?
- ❑ Have you designated the age level for which your story is intended? Is your main character's age close to that of your intended reader?

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