

STORY WRITING

Basics of a short story

A story is a narration of a set of fictitious events often used to convey a moral message. After you've chosen an idea, you need to remember the basics of a short story before writing one. The steps to a good short story are:

- Introduction: introduce characters, setting, time, weather, etc.
- Initiating action: the point of a story that starts the rising action.
- Rising action: events leading up to the climax or turning point.
- Climax: the most intense point or turning point of the story.
- Falling action: your story begins to conclude.
- Resolution: a satisfying ending to the story in which the central conflict is resolved—or not!

Collect ideas for your story

Most of the time, you'll just think of small snippets of information (a catastrophic event around which you can build a plot, a character's name or appearance, etc.), but you will sometimes get lucky and a whole story will reveal itself to you in a couple of minutes. If you have trouble finding inspiration or if you need to write a story in a hurry (for, as an example, a class), learn how to brainstorm. Experience usually helps to build good plots.

Characters

Find inspiration from real people. You can easily borrow attributes of people you know or even strangers you notice. For example, you might notice that someone is always drinking coffee, talks in a loud, booming voice, is always typing away at the computer, etc. All of these observations would together make a very interesting character. For a story to be believable, the characters have to feel genuine and realistic. Here are a few strategies to create "real people" to populate your story:

Write a list, titled with the character's name, and write all the attributes you can think of, from their central motivations to their favorite foods. Do they talk with an accent? Do they have any quirky mannerisms? You won't need all this information in your story. For example, the character could have anger issues, be afraid of water, be lonely, dislike being around other people, smoke too much, etc. Any or all of these could be developed further.

Every character needs to have some flaws, some problems, some imperfections and some insecurities. You might assume that people wouldn't like to read about a character with a lot of flaws, but that couldn't be farther from the truth. Batman wouldn't be The Dark Knight if he weren't a borderline sociopath!

Organize your thoughts.

After you've prepared the basic elements of your story, it can be helpful to make some sort of time-line to help you decide what should happen when. A quick start is especially important in short stories because you don't have much room to tell your story. Don't dillydally with long introductions of the characters or uninteresting descriptions of the setting: get right into the plot, and reveal details about the characters and setting piece-by-piece as you go along.

Limit the breadth of your story

The main events of a short story should occur in a relatively short period of time (days or even minutes), and you typically won't be able to develop effectively more than one plot, two or three main characters, and one setting. If your story has much more breadth, it probably needs to be a novella or novel.

Read!

Nothing can help you learn how to write a good short story better than reading good short stories. Note the style and how the author uses brevity to their advantage.

Reading a variety of authors and styles will help you learn how to adopt different "voices" for each story you write, and broaden your creative palette. Pay attention to how the authors develop their characters, write dialogue, and structure their plots.

SAMPLES

The Cookie Thief

A woman was waiting at an airport one night, with several long hours before her flight. She hunted for a book in the airport shops, bought a bag of cookies and found a place to drop.

She was engrossed in her book but happened to see, that the man sitting beside her, as bold as could be grabbed a cookie or two from the bag in between, which she tried to ignore to avoid a scene.

So she munched the cookies and watched the clock, as the gutsy cookie thief diminished her stock. She was getting more irritated as the minutes ticked by, thinking, "If I wasn't so nice, I would blacken his eye."

With each cookie she took, he took one too, when only one was left, she wondered what he would do.

With a smile on his face, and a nervous laugh, he took the last cookie and broke it in half. He offered her half, as he ate the other, she snatched it from him and thought... oooh, brother. This guy has some nerve and he's also rude, why he didn't even show any gratitude!

She had never known when she had been so galled, and sighed with relief when her flight was called.

She gathered her belongings and headed to the gate, refusing to look back at the thieving ingrate.

She boarded the plane, and sank in her seat, then she sought her book, which was almost complete. As she reached in her baggage, she gasped with surprise, there was her bag of cookies, in front of her eyes. If mine are here, she moaned in despair, the others were his, and he tried to share. Too late to apologize, she realized with grief, that she was the rude one, the ingrate, the thief.

The Town Mouse and the Country Mouse

Now you must know that a Town Mouse once upon a time went on a visit to his cousin in the country.

He was rough and ready, this cousin, but he loved his town friend and made him heartily welcome.

Beans and bacon, cheese and bread, were all he had to offer, but he offered them freely.

The Town Mouse rather turned up his long nose at this country fare, and said: 'I cannot understand, Cousin, how you can put up with such poor food as this, but of course you cannot expect anything better in the country; come you with me and I will show you how to live. When you have been in town a week you will wonder how you could ever have stood a country life.'

No sooner said than done: the two mice set off for the town and arrived at the Town Mouse's residence late at night. 'You will want some refreshment after our long journey,' said the polite Town Mouse, and took his friend into the grand dining-room. There they found the remains of a fine feast, and soon the two mice were eating up jellies and cakes and all that was nice.

Suddenly they heard growling and barking. 'What is that?' said the Country Mouse. 'It is only the dogs of the house,' answered the other. 'Only!' said the Country Mouse. 'I do not like that music at my dinner.'

Just at that moment the door flew open, in came two huge mastiffs, and the two mice had to scamper down and run off. 'Good-bye, Cousin,' said the Country Mouse, 'What! Going so soon?' said the other. 'Yes,' he replied; 'Better beans and bacon in peace than cakes and ale in fear.'

Practice Questions:

1. On the basis of the outline given, write a story.

Outline: Assistant for wicked magician---- thief with extraordinary power of making himself disappear---- police harassed by him---- cruel to assistant---- reported to police---- magician made police disappear but assistant and other boys came to their rescue and help arrest magician.

2. It was around 4 a.m. when, despite the biting cold, Vijay Singh from Mithunpur Mouza village in UP's Sambhal district had headed out to the fields..... **Complete the story in your own words.**