

A hand is shown typing on a laptop keyboard. The background is a blurred laptop screen. The text "SHORT STORY WRITING" is overlaid on the screen area.

SHORT STORY WRITING

SHORT COURSE

HOW TO WORK THROUGH THIS COURSE

Over the following pages, you will move through a logical, self-paced learning experience that can enlighten and educate you.

It is important from the outset to understand that learning about something is not the same as just reading about it. Learning implies a permanent change in what you know and can do.

Anyone can read a book and understand it; but for most people the detail of what you read is largely forgotten.

Reading something once only puts information into short-term memory. It is soon lost if you don't 'work' on it. Studying the same information takes longer, but by thinking about it and processing it you can transfer that information to long-term memory. This way, you will enhance your ability to recall and apply that information for years to come. If you take your time to work through the lessons that follow, you will learn.

Read, Reflect, Research, Revise

Throughout the following pages, you will find not only things to read about, but also things to do:

1. Throughout each lesson, there are suggestions of things to do under the headings "Learn More". These are all sorts of ideas about things you can do in order to explore the subject further.
2. At the end of each lesson, click on the link that says "Click Here to Access your Lesson Review Questions". You will need to be online and logged into the student room to access these. Your answers are evaluated in real time and you will be given a score upon completion. You can repeat these if you need to.

Undertaking these tasks will involve reflection, research and revision of the topics you read about. By repeatedly encountering each topic in different ways, your perspective on each subject will broaden, and the commitment of information to longer term memory will strengthen.

You don't need to undertake all of the suggested tasks if you don't want to; but we strongly recommend that you do some in each lesson, and that you take all of the Lesson Review Questions.

The more time you spend doing these things, the stronger your learning will be.

Completing the Course

After completing all the lessons you will be presented with a final assessment which can also be undertaken online.

Do not attempt to do this until you have worked through all the lessons, and feel like you have learnt the subject well.

Upon finishing this final assessment you will immediately see your final results, and you can save a pdf copy of those results as a "Certificate of Completion".

Welcome Audio

Click the button below to listen to the welcome audio for this course. This feature is supported by most computers and some mobile devices.



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DISCLAIMER: This institution accepts no responsibility for the attitudes or actions of our graduates. The education you receive through this course in no way guarantees your actions in the future will always be as they should be. Your actions in your profession, or in any other situation where you apply what you have learnt here, will be affected by many things other than just the learning from this course. Success or failure of a graduate depends upon not only what they learn in this course, but also, what they learn elsewhere, as well as personal qualities and attitudes.

LESSON 1 WHAT DO WE MEAN BY SHORT STORIES?

A short story is a story that tends to focus on one theme or story. Longer stories may have plots and subplots, but in a short story, there is only enough for one theme as the focus of the plot. A short story is one that can be read in one sitting. It tends to be less elaborate than longer pieces of fiction and is shorter.



A notebook or two

Before getting too far into the course, it is important to start keeping a notebook or files on your computer.

Or both.

As you go through the course, you will be asked to complete suggested tasks. These are not essential, but they can be useful to improve your writing. The tasks may give you ideas for writing short stories.

Make a note of them in your notebook.

This keeps all of your ideas and thoughts together.

Short stories defined

Once upon a time, there was a storyteller who excelled at their craft. When they told stories, everyone would stop to listen. The stories they told made people laugh, cry and think about the issues raised. Listening to the storyteller brought people together, and – after a story – the ways in which the listeners acted exemplified the power of fiction to influence people's lives. People acted more thoughtfully when they reflected on the underlying messages in the story.

Defining short stories by their length (generally under 7500 words), doesn't fully express what a short story is, or how important stories have been in developing communities and their cultures. For example, 'once upon a time' is a traditional opening to a story in Western cultures and is usually associated with fairy tales and happy endings, although both the supernatural and a happy ending are not guaranteed in any story. However, the power of the opening on readers should not be underestimated. 'Once upon a time' suggests that the story happened in the distant past, but that the themes may have current relevance to the listeners

Suggested Tasks: ▼

Throughout this course, you will be provided with suggested tasks and reading to aid your understanding. These will appear in the right hand column.

Remember: these tasks are optional. The more you complete, the more you will learn. In order to complete the course in 20 hours you will need to manage your time well. We suggest you spend about 10 minutes on each task you attempt, and no more than 20 minutes.

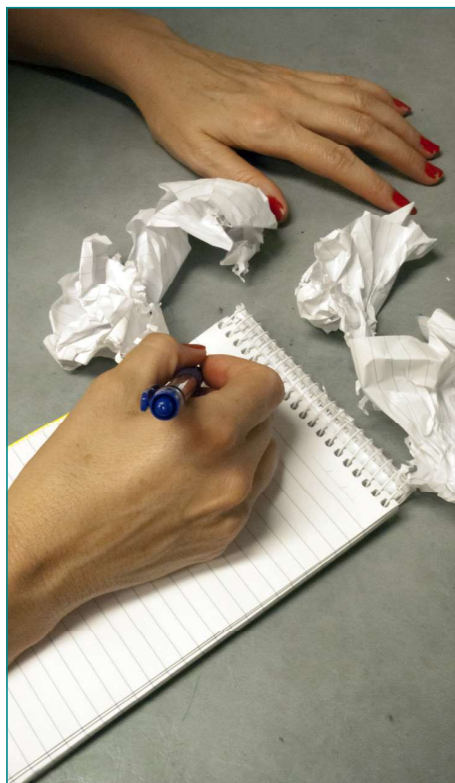
or the readers. The phrase reinforces the genre expectations, specifically that a story should entertain as well as educate. It also predisposes a listener to act in the ways they associate with their early experiences of storytelling. They get comfortable and settle in to listen. In short, stories can be a way of sugar-coating a powerful lesson – so that key ideas are passed on in ways that people can absorb without feeling the need to resist.

Stories have been used to pass on or reinforce a community's values and attitudes, to draw attention to the issues or events that different groups may experience. When we empathise with the plight of the hero or heroine, we can start to see how their struggles might be exemplified in the lives of those around us. Empathy could lead to awareness and then action – and a short story might move us to change behaviours and ease the circumstances of other community members.

The features that are common to all short stories include:

- **A limited length** – usually around 7500 words, although they can be both longer and shorter
- **A simple plot** – subplots are rare as they will complicate the story (and need more words)
- **Only a few characters** – generally no more than three
- **A quick start** – lengthy descriptions are unlikely
- **Limited settings** – one to three locations at most

- **Only one point of view** – keeping to a single point of view will help to maintain the story's rhythm and the reader's connection with the characters
- **A clear timeline** – events in the story don't have to be outlined in chronological order but keeping a logical pattern will help strengthen the story
- **Tension** – there needs to be a purpose, event or conflict that drives the story. This should be introduced early in the story and, ideally, should grow as the story develops. When tension is resolved, the story comes to an end.



LEARN MORE >>>

Suggested Tasks

Reflect on the type of stories that you enjoy reading or writing. What features, plots or characters appeal to you most?

Make notes in your notebook.



THE HISTORY OF SHORT STORIES

Before cultures and communities learned to read or write, stories were passed on as part of oral language development and as a main source of entertainment. For example, Norse and Icelandic communities developed sagas – long series of stories that might follow a family over several generations or a group of friends through a series of experiences. A storyteller might tell the saga over several days (or weeks) to entertain a community.

As reading and writing became more common, and more people had access to printed books, the role of a storyteller became less prominent. People began to read stories to themselves and their

friends or family. Interest in stories declined, particularly during the 17th and 18th centuries, when more people became interested in drama (and stories were performed in a theatre) and novels. Novels could be read aloud to a group, with people taking turns to read or simply listening while engaged in other tasks.

During the 18th and 19th centuries, reading aloud became an important social activity – and novels became longer as a result. It was in this time that magazines started including serialised stories – where a story might be broken up into its chapters (or sections of a chapter) and published over several issues. Serialisation made the stories more accessible to everyone because books were more expensive than magazines or newspapers. At the time, authors were paid by their word count and the number of episodes a

publisher would commission. As a result, authors were actively encouraged to spin out a story, introduce multiple complexities and keep their readers hooked. This introduced a challenge to authors that is still relevant today – how to make each episode appear to be complete (satisfying the reader's need for a clear ending) but still maintain links with the larger, longer story. Writers who want to introduce stories as part of a blog and build a following to their work (prior to any publication) would need to address the same issues.

Some of the famous 19th century authors whose novels were serialised in magazines include:

- Alexander Dumas – *The Count of Monte Cristo* and *The Three Musketeers*
- Charles Dickens – *Pickwick Papers*, *Oliver Twist* and *Tale of Two Cities*. *A Christmas Carol* wasn't serialised and is much shorter than his other novels as a result.
- Fyodor Dostoevsky – *Crime and Punishment*
- Victor Hugo – *Les Misérables*
- Arthur Conan Doyle – *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*

During the 19th century, stories started to be divided in terms of their structure.

- **Tale** – A tale would include characters, plots, motifs and some symbols that may be relevant to a culture but might not always be understood by outsiders. Tales were likely to pass on a culture's values or attitudes.

- **Sketch** – A sketch was usually descriptive and more likely to be an explanation of something from another culture or an unusual point of view.

DIFFERENT TYPES OF SHORT STORIES

Although people often describe short stories in terms of their genre, they can also be described with reference to their word count. Each type of short fiction has its own challenges. Writing microfiction like dribble, drabble or post card fiction is just as difficult as writing a full novel. Shorter versions of stories often require clever editing and the author's willingness to redraft or start over in order to meet the correct word count or tighten up the story.

