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Story Creation And Structure Cheat Sheet For The Short Story



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This cheat sheet is best for stories 2500 to 7500 words and can be used in bigger stories. There is a *bonus extended cheat sheet* at the bottom of this page. For stories 1000 words or less, you can refer to this [Medium article, What Makes A Good Flash Fiction Piece?](#)

Starting Points:

Always keep in mind your word limit while writing a short story. You should be selective in word choice, and always less is best. Use one word instead of two words where you can. Remove excess [filler words](#), [thought verbs](#), and [to be verbs](#). Limit your [adjectives](#). Tighter storytelling makes the short story better.

Optional Starting Character Name: (You can always come back to the name later once you have a feel for your character.) [Name Generator](#).

Character Name: _____

Describe Character in two to three words, no more: (eg. hopeless romantic, avenging mailman, nervous bank teller, guilty father, cranky bus driver. It is a concept thought that reveals a lot about who your character is in fewer words.) Physical [Description words](#). Key personality [traits](#).

Character External Desire: _____

Character Internal Desire: _____

Optional Resistance: What stands between the character's deep need or desire if you know. It can be figured out once you start writing.: (e.g. something, or someone, or an event, or circumstances that struggles against or prevents the characters from achieving deep desire or need, or a temporary need or desire, that moves the story forward.) Greatest Desire-Deepest Motivation or [Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs](#).

You can combine setting and situation: (e.g. shopping for toilet paper during the Corvid19 pandemic at Walmart or whatever.)

Story setting: _____

Character situation: _____

Overall Word Count Structure: Not exact because stories range from 500 to 7500 words in the short category. You will use a small number in the beginning and an even smaller number of words in the resolution. The bulk of your words go in the middle.

- The beginning of your story will take 150 to 400 words of your short story, give or take, based on your word limit requirements.
- The resolution will take 50 to 250 of your words again based on word limits.
- All the rest of your words go into the rise and fall of the story.

A Note About Starting:

Start a short story as close to the end and in the middle of action as possible.

Story Structure

What is your story goal? (Concrete goal: The girl to win the science prize, Thematic Goal: to learn no one person can control everything you do what you can and move on, Quest Goal: the mage completes the challenges and retrieves the golden elixir, Character Growth Goal: Seth believes it his fault his mother left but eventually comes to realized that the reason she left was not about him but about who she was as person.)(A short story only has enough room to feature a single or very simple goal because of word limits so keep that in mind.)

Story Goal: _____

Summarize your story if you can in one sentence in fifteen words or less for a short story. Include the protagonist, the desire, situation-setting, and resistance if you can. (Think of it as a [logline](#), a novel would require around 30 words but for a short story, cut it in half.) This will be your compass to help you focus on the story you are telling. Write to that end.

The Short Story Sentence fifteen words or less: (example for a short story sentence: A grieving pilot in winter conducts a search and rescue for five missing girls. 14 Words.

---There are a lot of details not included but some are implied like the antagonist, which could be a person, a winter storm, or the area e.g. forest or mountain, the girls refusing to fly, or the pilot as his own worst enemy. The sentence does include the protagonist with the descriptive word, setting, and hint at story type which gives hints at problems the character might face depending on the direction you want the story to go. e.g. mystery, thriller, or just rescue story with more facts known starting out.)

The 15-word sentence:

Start with Setup or Opening:

The setup or opening consists of a brief character introduction in their ordinary world in a setting with a problem or hint of a coming problem. Try to do this in one or two paragraphs in a short story, the sooner the better. If you can do it in the first two lines that is a plus.

You can use a **hook**: The difference between a [story hook and a gimmick](#). [10 Ways to Hook the Reader](#) [Narrative Hook Example - Mountain Brook Schools](#) [Top 100 Short Story Ideas - The Write Practice](#)

The Opening Hook is simply something that grabs the reader's attention and keeps them reading or turning pages. The hook is very similar to the inciting incident you often hear referenced when plotting a full-length novel. ([5 Plot Points](#) for Novels.)

Your Hook and Opening paragraph:

At the start of your story after the opening, the action rises pushing the story forward. In a short story, you only have room for two to three conflicts; resistance, between your character and the story goal. (Obstacles.)

(Conflict should always originate or be resolved from an action or choice your character takes. It does not just happen for no reason. It is there to move the story forward to the end goal. The strongest stories are the ones when the character solves his problem through his own wit, knowledge, or strength. If your conflict does not move the story forward, or reveal something about the story or character development, remove it. It is unnecessary and delutes the power of your story.)

Conflict or Resistance 1: _____

Conflict or Resistance 2: _____

Conflict or Resistance 3: _____

This beginning conflict rises to a high point which is similar to your climax. A short story will only have two to five conflicts for the entire story, probably less, depending on story word limits. What is the high point those conflicts lead up to? The climax---the highest emotional point or moment moving your character to the all in win or lose turning point?

High point: _____

The breakthrough, a high moment for your character is immediately followed by falling action to a dark moment, all is lost until that last push or pivotal moment brings the win or ultimate change for the character. The falling action reflects the opposite TONE of the rising action. This is the journey to the end of the story.

Conflict or Resistance 1: _____

Conflict or Resistance 2: _____

A dark or lost moment with last push.(An internal and external revelation to the character when he knows what this is and sparks the last determining action that wins or loses the deepest need or desire. One last push do or die.)

Dark Moment: _____

Resolution: _____

Wrap up: The big change or win followed by the new world your character lives in because of this change.

****Some stories are so short you won't be able to really show this, however, because this is a short story it can end on irony, a twist, a lesson learned. It needs to show the character's growth or lack of growth resulting from your character's choices or actions. *It should also reveal the story goal of the summary sentence you created as your compass.***

*This cheat sheet was originally created as a tool for this article on the Insecure Writer's Support Group Blog.

[An Expansive Mini Guide For Structuring Your Short Story](#)

Bonus:

Character creation for novels for more in-depth world-building while creating 3-dimensional characters: [Bonus Extended Character Profile Cheat Sheet Using Astrology.](#)

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