

Start Here Flash Fiction

Hi, welcome. My name is Kayleigh and I'm so happy that you decided to join me today to talk about one of my favorite genres of writing flash fiction. Before we get started, I just wanted to remind you of the different documents you can find on this page, lower down under the video.

First, you'll find a written transcript of the audio from this class.

Second, you'll find a worksheet that you can use to follow along and write in your own thoughts and comments as we go. It is a Google Doc, so you will be able to add in your responses.

And third, I have for you a list of the 25 top literary magazines to publish your flash fiction in. If you would like to see it anthologized in some of those year-end anthologies that we'll be talking about later on.

Okay. So with that out of the way, let's go ahead and jump into talking about flash fiction.

So let's get started by defining our terms exactly what is flash fiction? Flash fiction is very simply fiction that is under a thousand words. Now, you might think that this answers all of it, but in fact, once we start looking at flash fiction, we find that then within those thousand words, there turn out to be a lot of different sub genre forms that develop. So let's look at some of those sub genres now. So again, a thousand words is really the limit for a flash fiction. But then under that, we also have different lengths of story that create these other sub genres. So if you have a particular length that you really like writing in, you'll find that there are different lit mags that cater to these different sub genres.

So we have sudden fiction, which is 750 words or under.

At 400 words we have nano fiction or micro fiction.

A very popular form is the hundred word story, which can also be called a drabble.

The 50 word story, often called either a dribble or a mini saga.

Under 25 words, we have hint fiction, these are very short stories.

And then the shortest popular length to write in is the six word story.

We're gonna dive more into that in a moment. And in addition to these sub genres by length, we also have some very popular flash fiction forms that you often will see. So a few popular ones are a story as a letter, a story as a list, a borrowed form, or hermit crap. This would be a fictional story that appears in a rigid form, like a crossword puzzle, an immigration form, a restaurant menu. The sky's the limit on this. A litany story, which means a repetition of a few words or phrases, A one sentence story, which would be a story that's told completely in one sentence. And there are many, many more forms. I would say new forms are being invented every day in flash fiction.

Now, you might be wondering where you can publish flash fiction. First of all. Many publications that take longer stories are also happy to accept flash fiction because editors like to have a variety of different lengths so that as the reader's going through, they get like a little breather in between.

And it also gives editors opportunity to accept more stories because they can fit in a few of these short ones in between their longer ones. So if you have a favorite publication for short stories, you can always check and see if they do accept flash fiction. In addition to that, there are also many more lit mags, many of them online, that are devoted entirely to flash fiction.

So if you'd like to see samples of the best, you can look at that 25 best lit mags sheet that I have for you on the class page. Or you can look at the Wigleaf top 50. Or the latest, best small fictions, anthology, or best micro fiction collection. All three of these come out new every year with an entirely new batch of stories drawn from different lit mags.

It's really fun to look at them year over year and see what are the new lit mags that are being born that come in with really interesting points of view. One of my favorite things about flash fiction is that because they're so short, you will often find that there will be an editor of a magazine that is just one person, and so they can really put their perspective on the mag in terms of what stories they choose.

A great example of this is milk candy review. That's one of my favorites. That's just run by one person. So I think that's one of the really cool things about flash fiction is that it is so nimble both for the writer and also for editors and for readers.

You can also check out contests and often contests will include a prompt to get you started so that can be a really great way to start generating some new work and also potentially win a little bit of money.

So on this page I have a list of 24 of the flash lit mag that frequently appear on those awards list. And again, you will find all of these names on that downloadable sheet that I have for you on the class page.

One question that usually comes up at this point is, what is the difference between a flash fiction and a short story or a flash fiction and a poem? So let's look at what some of those distinctions are and also where some of the similarities lie. First, let's look at flash fiction and poetry. With poetry, we often are going to see a focus on evoking emotion imagery or meditation versus in flash fiction, we're really looking more at story.

We're gonna be looking at character conflict change. Usually time will pass. Whereas in poetry, we're really going to be focusing on poetic language, rhyme, meter, and sound. Now, with poetry, we can have some that are very, very short. Um, for example, a three line haiku is only three lines, but poems can also go up to book length that, you know, epics versus flash fiction, where we do have that limit of a thousand words.

So it has to stay short. Also in flash fiction, it's going to be structured in sentences and paragraphs versus poetry where it might be structured in sentences, but very often we're going to see the sentences broken up into lines and stanzas instead. That being said, there really is a lot of overlap.

Both of these forms, both flash fiction and poetry. The writers are really interested in pushing the boundaries and seeing what the limits are of their form. So you will often get pieces that could qualify as either flash fiction or a poem. And in those cases, it's up to the author to decide how they want to present it, where they wanna submit it, what they wanna submit it as, and it's up to the editors to decide what they consider it. So you possibly could have a piece that you could send out both as a poem or as a flash fiction and just see where it gets published first. That is really interesting thing that happens with flash fiction.

Now let's look at flash fiction versus a short story. With flash fiction we're going to be focusing on just one arc or idea. Versus a short story where it's going to be long enough to contain multiple arcs or ideas with a short story. We're not even starting until something like 1500 words, and it can go much, much longer, maybe even up to 10,000 words in some publications.

Versus a flash fiction, we really have to stop at that 1000 mark or a few publications might allow you to go up to 1200 words in a short story, because we have so many more words, we have time to have a fuller development of characters, of setting a backstory. There's usually a preference for round, fully developed characters, and you may even have multiple sections that move at different paces with different tones, A lot of different movement. Flash fiction. On the other hand, it's really just giving you a quick hit of story.

So one of the main distinctions of a flash fiction story is that you will notice that there is space there for the reader to fill in the gaps. So often in a flash fiction, we might be relying on signifiers of characters and letting readers assume the rest about the character.

So two readers might take something very different from the story, which is a really interesting thing that can happen with the flash fiction. Now let's look at the six word story, which is the first form that we're going to focus on today. As I said before, the six word story is really the shortest length of flash fiction that is really popularly, um, embraced in contests and publications.

The most famous six word story that is often credited to Ernest Hemingway, although in fact it probably existed even before him, is for sale baby shoes never worn. As you hear this story, think about what is actually on the page versus what you take away from it. Think about the assumptions that you are making.

Do you imagine a man or a woman placing the ad for the baby shoes? And what relationship do you assume this person has with the baby? What kind of shoes do you see? Are you imagining this ad being in a newspaper or maybe a website like Facebook Marketplace? And what do you imagine happened to the baby?

This brings us to one of my favorite metaphors for flash fiction, which is, I think you can think of it as being kind of like a zoetrope. So a zoetrope is one of the earliest forms of movie in which what we have is a series of static images that the brain is then able to turn into an entire moving story.

And the reason that the brain is able to do this is because there are little gaps between the pieces of information. So if you've ever seen that old standard Zoetrope with the horse that's running, you'll notice that if you look. From the top down, you sort of just see a mess. But if you look through the slats, then it's the spaces when you're seeing the outside of the Zoetrope spinning that allow your brain to fill in those gaps.

That's what allows you to create a story. Well, it's the same thing with flash fiction. With flash fiction. You wanna give your reader a little bit of information, but you also wanna be sure to leave those gaps that allow the reader to fill in what they think the story is about. For example, we can talk about for sale baby shoes.

Think of how easily, just a little bit too much information destroys the sadness and the backstory of the story. So here are some examples for sale. Baby shoes never worn. Marked size two months, but we're too small for our newborn. Here's another for sale. Baby shoes, never worn. Stock surplus for sale.

Ugly baby shoes, never worn. Notice how just one word takes away. The entire effect of the story. There's no more story because we don't have to do any work as readers or as listeners. We lose the character, we lose the plot, we lose everything that's interesting about the story. Let's look at some more six word story examples.

So these all come off of Reddit. So as you read these stories, think about the structure. Think about what information is actually on the page, and think about what information you as the reader or the listener are filling in. So the first example, I'm beside myself, cloning Machine Works. Second example, T-H-C-L-S-D-D-U-I-C-P-R-D-O-A-R-I-P.

Next. Painfully he changed is to was.in the Sky dead pixel. So I think that these are all great examples because of how different they are from each other. You would think that with a six word story, you would run out of stories, or at least you would run out of structures. But in fact, people are always creating new variations.

So you can always go online and find people who are doing these on different social media or on Reddit, and there's a link in your worksheet if you would like to check out more of these. Next, let's look at the six word memoir books. These are put together by Smith Magazine and they have a few anthologies and they're still accepting stories for more.

So they have six words about work, six word memoirs of famous and obscure writers, six word memoirs of love and heartbreak. And I encourage you to read the ones that are on this page and also to go and check out more of them. Now, one thing that you probably have noticed is at this point we're talking about six word memoirs, not just six word stories.

So that raises the question of what is the distinction between flash fiction or flash nonfiction? And the answer to that is it really depends. You might have stories that could go either way, or you might have stories that are very particular to a person.

If you look at the ones on this page, couldn't cope, so I wrote songs. Aimee Mann, who is a singer, some of our understanding of how that story works comes from our knowledge of the person. So I think that this one has to be very squarely in the nonfiction side. Found true love married. Someone else, I think is an example where it really could have been published as either flash nonfiction or flash fiction. Um, because it is such a universal story and not something that we need to know Dave Egger's background in order to understand.

Here's another example of a non-fiction six word story project. This is the race card project. This was created by Michelle Norris from NPR. This project went on to create her book, our Hidden Conversations, but the project is still open and you can still submit your own six word stories for it.

As you look through these, you'll notice how durable this form really is for people of all different backgrounds to convey just a little tiny snippet of their own experience. And because it's so short, I think it conveys not just their own experience, but it also really invites the reader to think about how their own experience might be similar or different from that person's.

So I think this is an example of where that space, that flash fiction leaves can really be an opening for the reader to connect with the writer. Really showing kind of the power of flash fiction. Now for our first writing assignment, I wanna give you time to write your own six word story or memoir. The first rule is, it must be exactly six words, not four words.

Not seven words, exactly. Six and a few ideas that you can use to create this. You could write a six word memoir about your love, life, job, or family. Just as we saw in the anthologies from Smith Magazine, you could write a six word memoir about your race for the race card project, or you might want to write a six word fiction retelling of a well-known myth or fairytale.

So we'll give you two minutes now to work on writing your own six word story.

I hope you enjoyed writing that six word story. Now, let's look at a slightly longer form, the Dribble or 50 word story. Dribbles are stories that are exactly 50 words, not including the title, and these stories can be any genre. And on any

topic, in addition to being accepted at most flash fiction publications, they're also a very popular form for writing competitions.

Some of my favorite magazines and contests to look at for 50 word stories are the Dribble Drabble Review. They. Publish only dribbles of 50 words or dribbles of a hundred words, 50 word stories.com, and they publish one or two new stories every single day. So they really accept quite a lot good chances of having your story get accepted for publication, which is nice.

Then we have a couple of contests, 53 Word story contest, which is as the name might suggest actually for 53 word stories, and that's because it's done by Press 53. So they have, you know, a whole 53 thing. The Scottish Book Trust, which we're going to look at in just a moment, and Blink Ink, which is one of the rare print publications of flash fiction.

So let's dive in and look at some specifics. So here we have a couple of examples from 50 word stories.com. As I mentioned before, they do publish quite often every single day, so they tend to have a wide range of different types of stories that they accept. Go ahead and read these two and let's see what you think.

Next, let's look at Press 53. Press 53 is a competition. It opens for the first two weeks of every month, and they give you a one word prompt to write a story on. And often they're looking for a slightly slanted interpretation of their prompt. So here are a couple examples. The first one is with the prompt run and the second one with the prompt leg.

Go ahead and read these two.

Okay, and next we have the Scottish Book Trust. So this is another monthly competition. If you are located in the uk, then there is a prize if they choose to accept your story. If you're in the United States, unfortunately, they no longer ship their prizes, but you would still get bragging rights and a publication.

The Scottish Book Trust accepts submissions for the first two weeks of every month and just like 53 press, they. Do give you a one word theme for you to write to a few things that are different about the Scottish Book Trust. Um, number one, they do publish both English and Gaelic stories. So if you are a Gaelic speaker, this is a place to submit those Gaelic stories.

The next thing is that. Even though they call it I think, a 50 word contest, they actually look for about 50 words or up to 50 words, and you'll notice that their

stories do not have titles. If you did wanna have a title, the title for this publication only would count against your word count. And then finally, you'll notice that in their stories, they tend to be a little bit more poetic often than American flash fiction is.

So again, you'll see pieces that might be more meditative or might be more image-based, rather than having a real clear plot. So go ahead and read these two examples.

Okay, great. So the assignment that I have for you is to write your own dribble or 50 word story. So a few ideas you could write on the topic of dog days, whatever that means to you. The color yellow. Heat, or you can go to 53 Word story contest or the Scottish Book Trust contest and see what their current theme is, and go ahead and write a story according to one of those.

Now, I'm not actually going to include the time here for you to write the story because I don't want you to have to keep watching this video when I know it's probably gonna take you more than two minutes to write a 50 word story, but I do encourage you to actually write the story right now. When people put things off, they often don't get around to doing it.

You have set aside this time to do your writing, so I encourage you to do that writing right now.

All right. Thank you again for joining me today to talk about flash fiction. Congratulations. You're now a flash fiction writer. Whether you did both assignments or just the six word story, it counts!