

Writing Resources

Creating your own adventures - writing short stories

Today I wanted to talk about writing a short story. If you are just starting your writing career, short stories are a great way to improve quickly. They contain the same elements of a novel - characters, plot with a beginning, middle and end, and great setting. What makes short stories unique is that they have to be very concise. You can't explore multiple themes or have complex character arcs in a short story. Most short stories explore one main topic and don't usually contain multiple interwoven plots.

For some, this can make short stories much more difficult than a full novel. Having to keep their thoughts as refined as possible is not an easy task. Most of the time, authors write a short story and cut out more than they wish.

That can be ok, because you can write a novella or a novellette - basically just longer short stories. The steps outlined here also work for novellas and novellettes.

Here are some steps to take that will help you write a short story. This method focuses on writing a genre story like fantasy or science fiction. This approach may not work as well for literary fiction or other types of short stories.

Step 1 - Where are we adventuring? - Get the Setting

For a short story this is very important. It affects the type of story you are telling. You need to have one point you are trying to make, and different settings lend themselves better to what you are trying to say.

If your story is to be a prequel to a novel or part of a longer story, your goal with might be to tell backstory about a particular character. Or it might be to introduce a new direction for your novel. In Clarise and the Night Show, the story told how Samuel first met Clarise. It's not teaching a lesson to the reader; it's meant to tie into the novel and give more details about the characters.

The great thing about stories is that the same story can be set in many different locales. I have a short story for Samuel the Town Magician, and it's set in his village market and the show grounds of another village. I could do the same story (with different characters) and set it in bases on the moon. I could do the same story but make the characters fishes and set it in the ocean.

The setting for the story will help the reader determine if they want to read the story. Even though you can write the same story in different settings, some people will like it better in a particular setting. That's fine, especially if you are making this part of a series or part of your novel, like I did with Clarise and the Night Show.

You don't need a short story to have multiple locations, because you won't have the space or number of words to make elaborate descriptions or jump to too many locations. Keep it simple - a good short story can take place in just one room.

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Once you've thought of your setting, move on to your characters.

Step 2 - Who is adventuring? - Get the Characters

Like the setting, you don't want too many characters in your story. Keep it to just a couple. If you have too many characters, it makes your story more complex and can bog it down. You want to keep things quicker than a novel, so use only the characters you need.

In my story *Clarise and the Night Show* I focus on two characters - Samual and Clarise. There are several other characters just to add to the story, they aren't focused on and they have very small parts. There wasn't any talk of Rory or Toby or even Cat, I kept it to a minimum. In the story *Faking the Magic* I focused on Samual and Rory with Samual's father also being important. Clarise was barely mentioned in it because it would have complicated the story and it didn't need to be complicated.

If you have ideas for several stories, you can either put them together as a full novel or even write each individual story and it could be a collection of short stories. There are some great characters that started in short stories.

Think about your characters for the story. If you have more characters than might be best, can you take some out or even make several of them into one character? Now, obviously this won't work if you're writing with known or established characters, but if this is an original story, you might be able to combine some characters into a single character, especially if they are a secondary character. Movies do this often when they are based on books.

Once done with characters, it's time to start writing.

Step 3 - What is the adventure? - Write out the basic story

Time to write the story. Best advice for this is to write out the basic story in one sitting. Don't worry about all the description and all the details. Get the very basic story out and done. Since it's a short story, the best thing to do is just get it done.

Make sure you start as close to the conflict or action as you can. You don't have time in a short story for a lot of worldbuilding. You need to focus on the characters, their conflict and the resolution. This is why I like to use short stories in between novels of a series - The world building can mostly be done in the novel and the separate stories can just enhance and add to the world.

Everything in a short story should be used and reused. If you have a character talk to your main characters, that character should come back or what was discussed should come back. If not, then it's a waste to include it in the story. If your character trips over a little girl with a red wagon, later in the story they might grab that red wagon to help chase someone rather than finding a bike lying around.

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Keep things brief, especially in your first draft. It's easier to see all the parts - characters, setting, items, etc. when you keep it slim. Double check that you don't have anything you don't really need. If you do, see if you can condense or combine things to get the same point across.

Once you have the basic story and everything is falling into place, then you can go back to add to it. Put in your descriptions, add your smells and sounds, add all your actions.

Step 4 - Go on the adventure and fix it - Read, edit, revise

By now you've made at least two passes in your writing. Now you want to run right out and Put it away and let it sit. Too often writers take what they have at this point and give it to everyone to read. Put on the brakes and resist that urge. But why? It's wonderful, right?

Like bread, leave it alone and it will rise to something better. When you step away from a story you gain perspective on it. When you go back to read and edit, you'll find that you see things you didn't see before and things sound different than you thought they did.

How long should you wait? At least a couple days, but a couple weeks or longer isn't unusual. You may think you could never do that, but the benefits can be nothing short of amazing.

Step 5 - Take others on the adventure - Get feedback

Once you've reread and edited, now you can get others to read it and get feedback. Find some people that will give you great constructive criticism. You don't want someone to read it and just say "It was great, good job." It's nice and may make you feel good, but it doesn't help you get better.

Ask questions like "Did you like the main character?" "Was the problem they had to overcome believable?" "Was it too long or too short?" Get specific - "Did it feel like the right spot to find the key?" or whatever. The more you can get others to tell you about what they like and don't like, the more you can improve your writing.

BUT BEWARE! If you ask 100 people for feedback, you will get 100 different answers to everything. This can hurt in the long run. Evaluate the feedback and take what works. Sometimes people won't really understand the story and they'll offer feedback that is completely contradictory to what you are trying to accomplish. The first couple times you may ask a ton of people to give feedback, but you should be able to figure out which people give you the best feedback and use them mostly in the future.

Once you've gathered feedback, go make the changes that make sense and the ones you want to make. There are a lot of suggestions you may not agree with and it's ok to not make those changes. Don't make changes immediately after every bit of feedback

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or you'll probably end up making changes to some parts more than once. Gather all of it and then go in to make the changes all at once. Take the suggestions that work the best for you and your story.

Be careful to not make changes and then get people to read and then you make changes and get people to read and then you make changes There can be a point where you've made the story the best it can at this point in time and you should release it and move on to the next one. There isn't a hard rule for that, but other people have been known to continuously edit and modify

I hope these suggestions help you to get your kids writing. I write because I want kids to have plenty of interesting stories to read. I also try to work with them to become writers – creators of stories. If you'd like to check out more of my resources to help kids write – visit my website: <https://www.saschneider.com>.