## TIPS FOR WRITING SHORT STORIES

Use these tips when planning stories, checking your drafts or evaluating your stories with a partner.

### Plot

A very simple plot allows the reader to imagine more than is actually stated in the torys.

A very complex plot can weaken the effect of the story.

A short story needs only a minimum number of scenes.

An Effective plot can be built around a single incident.

Every element of the story should have some part in the outcome.

A story needs to be dramatic: something should be hanging in the balance.

A short story can effectively span minutes instead of days or weeks.

A short story is best-written in scenes that show the characters in action.

### Characters

Limit the story to two or three characters.

Characters should be shown speaking and acting, not explained in statements about them.

Avoid long passages of physical description or biographical information.

Characters should be changed in some way as a result of events in the story.

### Background and setting

Use a few sentences to set the scene and then refer to it occasionally during the story.

Show characters responding to their setting, acting within it.

### Structure and style

Open with a sentence that interests and involves the reader.

In first paragraphs, introduce the characters, indicate the setting and give hints about what might happen.

Build up suspense as you move the story quickly forward to the climax.

Avoid bringing in new characters inn the later parts of the story.

End the story as quickly as possible after the climax.

Tell the story simply and directly.

### Economy of words

Extra words weaken and slow down a story.

Cutting words speeds up the pace.

Check that there is a reason for including every sentence.

Use single strong nouns and verbs rather than strings of weka ones.

Try packing the same amount of information into shorter dialogue.

### Title

The title should attract the reader and may be part of the theme.

### Evaluating your stories

Working in small groups, take turns to read your stories aloud.

The listeners could refer to the list of tips in this section and nnote points that apply to each story.

## LANGUAGE AND STYLE

### Opening paragraphs

The opening paragraphs of a story can serve many purposes.

They can:

* give a strong first impression of the story
* establish your style and the type of story
* set the tone for the story
* capture the attention of the reader and arouse expectation
* set up questions in the reader’s mind
* imply something dramatic has happened and there will be more to come
* give some indication of the who, what, where, when and why of the story

the following chart shows some types of openings, each of which creates an expectation that a particular type of story will follow. Read the explanations and examples then write examples of your own.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Type of opening |  | Example |  | Your example |
| **Character opening**  Information is given about the main character.  In this case we are also told something of his background. |  | James had never had any luck with sport. He called it ‘luck’ but what he had lacked from the day he first learned to walk were coordination and caution. He had three broken bones before his second birthday. |  |  |
| **Action opening**  The reader is taken straight into the action of the story. |  | The shock did not register immediately. That object the children were tossing around in the yard was a hand grenade. |  |  |
|  |  | ‘Just do it Angela. Get that filthy creature out of my sitting room now!’ |  |  |
| **Dialogue opening**  A dialogue opening can give information about the situation and character of the speaker. |  | Today something happened that really shocked me and now I can’t stop worrying about it. |  |  |
| **Emotion opening**  Here the speaker’s feelings are described before the reasons for them are given. |  |  |  |  |
| The man in the railway office was really helpful. I had lost my ticket and didn’t know what to do. I had no money left ..... |
| **Situation opening**  The situation in which the character finds him or herself is given first |  |  |  |  |

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## YOUR TURN TO WRITE

### Dramatic openings

Try some of these ways of opening a story and, if you wish, try the suggestions for continuing the story. Be inventive about where and when you set the stories and hint at this in your openings. Try outer space, the years 10BC or 1035AD, New York, a zoo, on top of the tallest building, underground, in the desert, in a crowded cafė. Talk with a group about the possibilities offered by each opening before you write.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  |  |  |
|  |  | Two characters are seated in a room in which the whole story is set. One accuses the other of something. The story ends with a resolution of the conflict that began in the opening The story opens with a loud noise and ends with peace and quiet. The time that passes in the story is only twenty minutes. |
|  |  | In the car park of the shopping centre a stranger is blaming someone for some event. The story concludes with both the characters in a bus going to ... |
|  |  | A person is alone and miserable, blaming him – or herself for what happened yesterday. The story includes one paragraph of flashback to yesterday’s event, then returns to the opening scene where something happens to make the character feel happier. |
|  |  | Conflict erupts between two characters very different from each other who are brought together through a family function. The story starts with unpleasant words between them and ends later the same day when they leave the function, together or separately. |
|  |  | In some unpleasant place there is one person who mistrusts another for no real reason. The mistrust turns to fear and the story ends with a dramatic event. |
|  |  | Two characters who do not know each other are thrown together literally when the lift breaks down with a jolt. The story ends when they are rescued some time later. |

### Planning Narrative:

|  |
| --- |
| Orientation: |
| **Who** is the main character? |
| **Where** will the story take place? |
| **When** will the story take place? |
| **What** situation? |
| **Why**? |
| **Complication**: |
| The problem that must be resolved through a series of events. |
| **Resolution:**  The problem occurring in the complication is resolved. How is the problem going to be resolved? |
| **Coda**:  The message of the story. |