

ELEMENTS OF SHORT STORIES

What is a Short Story?

- A short story is a relatively brief fictional **narrative** or story written without using any rhymes or rhythms. The short story has a beginning, a middle, and an end and is composed of the following elements:
 - Theme
 - Plot
 - Character
 - Setting
 - Point of View

I. THEME—The central idea that the author wishes to set forth in his or her writing.

To find the theme, ask yourself these questions:

1. What is the story about?
2. What is the central idea?
3. What observation did the author make about human nature?

II. PLOT—A series of related events that the author uses to develop the theme of a story. *To identify the plot, ask yourself these questions:*

1. What happens in the beginning of the story?
2. What happens in the middle of the story?
3. What happens at the end of the story?

III. CHARACTER—The action of the story is centered around the characters in the story. One central character usually dominates the story.

IV. SETTING—The stage upon which the action of the story takes place. The setting is to a story just as the background is to a painting.

V. POINT OF VIEW—The author's choice of the teller of the story. The point of view is important to the total structure and meaning of the short story. *To find the point of view, ask yourself who is telling the story.*

- A. Literary techniques used to develop theme:
1. **foreshadowing**—giving hints to the reader about what is to happen next
 2. **flashback**—the author interrupts the story to go back in time to add scenes or information. This helps the reader understand what is happening in the present.
 3. **Irony**—the opposite of what is expected to happen. Either a statement may have an opposite meaning, or an outcome of events may be the opposite of those hoped for or expected.
 4. **Tone**—the “feeling” conveyed by the way the writer writes about his subject.
 5. **Realism**—the author attempts to portray life in his/her novel realistically. He/she must use details to reflect the reality that we see around us.
 6. **Romanticism**—the author uses his imagination to present the world to us. At times his/her view may be extremely idealistic; at other times it may reflect extreme horror.

B. **THEORIES OF LITERATURE:**

1. **Imitative theory**—the author’s job is to present an imitation of the world so we, the reader, can better understand the forces of the world around us that shape our thought and feeling. Art imitates life.
2. **Expressive theory**—the author examines his internal view of the world. “Truth” has nothing to do with the work. The author shapes the world as he internally perceives it.
3. **Affective theory**—this theory is similar to the expressive theory except the focus here is on the feelings of the reader. The author attempts to sway the reader’s perceptions of the world.

QUESTION TO PONDER: Does art imitate life or does art generate or push us, the reader, into new patterns of thought and behavior?

I.

A. Stages of development:

1. **EXPOSITION**—the beginning stage
 - a. the reader is given the setting of the story
 - b. the reader is introduced to the principal characters and their relationships to each other
 - c. the reader is given information about the events that existed before the story actually begins.
 - d. The reader is also given some information about the conflict in the story. **CONFLICT** is the struggle between opposing forces.

Types of conflict:

1. **Man vs. man**—external struggle between two or more individuals
2. **Man vs. himself**—internal struggle concerning emotion and decision
3. **Man vs. nature**—external struggle between man and an element of nature.

- e. the exposition sets the groundwork for the story.
- 2. **COMPLICATION**—mini-conflicts that contribute to the rise in action.
 - a. Each mini-conflict must be more intense than the other until the most dramatic conflict occurs
 - b. This dramatic conflict (or **climax**) will hint to either the success or failure of the principal character’s ability to win his struggle or to simply solve his problem.
- 3. **CLIMAX**—the turning point in the story, or the emotional high point
 - a. this turning point is for the character, not the reader
- 4. **FALLING ACTION**—the events that lead to the resolution
- 5. **RESOLUTION** (denouement)—the final stage
 - a. The outcome of the conflict or the resolution of the problem.
 - b. The outcome of the resolution will express the general theme of the story.
- A. All characters should be believable—have recognizable human traits and characteristics
- B. **FOUR TYPES OF CHARACTERIZATION**—techniques the writer uses to develop character
 - 1. What the author states
 - a. Physical description
 - 2. What the characters say or do
 - 3. How the characters dress
 - a. The characters’ speech and dress play significant factors in the development of their characterizations
 - 4. What other characters say
 - 5. Other
- C. **Types of characters:**
 - 1. **protagonist**—the central character—he or she can be good or bad
 - 2. **antagonist**—the “opposing” character(s)
 - 3. **flat**—characters who do NOT change in a story.
 - 4. **round**—characters who change
- D. **Analysis of characters:**
 - 1. **motivation**—what motivates the character to cause his/her actions?
 - 2. **Behavior**—what are the actions of the character and why is he/she behaving this way?
 - 3. **Consequences**—what are the results of his/her actions?
 - 4. **Responsibility**—what moral, legal, or mental accountability does the character have?
 - 5. **Expectations**—what expectations do you have for this character?
- A. The setting determines the place, time, tone, and atmosphere
 - 1. **tone**—the author’s attitude toward his/her material
 - 2. **atmosphere**—the general feeling or mood set by the author
- B. The author must choose items of description that are important not only because of their visual representation, but also in terms of their importance to the over effectiveness of the story.
- C. **Techniques for establishing setting:**

1. **Sensory details**—words that appeal to the senses (sight/hearing/taste/touch/smell)
2. Figurative language:
 - a. **simile**—comparison using like or as
 - b. **metaphor**—comparison using is or form of is
 - i. implied metaphor
 - ii. extended metaphor
3. **personification**

II.

A. Types of Point of View:

1. **first person**—the narrator is the main character who tells his own story. The narrator tells the story speaking with an “I” in his/her own language.
2. **First person observer**—the narrator tells the story which he has observed. The character is usually of secondary importance in the story. He looks on and simply reports what the more important characters say.
3. **Third person**—the author is outside the story using “he” or “she”
 - a. **Author-Observer**—allows the author to tell the story using the third person. He remains outside the minds of the characters. He records only what any observer in the same situation might also see.
 - b. **Omniscient author**—may tell what happens with the power to go into the minds of characters and also give his own comments. He/she is “all-knowing.”

B. Identifying point-of-view:

When the narrator is a character in the story ask:

1. Does the main character tell his own story? (first person narrator)
2. Does a minor character tell the main character’s story? (first person observer)

When the narrator is not a character in the story ask:

1. Does the author tell what people think and explain feelings and motives? (omniscient author)
2. Does the author simply tell the story without giving the thoughts and feelings of the characters? (author observer)