

## Elements and Characteristics of Short Stories

Short stories tend to be less complex than novels. Usually, a short story will focus on only one incident, has a single plot, a single setting, a limited number of characters, and covers a short period of time.

In longer forms of fiction, stories tend to contain certain core elements of dramatic structure: exposition (the introduction of setting, situation and main characters); complication (the event of the story that introduces the conflict); rising action, crisis (the decisive moment for the protagonist and their commitment to a course of action); climax (the point of highest interest in terms of the conflict and the point of the story with the most action); resolution (the point of the story when the conflict is resolved); and moral.

Because of their short length, short stories may or may not follow this pattern. Some do not follow patterns at all. For example, modern short stories only occasionally have an exposition. More typical, though, is an abrupt beginning, with the story starting in the middle of the action. As with longer stories, plots of short stories also have a climax, crisis, or turning-point. However, the endings of many short stories are abrupt and open and may or may not have a moral or practical lesson.

Of course, as with any art form, the exact characteristics of a short story will vary by author.

### Length

Determining what exactly separates a short story from longer fictional formats is problematic. A classic definition of a short story is that one should be able to be read in one sitting, a point most notably made in Edgar Allan Poe's essay "The Philosophy of Composition" (1846). Other definitions place the maximum word length at 7,500 words. In contemporary usage, the term short story most often refers to a work of fiction no longer than 20,000 words and no shorter than 1,000.

Source: [www.en.wikipedia.org](http://www.en.wikipedia.org)

## Short Story Structure

- Create a narrative lead:
  - show the main character in action, dialogue, or reaction.
- Introduce the main character's character.
- Introduce the setting: the time place, and relationships of the main character's life.
- Introduce and develop the problem the main character is facing.
- Develop the plot and problem toward a climax:
  - e.g. a decision, action, conversation , or confrontation, or confrontation that shows the problem at its height.
- Develop a change in the main character:
  - e.g. an acknowledgement of understanding of something, a decision, a course of action, a regret.
- Develop a resolution:
  - how does the main character come to terms – or not – with his or her problem?

Source: Lessons that Change Writers, Nancie Atwell, 2002

## Short Story Terminology

Atmosphere – the general mood, feeling or spirit of a story.

Characterization – the way that the author creates characters.

Protagonist – the main character who is faced with a problem.

Antagonist – the person, place, idea or physical force against the protagonist.

Climax – the point of the highest dramatic intensity; the turning point.

External conflict – happens outside the character.

Internal conflict – happens inside the character;  
(character vs. himself/herself)

Foreshadowing – clues or hints which prepare the reader for future action or events.

Irony – contrast or contradiction of what is expected and what results.

Verbal irony – occurs when a character or narrator says one thing but means the opposite.

Dramatic irony – occurs when the reader knows more than the character.

Situational irony – occurs when the contrast between what appears to be and what actually exists.

Plot – action of the story.

Chronological – places events in order of time from first to last.

Flashback – looks back at events that have already occurred.

Point of View – the angle from which the author tells the story.

First Person Narrative – the narrator uses “I” and participates in the action.

Third Person Narrative – the narrator uses “he” and “she” and is an outside observer.

Omniscient – narrator can see, know and tell all of the characters of a story.

Limited Omniscient – narrator can only see, know and tell all of one character.

Objective – narrator describes the characters statements but doesn't reveal thoughts or feelings.

Resolution – the outcome of a story.

Setting – the background where the action takes place.

Suspense – anticipation as to the outcome of events.

Symbol – a similar object, action, person, or place or something else that stands for something abstract.

Source : [www.flashcardexchange.com](http://www.flashcardexchange.com)