

Section 1.1.5 – Developing a Short Story Outline

Section Objective:

- Develop the characters, plot and setting for a short story

When you develop or plan a short story, the following areas need to be considered:

Characters
Setting
Time
Tone
Mood
Plot
Theme

Then, once you decide on the direction of your story, you will need to follow the steps for the writing process,

Character Development:

You need decide on the characters that you want to be part of your story. Sometimes, good characters can actually shape the direction of your story.

Think about all of the people who live in your neighborhood. Who are the most interesting people who live there? If you use people you know, change their names and exaggerate their personalities so that they cannot be recognized. The emphasis in the story should be an in-depth character study of one character – more than plot.

Remember, graphic organizers for characterizations are a great beginning step.

Sample Character Analysis Guide: A Help for You

For each major character in your planning, you will want to complete a graphic organizer.

Characterization can involve a number of various areas, such as the following:

1. **APPEARANCE** What does the person look like?

 (hair, eyes, body parts, shape,
 colors, tones, etc.)

2. **PERSONALITY** What kind of attitudes does the person reflect?

(optimistic, angry, thoughtful, crazy, etc.)
3. **BACKGROUND/** From where does this person come? Where
ENVIRONMENT does he/she live?
(home, school, work, country, society, etc.)
4. **SPEECH** How does this person express himself/herself verbally? Look at what he/she actually says or does not say.

(Diction? Dialogue? Dialect? Idioms? Phrasing? Structure?)
5. **THOUGHTS** What are his/her deep reflections?

(Diaries, journals, discussions, monologues, conversations, soliloquies, etc.)
6. **ACTIONS** What does he/she actually do?

(Details that happen each situation –
playoff game, prom, election, trip etc.)
7. **REACTIONS TO OTHERS** How does he/she treat others?

(Family, friends, co-workers, service personnel, etc.)
8. **OTHERS' REACTIONS** How do others treat him/her?
TO HIM/HER (Family, friends, co-workers, service personnel, etc.)

Setting Development:

Naturally, try to choose a place that will fit the storyline. However, a believable setting probably needs to come from some place you know so that you can pull the details that you need.

Remember that a setting can be a whole area or just a room, or even just the mind of one character.

Time Development:

Choose a time about which you know. Using the present might be a good idea. If you use the past, do some research to create a believable time period. If you use the future, then your ability to predict will be important. If you use fantasy or science fiction, you need to have a good imagination, rooted in credibility.

Tone Development:

The tone of a story is the attitude you plan to use in the story. Do you think you want the story to have a romantic, tragic, humorous, ironic, sympathetic, combination, etc. tone?

Tone is usually referred to in the form of an adjective. You might try brainstorming a list of adjectives that would fit the plan you are trying to use.

Mood Development:

The mood is what you want your reader to feel – sad, happy, fearful. Again, adjectives are good.

Plot Development:

In planning a short story, you need to decide on what the major conflict will be, especially if you want an action-type story.

Consider these four major conflicts found in most literature:

Man Versus Man:

One person or group against Another



Man Versus Society

Individual against Society



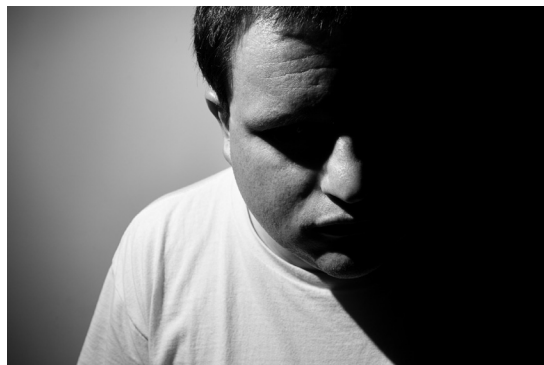
Man Versus Nature

Man against the forces of Nature



Man Versus Himself

Man against His Inner Nature



Then, you need to consider how much of the following plotline you plan to use:

- | | |
|----------------------------|--|
| 1. Exposition | Setting and situation of the beginning of the story |
| 2. Narrative Hook | The beginning of the conflict which grabs the reader's attention and throws him/her into the story |
| 3. Rising Action | Every happening that enables the conflict to develop – usually many, many details |
| 4. Technical Climax | The point where the reader can infer or predict how the conflict will be resolved |
| 5. Dramatic Climax | The point in the story where the reader feels the most intense interest or emotion |

Note: Sometimes the technical and dramatic climax are the same, but not always.

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|--------------------------|---|
| 6. Falling Action | Happenings after the climax has been reached – could be a great deal or just a few ideas |
| 7. Resolution | Final outcome of the conflict |
| 8. Denouement | An Epilogue – the final resolution –especially of all the other little elements of the story, not necessarily part of the major conflict – sometimes part of the minor conflicts –not in some stories |

Remember: Inferences, motivation, and predictions are important in plot development to maintain a reader's attention.

Theme Development:

A theme is the purpose or the reason (thesis) the author is writing the story. When you plan your short story, think of what you want the reader to learn, know, or understand about life, the future, etc.

Like a thesis, everything that you include in your short story should reflect the theme you use for the story.

Usually a theme is expressed in the form of a sentence. If you are too general with your theme, using just one word, you will not have enough directions to help you develop your story.

Example: War (too general)

War destroys a person's life, even if that person has never fought in a war.

Writing Process: Practice: Reminders:

1. Brainstorm: All elements (Character, Setting, Times, etc.)
2. Graphic Organizer: Clustering of ideas when needed
3. Basic Idea: Main Purpose: Theme
4. Outline: Planning: Direction of Story with emphasis on Characters
5. Character(s): Details
6. First Draft: Attention Getter
7. Introduction of Characters / Plot / Theme / Setting/ Time / Motivation / Inferences / Predictability
8. Revisions
9. Test: Have others read the story and see if they understand the story and if they like it.
10. Final Version

Sample Rubric: For Short Story

Consider the follow rubric to evaluate your story for yourself:

1. **Focus:**

| | |
|----------|---|
| 5 Points | Excellent direction (Thesis) |
| 4 Points | Good direction / Weak in a few minor places |
| 3 Points | Some direction / Weak in some places |
| 2 Points | No real direction / Some attempt |
| 1 Point | No real effort |

2. **Content**

| | |
|----------|---|
| 5 Points | Excellent depth (details) and perceptions |
| 4 Points | Good depth (details) and perceptions |
| 3 Points | Needs more depth and details |
| 2 Points | No real depth / A few details |
| 1 Point | No real depth at any level |

3. **Organization**

| | |
|----------|---|
| 5 Points | Excellent plan that can be seen / Great coherence |
| 4 Points | Good plan / Coherence a little weak |
| 3 Points | Evidence of a plan, but weak |
| 2 Points | Very weak plan |
| 1 Point | No real plan |

4. **Style**

| | |
|----------|---|
| 5 Points | Strong Individual Voice / Fluent Sentence Structure / Appropriate Vocabulary |
| 4 Points | Good Individual Voice / Decent Sentence Structure / Appropriate Vocabulary Most of the Time |
| 3 Points | Weak Individual Voice / Sentence Structure Problems / Weak Vocabulary |
| 2 Points | No Real Voice / Awkward Sentence Structure / Weak Vocabulary |
| 1 Point | No Real Voice / Poor Sentence Structure / Weak Vocabulary |

5. **Conventions**

| | |
|----------|---|
| 5 Points | Excellent grammar, usage, punctuation, capitalization, spelling, manuscript form, etc. |
| 4 Points | Good grammar, usage, punctuation, capitalization, spelling, manuscript form, etc. |
| 3 Points | Weak grammar, usage, punctuation, capitalization, spelling, manuscript form, etc. |
| 2 Points | Poor grammar, usage, punctuation, capitalization, spelling, manuscript form, etc. |
| 1 Point | Extremely poor grammar, usage, punctuation, capitalization, spelling, manuscript form, etc. |