

Let's Write Our Own Short Stories

(idea: Ralf Hölzer-Germann, 2016)

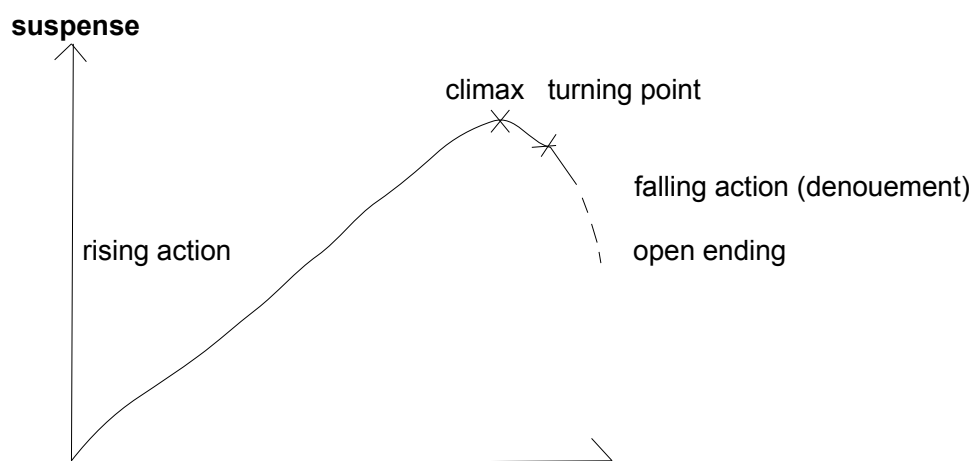
Dear students,

now it's time for you to write your own short stories having to do with (your) future plans and visions! But what do you need to know first before you get started. You need to know how good short stories are written! The following "Golden Rules" will give you an idea what makes a good short story.

What Makes a Good Short Story? The Golden Rules

Of course, a short story is **short**! That's what the name says. But well, there are also short stories that are more than 20 book pages long, like, for example, Ernest Hemmingway's short stories

1. The short story starts "***in medias res***", that means it starts in the middle of the action without any long descriptions of the **setting**¹. That is because the author simply does not have the time to elaborate² on this.
2. There is only a **limited number of main characters** in a short story (in order not to confuse the reader) and the action centres upon a **single conflict** which is **the plot of the story**³. Otherwise the short story would be overloaded with too much information which would irritate the reader.
3. In a short story **suspense**⁴ is created right from the start. The action rises very quickly and reaches its **climax**⁵ towards the end of the story. What follows is very often a **turning point**⁶ providing for an **unexpected change of the events**⁷. Then the action quickly falls and the short story often has an **open ending**⁸. This is the typical graph showing how a short story is structured:

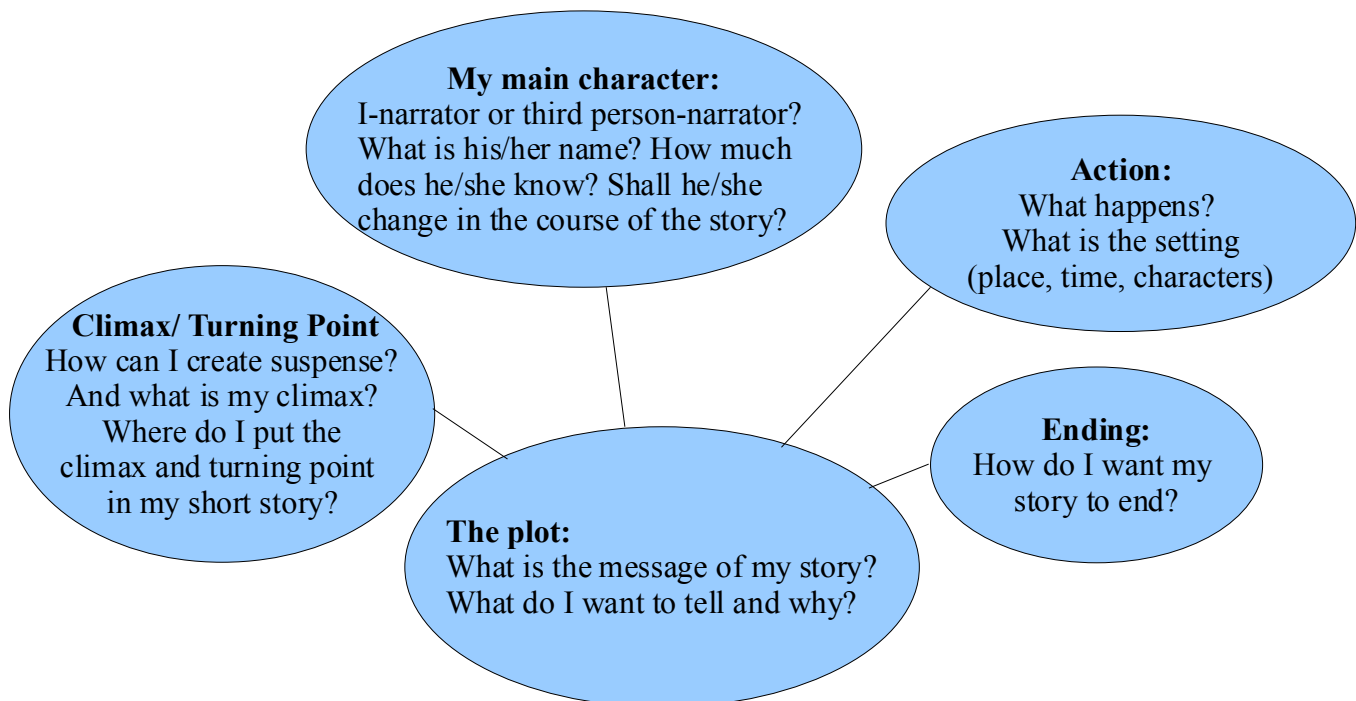


- 1 setting: The *setting* means the description of what happens, where it happens, how it happens and who takes place i
- 2 to elaborate: to spend a lot of time and efforts with something
- 3 plot: the *plot* can be best described as the message of a story in contrast to the action. The *action* is simply *what* happens, *where* it happens, *when* it happens and *who* takes part whereas the *plot* is about *why* something happens. See the following example: *The king died and then the queen died* (= action) *The king died and then the queen died of grief* (=plot)
- 4 suspense: Spannung
- 5 climax: Höhepunkt
- 6 turning point: Wendepunkt
- 7 event: Ereignis
- 8 open ending: offenes Ende

4. Before writing a story the author must think about the **narrative perspective**⁹ or **point of view** the story is told from. This can be an **I-narrator**¹⁰ who is somehow involved¹¹ in the events or a **third person-narrator**¹² who a) knows all the events (**omniscient narrator with an unlimited point of view**¹³) or who does *not* know everything so that he has a **limited point of view**.
5. The author of a story also needs to decide whether his or her main characters should change their behaviour and attitudes¹⁴ in the course of the action (then they are **round characters**) or not change their behaviour and attitudes (then they are **flat characters**).
6. In a short story the author might want to make use of rather short than long sentences, **direct speech**¹⁵ and **direct thought**¹⁶ to express him- or herself very clearly. Furthermore doing so gives the story a very realistic touch and grabs the interests of the reader.

This is **how you proceed** if you want to write your own short story:

Step One: Make a mind map first (You have got 30- 45 minutes for that)



9 narrative perspective/point of view: Erzählperspektive

10 I-narrator: Ich-Erzähler

11 to be involved in something: involviert/beteiligt sein an etwas

12 third-person-narrator: Erzähler in der dritten Person

13 omniscient narrator with an unlimited point of view: allwissender Erzähler mit einer unbeschränkten Sichtweise auf die erzählten Ereignisse

14 behaviour and attitudes: Verhalten und Einstellungen

15 direct speech: direkte Rede

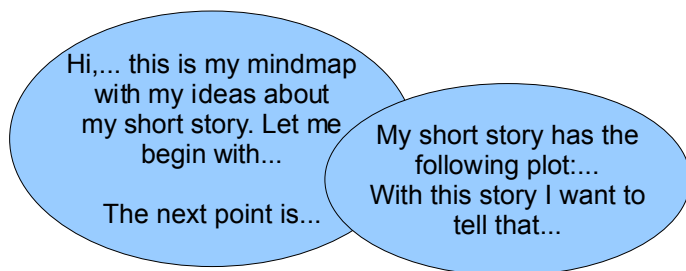
16 direct thought: direkt ausgedrückte Gedanken. *Direct thought* is often expressed in incomplete sentences. See the following example:

The exam started, she was given the test and she skimmed the tasks. There were some questions she definitely couldn't answer. Maybe she didn't learn enough for the exam or prepared the wrong stuff. The first negative thoughts entered her mind: 'Should have started to prepare much earlier!' Or not smart enough! Will screw it! So she became increasingly worried and nervous. Her muscles tensed and she started to sweat. She read the tasks again. A growing feeling of despair started to get hold of herself. 'Wait!', she said to herself. 'Just keep cool! Relax! Keep a clear head now! No need to worry! Passing the exam? Of course, no problem! Easiest tasks first, Jane!' She started to relax a again and took a deep breath. Now she felt better again because she succeeded in calming herself. There were some tasks on the exam paper which didn't cause any problem at all. So she took her pencil and started with the easiest task she could do. ...

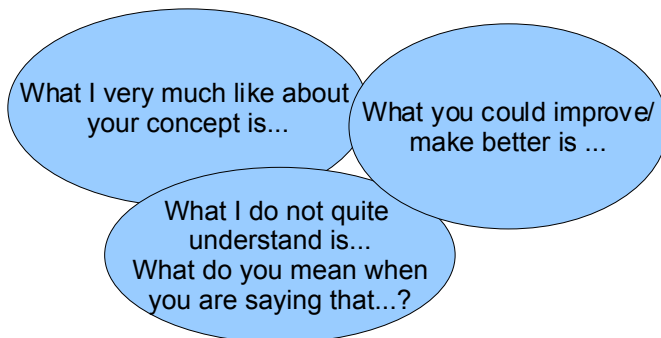
Step 2:

After having decided what to write about (with the help of your mind map) exchange your ideas/mindmaps with a partner and give each other a feedback. Discuss whether your plot is worth writing about and if your story makes sense and catches the interest of your readers. Change your story if the criticism makes sense to you. You have got 15 minutes for that. Speak English only. The following phrases will help you

Student who introduces the mind map:



Student who gives feedback:



Step 3:

Start writing your short story. Keep the following things in mind:

- a) Concentrate on only **one** conflict, a **limited number of characters**, and a **not too complicated setting**. Then give a **clear description** of the place, the characters involved (looks) and the way they behave (character traits). Tip: The better you describe things/people the more does the reader get an idea what you are writing about so that he or she is able to follow you.
- b) **Start in medias res**, i.e. in the middle of the action.
- c) **Create suspense** right from the start and let your short story culminate¹⁷ in a **climax**. Perhaps you want to give your story a **turning point** in which the events take an unexpected change. Think about how you want your story to end (**open ending or not?**).
- d) Make **rather short than long sentences**, especially when you write about what happens. Write longer sentences in order to describe places or people.
- e) Make use of many **adjectives, direct speech and direct thought** to make your story as **realistic and interesting** as possible.
- f) Make use of a dictionary. If you are looking for a special word don't stop after the first entry¹⁸. Look at the different entries and the given examples in order to get the right English word for you.
- g) **Don't mix the main tenses**. Decide if you want to write your short story in the present or past tense as the main tense.
- h) **Read your story over and over again**. Would anyone who is not familiar with your thoughts and ideas understand what you are writing about? In order to check this out **give your short story to somebody else to have their feedback**. The checklist below will help you.
- i) Eventually¹⁹ **make a computer print** out of your story, **count its words** and pass it to the teacher.

¹⁷ to cuminate: kulminieren, sich zuspitzen

¹⁸ entry: Wörterbucheintrag

¹⁹ eventually: schließlich

Checklist For Your Short Story + Peer Feedback Sheet²⁰

Author of the short story: _____.

Topic of the short story: _____.

My first impression after having read your story is _____.

1. First of all your text²¹...

☐ is a short story because _____.

☐ is not / rather not a short story because _____.

The following quality features²² of a good short story can be found in your story:

2. Your short story has got a message to tell / a good plot:

Yes, because _____

_____.

No or not really because _____

_____.

____ / 20 points

2. Your short story creates a lot of suspense and leads to a climax/ unexpected turning point, followed by a surprise or open ending which leaves the reader somehow surprised/ puzzled²³ or shocked.

Yes, it does because _____

_____.

No, it doesn't because _____

_____.

It partly does and it partly does not²⁴ because _____

_____.

20 idea: Tim Lippold, Selfassessment im kompetenzorientierten Englischunterricht. Mehrwert von Selfassessment zur gezielten Kompetenzentwicklung. Pädagogische Facharbeit zur zweiten Staatsprüfung für das Lehramt an beruflichen Schulen (2016) - Your short stories will also be assessed against the background of this checklist.

21 Tick the appropriate box please.

22 quality features: Qualitätsmerkmale

23 puzzled: verwirrt

24 it partly does and partly doesn't: teils-teils

___ / 10 points

3. Contentwise²⁵ your short story is fun reading because it...

a) is comprehensible²⁶ and logical . Yes: ___ No: ___ Partly Yes/ Partly No: ___

This is what I did not quite understand: _____
_____.

b) makes the reader identify with (one of) the characters so that he or she can find him-/herself in your story.

Yes: ___ No: ___ Partly Yes/ Partly No: ___

c) is suspenseful.

Yes: ___ No: ___ Partly Yes/ Partly No: ___

d) is intelligently written.

Yes: ___ No: ___ Partly Yes/ Partly No: ___

e) is funny.

Yes: ___ No: ___ Partly Yes/ Partly No: ___

(Your story needs to fulfill²⁷ at least two of these criteria mentioned above!)

___ / 10 points

3. Languagewise²⁸ your story is fun reading because...

a) the sentences of your short story are well-constructed and your text doesn't have too many errors²⁹ and spelling mistakes³⁰.

Yes: ___ No: ___ Partly Yes/ Partly No: ___

These are some of the errors that you made, which made it difficult to understand some parts of your story so that you need to check grammar again:

_____.

b) your style of writing is good: Yes: ___ No: ___ Partly Yes/ Partly No: ___

c) you made use of direct speech and direct thought:

Yes: ___ No: ___ Unfortunately not too often: ___

d) you used a lot of adjectives to describe the people and places in your story.

Yes: ___ No: ___ Unfortunately not too often: ___

___ / 10 points

All in all I give you ___ / 50 points for your short story. Name: _____

25 contentwise: auf den Inhalt bezogen...

26 comprehensible: verständlich

27 to fulfill criteria: Kriterien erfüllen

28 languagewise: bezüglich der Sprachlichkeit

29 errors: schwerwiegende grammatikalische und sprachliche Fehler

30 spelling mistake: Rechtschreibfehler