

Steps How to Write a Short Story

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Step 1: The Beginning of a Short Story

Write the beginning of your summary (about 250 words). This is probably the most difficult step because you do not know how to start. Now check my tips...

1. Start in the middle of the action. Imagine a **very concrete situation** that you think is pretty good to start your short story with. Imagine you had to describe this situation to a blind person! Here you must be **very precise**¹ in your description of the situation. Also write down what the atmosphere is like.

In the following never forget to mention **where and when the action takes place**. Describe each situation in detail! What is the atmosphere like?

2. Give necessary information about your characters:

a) Let the reader know about the **life situation of your characters** (Does the action take place in their childhood, during puberty, adolescence, adulthood etc.? Do your characters go to school, to work etc.?).

b) Describe **how your characters look like** and **how they feel**;

c) Let the reader also know what their **character traits** are;

3. Use direct speech and direct thought at the beginning of your short story;

4. Slowly build up suspense²; that means develop your conflict now. Make the reader want to continue reading your story! Make him or her curious what will happen next. But do not tell too much! A good text consists of parts that leave it up to **the reader's imagination** what exactly happens!

Here is an example of how you could start your short story:

Eveline, by James Joyce, 1914³

The action starts immediately!

She sat at the window watching the evening invade⁴ the avenue. Her head was leaned against the window curtains and, in her nostrils was the odour of dusty cretonne⁵. She was tired.

description of the atmosphere

description of feelings

Few people passed. The man out of the last house passed on his way home; she heard his footsteps clacking along the concrete pavement⁶ and afterwards crunching on the cinder path⁷ before the new red houses.

Concrete description of the situation now so that the reader has an idea of the situation.

1 precise: präzise, genau

2 build up suspense: Spannung aufbauen

3 James Joyce, Eveline (1914) https://www.lonestar.edu/departments/english/Joyce_Eveline.pdf (19th January 2021)

4 to watch the evening invade the avenue: (bildlich gesprochen) dabei zuschauen, wie der Abend die Straße einnimmt

5 Her nostrils was the odour of dusty cretonne. In ihren Nasenlöchern lag der Geruch von staubigem Baumwollgewebe

6 concrete pavement: Bürgersteig aus Beton

7 cinder path: Aschenweg

She /Eveline thinks about her childhood,
that means she is grown up now!

One time there used to⁸ be a field there in which they used to play every evening with other people's children. Then a man from Belfast bought the field and built houses in it—not like their little brown houses but bright brick houses with shining roofs.

The children of the avenue used to play together in that field ...the Devines, the Waters, the Dunns, little Keogh the cripple, she and her brothers and sisters. Ernest, however, never played: he was too grown up. Her father used often to hunt them in out of the field with his blackthorn stick⁹; but usually little Keogh used to keep nix¹⁰ and call out when he saw her father coming. Still they seemed to have been rather happy then. Her father was not so bad then; and besides, her mother was alive.

backshift into the past:
Eveline remembers her childhood.

That was a long time ago; she and her brothers and sisters were all grown up her mother was dead. Tizzie Dunn was dead, too, and the Waters had gone back to England. Everything changes.

The conflict: Eveline is about to leave Ireland,too, but she is not too happy about it!

Now she was going to go away like the others, to leave her home.

direct thought

Home! She looked round the room, reviewing all its familiar objects which she had dusted once a week for so many years, wondering where on earth all the dust came from. Perhaps she would never see again those familiar objects from which she had never dreamed of being divided .(...)

8 One time there used to be field... : Einst war einmal ein Feld...— Das englische Verb “used to“ drückt aus, dass einmal etwas zu sein pflegte, also eine Gewohnheit aus der Vergangenheit

9 blackthorn stick: Stock aus Schwarzdorn

10 to keep nix: hier → sich schlau anstellen