

# Story Writing



Levels 8, 11

## Introduction

Many students enjoy writing stories. However, many don't know that fiction is among the most advanced and difficult genres to master. Although only a fraction of students will go on to do significant story writing after school, we hope this assignment will constitute a joyous break from your usual non-fiction writing assignments!

Why do we say that fiction writing is an advanced form? Think of the tasks that one must undertake in order to write an effective story:

- \* You must create three-dimensional characters who act in self-consistent ways.
- \* You need to define and describe the setting.
  - If realistic, each element—from dress, to vegetation, to news of the day, to social customs, etc.—must be researched and adhered to throughout the story.
  - If you are writing fantasy, you must create the elements of your new world in minute detail and stick to them throughout the story.
- \* You must devise an interesting (and possibly plausible) self-consistent plot. All themes and story lines introduced must work together and be tied up at the end of the tale.
- \* Finally, you must skillfully use all the normal, good, non-fiction writing elements: strong sentences, solid paragraphs, interesting style, and proper mechanics (grammar, punctuation, etc.).

“Self-consistent” means that the character acts in accordance with his nature or articulated beliefs. For instance, a sweet girl doesn't turn out to be a gang leader; nor does a hardened criminal typically do a kind thing. If your character seems inconsistent, ask yourself how you see your character.

## Where to Start?

Find out from your teacher:

- \* How long is the story to be?
- \* How many characters should you use?
- \* How will the story be graded?

## On to Characters and Plots

You can start with either plot or characters.

- \* Do you have a strong plot in mind? Start there with the appropriate story map supplement from *Writing Aids*.
- \* Are you clearer on one or more main characters, but unsure exactly how all the actions and themes of your story work out? Simply write character sketches as directed in the Writing Assignments, using your Character Sketch Talking Points or Characterization Grid supplement.
- \* Looking at samples of favorite stories may also help get you going.

## Drafting the Story

Here are some tips to get you started:

- \* Can't begin *at all*? Try using a tape recorder and telling your story into it. If you don't like it, start again. Once you have “told” all you can, start writing it down.
- \* If you are having a hard time beginning the story, start writing in the middle. You can come back to the beginning and write it later. As you're drafting, you may think of the perfect way to start your story.
- \* Keep your story simple. You don't want to have too many characters or events that you need to write about.
- \* If you want to write a longer work, choose to write and edit only one chapter of it now.
- \* If you get tangled in your plot lines, go back to your story map and untangle them with your teacher's help. Sometimes you need to adjust your plot according to the new directions the story has taken.



- \* Finally, there is the challenge of ending a story. Some students just can't do it! They want to add one more character or incident, or they have gotten away from their original plan and can't figure out a way to resolve their plot. If you have trouble ending your story, ask your teacher for help in brainstorming possible endings.
- \* Stick to your deadline—rewrites must end sometime! One cannot begin again indefinitely.

### Editing the Draft

Consider the elements below when you are self-proofing your work:

- \* Theme
  - What is the point of your story? Is this point sufficiently clear to your audience?
  - Even if you do not state your theme explicitly, are your characters' action and words consistent with it?
- \* Characterization
  - How real do my characters seem?
  - Are there details about my characters that might confuse a reader?
  - Do my characters act like different people in different scenes of the story, or are they self-consistent all the way through?
  - Do my characters do anything surprising? (This is not the same as inconsistency; it can actually be a mark of realism since most people do surprise us from time to time.)
- \* Plot
  - Does my story flow easily?
  - Are there gaps?
  - Is there confusion of facts or events that leave a reader baffled?
  - Are there contradictions in my plot? Does one aspect make another impossible?
  - Is my plot too predictable? Does it need more of a "twist"?
- \* Delightfulness
  - Is my story interesting to read?
  - Have I included humorous, thought-provoking, or beautiful sentences and scenes that enhance my story and delightfully surprise my reader?
- \* Writing style and structure
  - Are my sentences full of good, concrete, specific words?
  - Are my sentences varied and interesting in narrative sections?
  - Is the dialogue interesting, illuminative, purposeful, realistic for the characters that speak it, and properly punctuated?
  - How is the overall "flow" of my writing? Any choppy transitions?
  - Is there a way that varying the style or structure would seriously improve my story?
  - Are there errors of grammar, punctuation, or word usage?

### Odds and Ends

It is not unusual for a story to go through several drafts. Like all writing projects, your story should be edited, polished, and then presented.

- \* Who will your audience be?
- \* Can Dad read your story out loud at the dinner table?
- \* Can you submit it to a story-writing contest?
- \* Will you send it to the *Tapestry* website for publication?