

LONG STORY SHORT

What Editors Want

Originality

- When you write a story, take a step back and say, “How can I add one more twist to this to make it a little different?” We’ve all read the typical plot: *Father is dying, family gathers, a family story is told. Everyone is sad.* What if the family story is that he is not their father? What if he tells them he is gay? What if he dies just before the punchline. What would the repercussions be?

Theme

- What is the message? *Is it that time heals all wounds? Time wounds all heels?* Whatever it is, make it come through clearly, but not blatantly. The reader should be able to summarize the theme in one sentence.

Plot

- A short story needs a plot that is not too complicated but is focused.
- Don’t include more than about 3 characters.
- Keep the background info to a minimum.
- Show us what is happening, don’t tell us.
- Example -

Tell: *She was sad and angry as she packed her suitcase.*

Show: *She jerked a suitcase from the closet and threw it on the bed. She emptied her drawers into it, stuffing the corners full. Wiping tears with the back of her hand, she snapped it shut.*

We learned everything from her actions. This is showing.

Make Your Words Count

- After you have written your story, go back through and analyze every paragraph, every word, every phrase. If they don’t advance the story, cut them. For example, see how many words you can eliminate here:

"I remember that night so well that the details are crucified in my memory forever. It was pitch black and the night air was cold enough to give me the shivers. The only light to be seen came from a flickering street lamp that's glow was slowly dying out. I sat at the train depot with a few mere items that I chose to take with me: my wallet with its contents--faded ID a \$20 dollar bill and my train ticket- and a journal to record my empty headed thoughts."

Like this:

"The memories of that night are crucified in my mind. The night was black and cold enough to give me the shivers. The only light was from a flickering street lamp whose glow was slowly dying. I sat at the train depot with a few belongings: twenty bucks, my ID, and my journal."

Give the Reader Credit for Reading into Your Words

- Let the reader assume and imagine some things. Readers are smart and they get a lot of things without the writer spelling them out. Allude to things, rather than explaining in detail. This will give you more room to elaborate on the important things.
- Don't say, "She wiped a tear. She was so sad." Obviously, if she wiped a tear, she's sad. Leave out the qualifier, imply instead – show us.

The Ending

Don't end a story with a "*So, they lived happily ever after or some such thing*. Stop just short and let the reader wonder a bit, come to his own conclusion. A story does not need a summary line at the end.

Read the Guidelines and Look at Sample Work

- Be sure to read and follow the guidelines. Check your work, spell-check, include a bio, contact info, but unless you're entering a contest, leave off your mailing address – it just gets deleted anyway. Look at the formatting of the publication and present your submission in the order shown, i.e. Story Name, byline, story, bio, contact link. Try to save the editor time. There's nothing more annoying than having to completely reformat a story for publication.