

Let's Write!

5 Ways to Start a Short Story

You have far fewer pages to write a short story than you do in a book, which means you need to cover a lot more ground in a lot less time.

Hook readers with excitement

Start off with something that immediately engages the reader from the opening sentence, like an action scene or an unexpected event. The inciting incident is the moment your protagonist is pushed into the central conflict of your story, which can be an enticing scene to start with, and clues your viewers in on what kind of story this is going to be.

Introduce the lead character

Starting your short story by introducing your main character can be a good way to draw the audience in emotionally, especially if this character is written in first person. Try giving your main character a unique voice or quirk that makes them interesting and intriguing to your readers. When readers care about someone, they want to know what's going to happen to them and will keep reading. Establish this feeling with your readers quickly within your short story to have an effective beginning.

Start with dialogue

A powerful line of dialogue from one of your characters as your first sentence can quickly establish who they are and what their point of view is. Readers will want to read on to discover who is saying this first line and why, and what the circumstances surrounding it is.

Use memories

Recalling the memories of a character via the narrator or using a flashback is a quick way to show (rather than tell) a little backstory about the inhabitants of your world. It can show us how a character feels about a particular person, place, or event—it provides a setup for your characters' trajectory by showing their history. Showing a memory through a character's eyes creates an emotional attachment, stirring empathy and sparking connection, which are all important qualities for an impactful short story.

Begin with a mystery

Present a mystery to your audience on the first page to create a compelling beginning that keeps them interested until it's solved. That doesn't mean you're automatically writing a mystery genre. Sometimes, a mystery in the opening is for the sole purpose of keeping your reader's attention. A mystery can also mean opening with a question, an unsolvable problem, or an ambiguous event, which will pique the curiosity of your reader, and they'll be excited to know what happens next.