



Hints to make your story more realistic:

- i. include interesting similes and metaphors
- ii. develop images that relate to the senses: smell, touch, taste, sight, sound.
- iii. make sure the discourse is appropriate to the setting and characters and demonstrates values and attitudes embedded in your characters, and the society
- iv. create a vivid atmosphere
- v. you might find it helpful to have a 'theme' in mind
- vi. SHOW DON'T TELL. That's right, rather than saying "the man was old", you might refer to his slow, shuffling walk, or his face as wrinkled as an elephant's skin
- vii. Make sure there is a clear link to the original poem, don't forget you have to write a rationale.

Short Story Hints:

Planning

- ❖ Read a range of poems from the various poets listed on the task sheet until you find a style, form, or subject that appeals to you. Remember that you don't have to identify the poem you *like* best, but rather, the poem from which you can develop the *best idea*.
- ❖ Once you have chosen your poem there are a number of areas to research. You will need to take notes concerning a range of contexts associated with your poem, **in addition** to developing ideas about plot, characters, complication etc. Just like your story in Year 11, you will need to:
 - (a) Be original
 - (b) Show a clear relationship to the original text (explained in your rationale)
 - (c) Write appropriately for the place in time and space on which you are focussed.
- ❖ Accordingly, it is important to be aware of the context in which either the poem is set, or the period in which the poet was writing (and their purpose for doing so) in order for you to write in a way that will seem authentic for the audience of your story. For example:
 - (a) If you set your story in World War Two and your characters speak with the *discourse* of a rapper such as Eminem, this will seem a little jarring.
 - (b) Or, if you write about the relationship between a man and a woman during World War Two and the husband fully endorses the notion of his wife going out to work for a living, this might seem out of keeping with the *values* of the time.

Thus, it may be easier to set your story in the present, and simply develop a meaningful way of translating the spirit, events, setting or characters of the poem into contemporary times. **This is not to say you should not choose a poem set in another time or place, just that if you do so you should be prepared for the work this will involve.**

- ❖ So, what areas might you need to address in order to appreciate the background that may inform the events of your story and the actions and values of the characters? A simple list might read as follows:
 - (a) Geographic context: country, state, urban/rural etc
 - (b) Social context: rich/poor, race/ethnicity, male/female
 - (c) Historical context: era, e.g. WWII, the Depression, the 1960's, 2004 etc
 - (d) Cultural context: rappers, nerds, sportsmen, Italian-Australian, migrant etc

These contexts are important because they influence what might be happening at the time, complications that may arise, the way your characters will react, and the values, discourses embedded in the text. So make sure you fully understand the context of your chosen poem. **Read on to remind yourself of the tricks you can use to make your story memorable.**

SHORT STORY CHECKLIST

<input type="checkbox"/>	Have you chosen a particular mode or genre and have written correctly in this?
<input type="checkbox"/>	Is there a focal point or central idea to your story?
<input type="checkbox"/>	Does your story have unity?
<input type="checkbox"/>	Is your introduction interesting and your conclusion satisfactory?
<input type="checkbox"/>	Have you avoided the bizarre or sensational eg mass murders?
<input type="checkbox"/>	Have you eliminated unnecessary detail?
<input type="checkbox"/>	Have you sequenced your subject matter using some of the following techniques?
<input type="checkbox"/>	- first/second/third person narration
<input type="checkbox"/>	- exposition of conflict
<input type="checkbox"/>	- flashback
<input type="checkbox"/>	- episodic plot
<input type="checkbox"/>	- shifts in tension (crises)
<input type="checkbox"/>	- foreshadowing future events
<input type="checkbox"/>	- providing clues
<input type="checkbox"/>	- ironic twists
<input type="checkbox"/>	- suspense build up
<input type="checkbox"/>	- background description
<input type="checkbox"/>	- deliberate omission (ellipsis)
<input type="checkbox"/>	- development of big characters
<input type="checkbox"/>	- character description
<input type="checkbox"/>	- dialogue
<input type="checkbox"/>	- character interaction
<input type="checkbox"/>	- contrast
<input type="checkbox"/>	- unusual twists
<input type="checkbox"/>	- climax
<input type="checkbox"/>	- resolution
<input type="checkbox"/>	Is your story interesting with an awareness of audience?
<input type="checkbox"/>	Is the writing credible?
<input type="checkbox"/>	Have you shown language control?
<input type="checkbox"/>	- organisation
<input type="checkbox"/>	- paragraphing
<input type="checkbox"/>	- crafting
<input type="checkbox"/>	- correction of language structures
<input type="checkbox"/>	- appropriate vocabulary
<input type="checkbox"/>	- correct spelling

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Short Story Rationale

1) Which poem is the **stimulus** for your story?
Why did you choose it? Consider: subject matter, setting, theme etc.

2) Does your short story respond to:

- the **invited reading** of one of the **characters** and/or
- the **invited reading** of the **primary relationship** between the characters?
- The **invited reading** of an **action** undertaken by a character
- The **representation** of an **issue** relevant to the socio/cultural/historical context
- The **representation** of **events** arising from a particular socio/cultural/historical context etc.

3) Explain whether you have created this response as a: **prequel** or a **sequel** to the events outlined in the poem/ or in such a way as to **fill the gaps** presented by the poem/ or to **challenge** or **endorse** assumptions visible in the poem.

What are your intentions regarding your story?

4) Describe the development of your **ideas**. Provide any necessary background information for your story.

5) Will you **endorse** (support) or **contest** (challenge) the attitudes, beliefs and values of the character/s and/or relationship in the base text?

6) **Briefly**, in 1 or 2 sentences, outline the **plot** of your short story. How have you developed your ideas into your short story? You could consider the following:

- character/s construction (how his/her behaviour is constructed by their membership of a particular group/discourse in society)
- setting description
- story structure (opening, complication/conflict/ developing tension, climax/highest point of tension, resolution/ending)
- story elements e.g., theme, moral, message.

7) Which **values/beliefs/ideologies** are **foregrounded** (emphasised) by the character/s in your text?

8) How does your own story hope to **position your audience**? (How do you want your audience to react to your story? To feel? To think? To respond?)



Hints on Writing a Short Story Character

Consider how you want to represent the character.

A character needs a physical appearance and a personality. The physical appearance needs to be established in a few words. They need to be suggestive enough for the reader to fill the gaps and make a complete person. Comments from the character him/herself and/ or other characters can be used as well as the writer describing the character. This needs to happen at the start of the story unless the writer is deliberately withholding the information for suspense/horror etc.

The character needs to be put in some circumstance that is going to affect the character. The character's actions must be motivated. The character is going to have to deal with the circumstance and there needs to be a change in the circumstances and a subsequent change in the character.

The character needs to bend or even break.

The character can be developed through dialogue- the way a person speaks says much about them. Words that describe the manner of the character's speech can be used e.g. *sneered contemptuously*, *giggled* as well as the actual words said.

The character can be developed by words that describe his/her movement e.g. *jolted*, *limped*, *staggered uncertainly*.

Make your character active so the reader can see him/her doing things, interacting with others and his/her environment.

Suggest the mood of the character- how the character feels about the circumstances and then about the changes.

There can be surprises about the character that may only be revealed at the end. If this is so, there needs to be some hinting, foreshadowing earlier in the story that the reader may pick up if they are very observant, clever and perceptive.

Contrast is always good so there may be another character in the story to contrast with your main character.

Figurative language is always effective when used convincingly. Similes, metaphors, personification, alliteration etc. all add depth to the images being formed in the readers' minds.

A symbol can always be linked with the character and can play a significant role in the story. Symbols add depth to meaning and effects.



Plot

The core of the story will grow from the discourses that you have been researching and thinking about e.g. being a soldier, a bushranger, a woman.

The story should invite a particular way of understanding and thinking about the people, place, circumstances and the events that are the story. Be conscious of your position on the characters, events, places, and circumstances. Be conscious of who you are foregrounding and who you are marginalising. Understand the consequences of your selections for your story. Is it he: she good? Is it she: he bad? Is it she: he important or unimportant? Why did it happen at all? Is it inevitable?

Conflict is the heart of the story. There needs to be opposition- a character pitted against a character, a character pitted against his: her environment, a character pitted against him/herself. The conflict needs to allow change. Foreshadow future events, reactions etc. The cause and effect links should apply: because this happened then something else occurred as a result. Remember that what is interesting in a story is not only what happened, but how it happened. Through the details of the story you make a comment. In this unit it is a comment about Australia and being Australian.

The climax is the culmination of a conflict in which the character has a crucial stake. The outcome of the climax must affect the character.

Start the moment or moments just before the climax. Ask yourself: *What is the climax?*
Finish immediately after the climax.

Use dialogue to advance the story but use it sparsely. Dialogue must advance the purpose of the story. Use dialogue at the climax. It's very effective. It slows the scene to present time and gives it a feeling of immediacy.

Plot the chronological and the narrative sequences so as to decide in which order events are to happen for the greatest effect. Stories concern the **NOWNESS**, the actual moment, which is generally emphasised by the weight of the past (or even the future).

Select the voice in the story. Is it a character in the story -- ? Is it the writer standing outside the story able to see everyone's thoughts? By reporting characters' thoughts the reader is drawn into the mind and the spirit of the character.
Do not write in a voice that is not convincing.

Choose time and place carefully. It is best to have one setting. Establish these quickly at the start of the story with a few well-chosen words. Remember the reader will fill the gaps if you choose your words wisely.

The theme and the mood are interdependent. Ask what mood you wish to display. The mood can develop with the circumstances.

A symbol can advance the plot. It should be, in the first instance, an event, thought or object that recurs and becomes representative of the conflict of the character.

Styles Of Writing

NARRATIVE WRITING

BEGINNINGS

The importance of first impressions cannot be overstated. They quickly determine the attitude of the reader to the whole story. A quick ... showing the disastrous consequences of a dull opening, is your probable response to such standard introduction as:

“The alarm clock began to ring and I knew that Saturday morning had begun.”

And

“We were all looking forward to the fishing trip.”

Even if they were planning to write about such ordinary activities showering, having breakfast or packing for the inevitable journey, the authors have demonstrated a marked lack of selectivity and imagination in choosing to begin in such a drab and unoriginal manner.

Your aim is to entice your audience to continue reading, and to indicate something about the tone and direction of your piece. If you To create interest at the outset, you risk inviting an unsympathetic response from your reader, who may feel trapped and frustrated – simply not read on.

Here are some different beginnings found in the stories of well-known writers, and some students. Discuss each of the examples. Do you like them? What are your suggestions?

Note: These are only a guide. Many beginnings do not fall neatly into a single category, but are combinations of two or more types.

The Senses

Here readers are presented with images that appeal to the different senses.

Sight: images are created that stress eye-catching detail and colour.

“White-flecked and turquoise, the wave gathered power and, as a steady rolling jelly, moved slowly towards the dun-coloured shores of Loetia.”

Hearing: sounds can be used as an attention-focusing device.

“The bells of the old chapel inside the village walls chimed ominously. Jack Marsdon look at his watch: eleven-thirty.”

Touch: this type of sensory beginning evokes in the reader memories of the texture of things.

“As Jan’s hand slid along, the rail changed from smoothly polished aluminium to rough, rimmed tungsten. She now knew that the eastern quadrant was near.”

Smell: one of the most suggestive senses is that of smell. The fresh, delicate fragrance of jasmine in spring, the strong aroma of pipe tobacco, or the acrid odour of hospital disinfectant have associations to most of us, and in many cases significant ones.

“The sharp and sweet smells of apple, lilac, and lemon-grass filled the air.”

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Taste: there are many tastes that are common to us; the sweetness of chocolate; the sourness of lemon, and the saltiness of blood. It is difficult, although not impossible, to describe them.

“Delicate and mellow but still with the gull grape flavour – I, for one, had thought it an excellent wine.”

Action

Action can invite the reader to participate imaginatively in what is being described.

‘Mother has smashed the potatoes into a pulp and is now slamming the saucepans around viciously. Dad is watching her uneasily over the rim of *The Herald*.’

Complexity

Many images packed tightly together arouse the readers’ attention.

‘Fortunes turn. Doors slam. Winds tear the grey tarmac. The music is the scream of jets. Today, as they say, is the first day of the rest of your life. And here is Ackerman, the Australian playwright, running through London, shedding money like autumn leaves.’

Morris Lurie

Suspense

Here the opening asks the reader to ponder what will happen in the remainder of the story.

“From where he stood behind the sights of the Winchester.32, he didn’t actually hear the sound of the first shot.”

Suspense is created as questions are raised: who is the man behind the rifle? Why is he shooting? What is the target?

Emotion

The reader is asked to respond emotionally.

As the corpse went past, the flies left the restaurant table in a cloud and rushed after it, but they came back a few minutes later.

George Orwell

Information

Information may give meaningful background detail.

“Murray turned six on the same day that his father was retrenched at the Flemington tannery.”

Questions

A question encourages the reader to attempt to answer it.

“Well, what is the meaning of life?”

10.

Dialogue

The immediacy of dialogue is attractive because it allows the reader to enter more quickly into the lives of the characters.

My daughter Bennison has just come in to say: "We have two spare feet. They must belong to Paddy."

Kylie Tennant

STRUCTURE

The structure of a piece is the order in which the events of the plot are made known to the reader. Some of the ways a story may be structured are as follows:

Chronological: (A-B-C-D) This is the natural order of events. Events have been arranged according to how they would occur in real life. For example, a corrupt man has an accident, goes to hospital, near death he reviews his life, discovers he won't die, and then mends his ways.

Retrospective: (D-A-B-C) Events are arranged so that the story opens with the final moment of its 'real life' sequence. For example, our story could begin with the man waiting to thank the doctor who saved his life. While waiting he recounts the events that have led him to this predicament.

Circular: (C-A-B-C-D) Events here occur in such a way that they finally?? retrace themselves. One common and effective way of doing this is to begin at a later point in the action, perhaps just at the story's climax recount events up to that point and then proceed with the remainder of the piece. For example, using our accident story, position C may the climax of that story – the life and death operation scene; positions A and B may narrate the moments leading up to it. This would return the reader to the initial climax. Finally, position D may represent the action following the accident, when the man is waiting to thank the doctor.

Flashback: This device is used to provide background information where it is necessary. It can be brief and need not recreate the events in their entirety. A flashback usually has the form of a remembered scene, related in speech or reported in the narrative. It is not often used in very short stories. Again, referring to the above example, one part of the narrative, perhaps the accident, may int. to emphasise the traumatic nature of that experience. Or brief background information about aspects of characterisation may be offe.... such as childhood experiences, that have not already been developed in the story.

CHARACTERISATION

How does one create believable and convincing characters? Here all writers have similar resources. Recollections of the people met in everyday life supply an abundance of material with which to work. These images can be taken and used as complete in themselves or gathered to form a vocabulary of fragments from which whole characters can be created. So, Sue's wry comments, Alex's nervous tic and John's awkwardness can be blended into the personality of a single character. The same, of course, can be done with aspects of physical appearance, and so on.

Realistic characters require that the author gets to know them and has a knowledge of their appearance, habits, tastes, ambitions, fears, desires, strengths, prejudices, weaknesses and most importantly, motivations. Only a small fraction of this appears on the page, but because the characters have emerged from this process, they are more likely to be lifelike and believable.

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Let's now look at each of the various aspects that combine to create fictional characters.

Appearance

The physical appearance of your characters can be vitally important to revealing their inner qualities and motivations. Often these descriptions can be effective if brief – several well-chosen words might be sufficient. At other times, if you have the space, a more detailed picture could be created.

In the extract below, Graham Greene emphasises the appearance of a man he is describing in such a manner as to give insight into the man's thoughts and being.

Among the kneeling women was an old face I seemed to remember; a round head like a peasant's, the skin wrinkled like a stale apple, with the hair gone from the crown. He knelt, bowed his head and rose again. There had just been time, I suppose, for a formal prayer, but it must have been a short one. His chin was stubbled white like the field outside and there was so little about him to suggest a member of the French Academy that I might have taken him for the peasant he appeared to be, in his suit of respectable and shiny black and his black tie like a bootlace, if I had not been attracted by the eyes. The eyes gave him away; they seemed to know too much and to have seen further than the seasons and the fields. Of a very clear pale blue, they continually shifted focus, looking close and looking away, observant, sad and curious like those of a man caught in some great catastrophe which it is his duty to record, but which he cannot bear to contemplate for any period of time.

Graham Greene

What does the physical description of the man reveal about him?

Which is the most significant aspect of appearance here? Give reasons for your choice.

What do we discover about the man's personality?

Action

The movements and gestures of your characters show what they are feeling and to some extent what they are like as human beings. Through our own experience we know that fidgeting can indicate boredom, so too can the insistent tapping of fingers. Whistling can be a sign of contentment, or provocative behaviour aimed at annoying someone. Eyes that move quickly away from the gaze of others can show a lack of self-esteem, or a willingness to deceive. Habits too are revealing; tugging at earlobes, rubbing eyes or forehead, clicking fingers, biting nails and so on. Think of other habits and what they reveal. You can use them in your writing.

The following passage contains actions that help to unlock the personality of its character. Again, this technique can be used sparingly – one or two well-chosen actions might draw your readers closer to a character, too many might push them away.

One morning while they were eating an early breakfast, Hester, suddenly disturbed by the too close crowing of their most handsome rooster, tilted her chair back and, putting an arm around the edge of the flywire door, caught the bird by the neck and, with a twist of her strong fingers, she broke his neck.

Elizabeth Jolley



List Hester's actions. What could they reveal about Hester?

Do you find this an effective passage? Explain.

Use the outlines provided below, or write your own, for a piece of writing that mainly uses the actions of a character to show his or her frame of mind.

- Two people arguing
- A person trying to catch a train
- Title: 'Players'
Character(s): two nervous gamblers and onlookers
Purpose: to show the response of both players to the fateful final card
Setting: a casino table
Action: the dealing of the final card

Setting

The setting and general conditions of your piece can reflect the personality and specific frame of mind of your characters. One of the most well-known examples is the old, run-down, haunted mansion on a distant hill, during a thunderstorm. Already the reader has been given an idea of what is to follow, and, to some extent, information about the characters involved.

The following passages give detail about the setting in such a way as to inform the reader about the thoughts and feelings of the characters.

The kitchen at Faldor's farm was a large, low-beamed room filled with ovens and kettles and great spits that turned slowly in cavern-like arched fireplaces. There were long, heavy worktables where bread was kneaded into loaves and chickens were cut up and carrots and celery were diced with quick, crisp rocking movements of long, curved knives. When Garion was very small, he played under those tables and soon learned to keep his fingers and toes out from under the feet of the kitchen helpers who worked around them. And sometimes in the late afternoon when he grew tired, he would like in a corner and stare into one of the flickering fires that gleamed and reflected back from the hundred polished pots and knives and long-handled spoons that hung from pegs along the white-washed walls and, all bemused, he would drift off into sleep in perfect peace and harmony with all the world around him.

David Eddings

Describe the atmosphere created by the description of the kitchen. Is it pleasant? Friendly? Inviting? Secure? Traditional?

Briefly describe Garion's childhood. Was he happy? Well provided for? Protected?

Which words indicate tradition?