

Short Stories Part 4

Drafting and Publishing Your Short Story

There are many aspects to drafting your story, such as fleshing out characters, piecing together the plot, and crafting the perfect title and ending. On the technical side, authors must consider the number of words in their completed manuscript, the submittal format, and locating the appropriate publishers to submit to for publication. In this, the final session on short stories, we'll go over these and some other pointers.

Word Count Is Important

Audiences are accustomed to a certain length of story and page count, so pay attention to how many words you use to compose your draft in order to attract more readers. While there are no hard and fast rules about how many words a work should have, there are widely accepted guidelines in the traditional publishing industry.

How Long Should a Novel Be?

If you're writing your first novel, the general rule of thumb for novel writing is a word count in the 80,000 to 100,000 range. While anything over 40,000 words can fall into the novel category, 50,000 is considered the minimum novel length. Anything over 110,000 words is considered too long for a fiction novel.

How Long Should a Novella Be?

A novella is a fictional piece between a short story and a novel with anywhere from 10,000 to 40,000 words. There's an even narrower story option—the novelette—that has a word count between 7,500 and 17,000 words.

How Long Should a Short Story Be?

The average short story should run anywhere from 5,000 to 10,000 words, but they can be anything above 1,000 words. Flash fiction is a short story that is 500 words or less.

How Long Should a Young Adult Novel Be?

Geared towards teenagers, young adult (YA) books address heavier topics and have more adult themes than children's literature, and their word count is closer to that of adult novels, too. YA novels should be anywhere from 40,000 to 80,000 words. A sci-fi YA book will be at the higher end of this range.

How to Title Your Story

When it comes to writing a story, there are few things quite as challenging as giving it a proper title. The title of a story should be brief, compelling, memorable, and relevant to the genre and plot of the story.

First, it's important to keep in mind that most titles are given to works *after* they've been written, not before. You can be brainstorming the title throughout the whole process of writing your story, but you don't have to decide on a definitive title until the end.

- **Keep it short.** Titles need to be memorable, and the more words you include in your title, the easier it will be to forget what it's called. Longer titles also don't fit as well on covers or book spines.
- **Make it interesting.** If you title your story "A Day in the Park," most people would pass up that story for one titled "The Day Cedar Park Ruined My Career."
- **Make it unique.** Before you decide on a title, make sure you remember to google it. If your story has the same title as another story that can create a lot of problems for you.
- **Don't give too much away.** Titling your story after something major that happens in the plot can be fun, but don't spoil the plot point in the process. You don't want to ruin the suspense, after all.
- **Work within your genre.** If you're writing a love story, don't title it "The Missing Sibling" or something. You don't want readers to feel tricked if they pick up your story thinking it is a mystery or horror story.
- **Make it memorable.** Using alliteration or rhymes can help you create a memorable title. Just make sure not to overdo it!

Options for Titling Your Story

There are lots of options when it comes to titling a story. It can be overwhelming if you don't have any ideas right away, so referencing a list like this can help get you started. Keep these options in mind while you're brainstorming, and you may end up with your breakthrough idea!

A Character's Name

Many popular titles simply name the story after their main character, such as *Harry Potter* or *Coraline*. If your main character has a compelling name, then naming your story after them might be the most straightforward choice. However, if your story isn't particularly character-driven, then you might want to consider other options first.

Setting

If the setting of your story is particularly interesting, it may make the most sense to include that in the title. Many stories use this strategy, like *The Haunting of Hill House* and *The Count of Monte Cristo*. If the setting doesn't stay consistent, you can pick from the most meaningful settings in the story, or the places in which something impactful happens (or happened).

A Key Item

If there's an object that has particular importance to your story, that could also be an option for the title. *The Lord of the Rings* utilizes this strategy in its title, other examples: *The Nutcracker*, *The Time Machine*, and *The Lion, The Witch, and the Wardrobe*.

A key Theme Motif

Many stories have an underlying theme. Themes can be things like betrayal, love, loss, vanity, retribution, and more. Motifs, on the other hand, are elements that are repeated throughout the story, such as images, ideas, topics, phrases, colors, and more, in order to highlight the key themes of the story. Some examples of stories that use the story's main themes for their titles include *Pride and Prejudice*, *Crime and Punishment*, and *Vanity Fair*.

Symbolism

If you want to be a little more subtle with how you incorporate the story's theme into the title, try turning to symbolism. For example, *Flight of Doves* is a story about children fleeing their uncle, but doves are commonly used to represent children symbolically. Similarly, in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's*

Nest, the story isn't about birds, but rather people who are locked up in a psychiatric ward. Try to consider what can be used to symbolically represent what your story is truly about.

Foreshadowing

Titles can often foreshadow a major event that takes place in the story. As long as you don't give too much away, this can result in a rather tantalizing title. Some examples of this are *As I Lay Dying* and *Things Fall Apart*.

Dialogue

Dialogue is a powerful tool. If your character says something significant, there's an obvious catchphrase or recurring statement, or a line of dialogue sums up the story's theme pretty well, then you could already have your title. Some examples: are *Catch-22*, *Brave New World*, *I am Legend*, and *Game of Thrones*.

Where to Submit Short Stories

Before attempting highly reputable publications such as *The New Yorker*, *The Atlantic*, or *Fireside Magazine*, you will need a publication history and portfolio.

There are numerous fiction journals looking for stories like yours, and deciding where to submit short stories can be difficult. The following eight short story publishers publish works by both new and established authors, allowing you to jumpstart your publication history.

The titles are links to the submission guidelines of these publications. Click to read the detailed submission requirements and see any available published examples.

1. [Apparition Lit](#)

Apparition Lit is a themed quarterly journal. They put out speculative fiction, sci-fi, and horror with a literary bent. All submissions must correspond with the quarterly prompt, so use this as an ekphrastic challenge for a great first publication!

2. [LampLight Magazine](#)

LampLight Magazine is a quarterly journal of dark fiction and horror. This short story magazine regularly seeks literary fiction with a bizarre, *The Twilight Zone*-style twist. Lamplight pays 3¢ per word for all fiction it publishes.

3. [SmokeLong Quarterly](#)

SmokeLong Quarterly publishes flash fiction (<1000 words). They like stories with surprising language and have emotionally resonant narratives, and are perennially open for submissions. This is a great first publication for flash fiction journals!

4. [Write City Magazine](#)

Write City Magazine, a publication out of the Chicago Writer's Association, seeks poetry, fiction, and nonfiction for its upcoming issues. All accepted works receive a small stipend, on top of publication. Be sure to follow their submission guidelines, which detail their preferred styles of fiction.

5. [Genuine Gold](#)

Genuine Gold seeks to publish emerging writers and established writers side-by-side. They seek fresh, innovative voices, and stories that are high-quality but not pretentious. Genuine Gold is produced with the help of the Indiana Pizza Club, but is open to submissions from around the world.

6. [Dark Magazine](#)

Dark Magazine pays 6¢ a word for horror and dark fantasy fiction. This journal prefers stories that deviate from an expected ending and play with new styles and ideas. This is a good place for horror short story submissions.

7. [Typishly](#)

Typishly accepts short fiction and tries to publish both new and emerging voices. Best of all, they aim to respond to all submitted works in under 24 hours! This is a great journal for both expanding your readership and trying your look at a fast-paced publication.

8. [SAND Journal](#)

SAND Journal publishes eclectic and subversive fiction. They love stories that refuse to be predictable and stories that inspire change. Short story submissions are open until September 1st.

Navigating the World of Submissions

Before you send your stories out for publication, you should understand a few things about fiction submissions. To begin with, no story is guaranteed to be published. Fiction reviewers, read hundreds of submissions for each publication. These editors frequently make difficult decisions about great stories, and great fiction pieces are frequently rejected due to the limited amount of space in each publication.

Despite the competitive nature of online fiction journals, you can improve your chances of having your short story submissions published. Make sure you note the following guidelines.

- Review the Journal's Past Publications—know your story fits with the publisher's style.
- Follow the Formatting and Submission Guidelines—**To The Letter**.
- Perfect Your Short Story—edit meticulously.
- Kill some Mice before Attempting to Slay a Dragon—Before being accepted by more prestigious short story magazines, writers must frequently secure publication in lesser-known journals.