

Denise George

HOW TO

WRITE

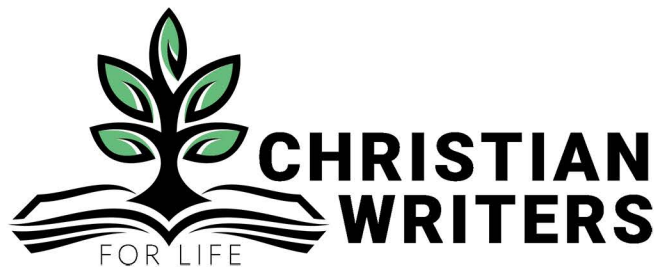
AN

AWARD-WINNING

SHORT STORY



STUDY GUIDE



How to Write an (Award-Winning!) Short Story

By Denise George

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When you know the nuts & bolts of how to write an excellent short story (whether fiction or nonfiction), you'll find no shortage of editors wanting to publish you!

When a writer takes the time, energy, and brain power to closely study exactly how to write a short story, he can then proceed with competence, clarity, and confidence.

Serious writers study first before they put pen to paper. And what you take the time to learn today will serve you for a lifetime of writing. Knowledge takes out the guesswork. You'll know exactly what to do.

I'm giving you a mountain of material in this workbook. Study it in bite size pieces, take a break, ponder it, and then pick up where you left off. What you learn in this course will enable you to write short stories that will impress an editor, powerfully impact your readers, and give you the necessary information to use during a long and prolific writing career.

If you are already a seasoned short story writer, we hope you'll find some tidbits of information that will be helpful.

Note: While we are giving you the elements that will help you to write an award-winning short story, we cannot control a literary judge's choice nor guarantee that your short story will win an award. But we hope that you win every award you enter!

Types of Short Stories

There are many different names and categories to describe short stories.

For Fiction:

- Flash Fiction can run 100-1500 words and is a complete short story that is very brief. (It can also be called a Short Short Story.)
- Micro Fiction can run from a few words to 100 words. Hemingway wrote a famous Micro Fiction story in just six words: “For sale: Baby shoes, never worn.”
- Drabble is a story that is exactly 100 words long.
- Twitterature is a fiction story written in 280 characters or less.

For Nonfiction:

- Flash Nonfiction is similar to Flash Fiction in length but it is based on true events or factual information.
- Micro Memoir (similar length of Micro Fiction) but is a piece of autobiographical writing.
- Flash Essay is a brief essay that captures a moment or insight and, like Flash Fiction, can run 100-1500 words in length.
- An Anecdote is a brief account of a particular incident or event.
- A Vignette is a short description or account. Unlike a full-fledged story or essay, it might not have a clear beginning, middle, and end.

In this seminar, we'll study how to write a complete short story, both fiction and nonfiction, in Flash Fiction and Flash Nonfiction length, between 100-1,500 words.

The Benefits of Mastering the Art of Writing Short Stories

- **Effective Storytelling:** Studying the techniques of writing short stories is an excellent way for a writer to convey a message concisely, a skill that can also be applied to longer works. Jesus told effective, life-changing short stories, called parables, that transformed the lives of His listeners. He skillfully conveyed a strong spiritual message in each parable story.
- **Engagement:** Readers living busy lives enjoy reading short stories. A Christian writer can engage a wider audience and reach a diverse group of people with messages of faith and values by using the short story format.
- **Publication:** Many magazines seek short stories for their readers. When a writer can write a powerful short story, it opens up opportunities to get published. Some magazines use 100 words or longer articles as magazine fillers. It proves a good way to step into a new market and open the doors to future publishing acceptances.
- **Anthologies and Contests:** Many publishing companies, writing community groups, and others hold contests and invite writers to submit short stories as contributions to anthologies and to enter into contests. Winning a contest and/or contributing to an anthology holds writing prestige, an honor to include on a writing resume, and is impressive to editors who can offer future writing and publishing opportunities.

The Essential Elements of a Short Story

Every short story requires some basic essentials, including:

- **A Strong Opening:** Every short story must captivate the audience from the beginning. A strong beginning draws the reader into the world of the narrative and hooks them from the outset to engage deeper into the story.
- **A Focused Theme or Idea:** Brevity demands clarity. A short story won't accommodate sprawling subplots or multiple themes. The narrative should revolve around a singular, potent idea or emotion, something that can resonate deeply with the reader despite the story's brevity. The core concept

should be strong enough to remain in the readers' minds long after they've finished reading.

- **Concise Character Development:** In longer tales, characters can grow and evolve over many pages or chapters. In short stories, however, every action, piece of dialogue, or internal thought must serve double duty, advancing the plot while revealing something essential about the character. It's about distilling the essence of a character's motivations, conflicts, or transformations into a few touching moments or words. Similes and metaphors can help make this happen.
- **A Tight Plot:** A compelling short story follows the essential structure of beginning, middle, and end. The challenge lies in ensuring every word propels the narrative forward. Every sentence must serve a purpose, whether establishing setting, deepening character, advancing plot, or underlining the main theme. Use active instead of passive verbs to save space and decrease word count, and to keep the active flowing.
- **Show, Don't Tell:** Showing is always more potent than telling. Instead of telling the reader a character is sad, perhaps have her looking at a fading photograph with a tear in her eye. Showing creates a vivid mental picture, allowing your reader to experience deeper meanings and emotions from carefully chosen details, making the experience more meaningful.
- **A Significant & Memorable Ending:** The short story's ending should leave a lasting impression on the reader. It doesn't always have to be a surprise twist. It could be a profound realization, a lingering emotion, or a provocative question. The aim is to make sure that the story, despite its short length, remains with the reader.
- **Every Word Counts:** In a short story, the writer has no room for filler. Each word should be chosen carefully for maximum impact. The connotations, sounds, and rhythm of words becomes crucial. Words must do their equal share of the work or they cannot stay in the story. This is where intense rewriting and reshaping come in.
- **Reread and Edit:** Editing words is where the magic happens in a short story. Precise and intentional refining, cutting, and polishing will transform a good

short story into a powerful and memorable story. Each edit should make the narrative sharper and more compelling.

Okay, those are the basics of short story writing. Now, let's look at exactly how each element works using lots of great examples, practical tips, and a few writing secrets.

The Master Storyteller

I never talk about short story writing without turning to Jesus' well-crafted, earth-shattering, life-transforming stories. His basic storytelling elements are as contemporary in our modern culture as they were more than 2,000 years ago.

When we study the norms and cultures of the first century, reading the parable as it was heard by Jesus' listeners, we are astounded by each parable's impact. In fact, His listeners were left open-mouthed, flabbergasted by Jesus' short stories. If only we could time-travel back to the first century, hear Jesus' words as they flowed from His mouth, and watch the horrified, shocked expressions on the listeners' faces would we feel the full brute force of His culturally unconventional words.

Before we continue, please press pause, take a breather and grab a Bible, and carefully read "The Parable of the Prodigal Son" (found in Luke 15:11-32) as if reading it for the first time. Then press play and let's dissect Jesus' short story (called a parable) and witness His unique storytelling power.

Know that this short story has been cherished throughout generations for its depth, relatability, and powerful message.

- **Strong Opening:** The short story starts with a younger rebellious son demanding his inheritance prematurely. This thoughtless and unexpected request sets the stage, grabbing the listener's attention. The son's selfish request and the father's compliance introduce immediate conflict and tension. This was just not done in proper Jewish homes. The son's inconsiderate actions labeled him an outcast in his Jewish community, a label not easily forgiven.

- The Lesson: Jesus starts the short story with a situation that introduces conflict and a scenario that evokes curiosity, if not anger and appalment, immediately engaging the reader.
- Focused Theme or Idea: The primary theme of this short story revolves around forgiveness, redemption, and the father's boundless love. Despite the story's brevity, these themes are explored with depth and clarity.
 - The Lesson: A strong central theme anchors the story, giving it purpose and resonating with the reader.
- Concise Character Development: The three main characters are the father, the prodigal son, and the elder son, and each are distinctly developed. The prodigal son's recklessness, repentance, and redemption; the father's unwavering and welcoming love and forgiveness; and the elder son's righteousness and jealousy are all clearly depicted.
 - The Lesson: Each character in the short story should have a clear role and emotional arc (the development or resolution of the narrative or principal theme).
- Tight Plot: The short story unfolds logically—the son's departure, reckless living, his downfall, repentance, return, and the father's reaction. There's also a subplot with the elder son's resentment. Despite the story's short length, it has a complete and compelling arc.
 - The Lesson: A well-structured narrative ensures clarity, engagement, and emotional payoff.
- Show, Don't Tell: The short story is rich in imagery and action: the wasteful living of the younger son, the dire situation of feeding pigs, the father spotting the son from a distance and running to him, and the celebration with a fattened calf. These details powerfully convey the story's emotions without direct description and explanation.
 - The Lesson: Use vivid imagery and action to convey emotion and theme, allowing readers to draw insights themselves.

- Significant & Memorable Ending: The short story concludes with the father’s loving assurance to the elder son. It brings together the story’s themes and leaves the audience reflecting on the nature of grace, jealousy, and family bonds.
 - The Lesson: End with a moment that summaries the story’s theme and leaves a lasting impact.
- Every Word Counts: The short story is concise. Every element, from the initial demand for the inheritance money to the father’s compassion and the elder son’s resentment, serves to illustrate the themes of forgiveness and unconditional love.
 - The Lesson: Be economical with words, ensuring each one contributes to character, plot, or theme.
- Reread and Edit: While we don’t have “drafts” of Jesus’ parables, it’s evident that they were crafted with intention and precision, and they were passed down meticulously to teach future generations.
 - The Lesson: Refine the short story to ensure clarity, impact, and purpose.

By studying “The Prodigal Son,” we can glean essential storytelling techniques that create powerful, enduring narratives. The elements all work together to make this short story timeless and universally impactful.

Now, let’s have some eye-opening fun! The short story of “The Prodigal Son” is written in third-person voice. While the third-person voice works well in this context, what might happen if we changed the third-person voice to first-person voice? Since many magazine contests ask for first-person stories, let’s write this short story from three different perspectives, allowing the father, younger son, and older son to tell his short story using first-person voice.

First-Person Voice: The Older Brother's Perspective

“From as early as I can remember, my younger brother always had a spark of rebellion in him. I’d see it in his eyes when Father asked him to do chores, or when he’d sneak off with friends instead of tending to our family’s fields. I, on the other hand, always stuck by Father’s side, diligently attending to every responsibility.

“One morning, my brother approached Father with an audacious request: his share of our inheritance. The audacity! Normally, this would be given after the passing of our father, but he wanted it now. I expected anger, disappointment, perhaps a stern refusal. But Father, always soft with him, agreed, and my brother departed with a purse heavy with gold, a heart light of responsibility, and a spirit anticipating adventure.

“The months that followed were peaceful. I would be lying if I said I didn’t enjoy the tranquility and the absence of his constant mischief. But as the sun rose and set, a weight of worry for my brother grew in Father’s eyes. Where was he? Was he safe? What was he doing?

“Word reached us that he had squandered everything in a distant city, living wildly and wickedly without a thought for tomorrow. I can’t say I was surprised, but seeing Father’s heartache was hard to bear. Then, the famine hit, and we heard tales of my brother’s destitution. Part of me thought, ‘He deserves to learn his lesson.’ But another part, a part I didn’t want to acknowledge, hoped for his safe return.

“One fateful evening, while I was working in the fields, a familiar figure appeared on the horizon. It was him, my brother, looking ragged, thin, and defeated. Before I could process my feelings, Father ran past me, tears in his eyes, wrapping my brother in a warm embrace. My emotions were a tangle of relief, resentment, and confusion.

“Father ordered a grand feast in celebration of his return, slaughtering our fattest calf. I stood at a distance, grappling with bitterness. When Father approached me, I let my feelings be known, ‘All these years, I’ve been by your side, and not once did you celebrate my loyalty. And now, he returns after wasting everything, and you celebrate?’

“Father, with tears still in his eyes, gently replied, ‘Son, you’ve always been with me, and everything I have is yours. But we had to celebrate because your brother was lost and now, he’s found. He was dead, and now, he’s alive.’

“Though it took time, I began to understand. This wasn’t just about loyalty or inheritance; it was about love, forgiveness, and the joy of a family being whole again. And as the music played and the laughter echoed, I took my first steps towards my brother and my father, towards understanding and reconciliation.”

Now let’s listen to the first-person account in a short story written by the younger brother.

First-Person Voice: The Younger Brother’s Perspective

“Ever since I was young, I was restless. While my elder brother diligently worked alongside our father, I daydreamed of distant lands and adventures. One day, overtaken by youthful audacity, I asked Father for my share of the inheritance ahead of time. To my surprise, he agreed. With a weighty purse and dreams of freedom, I journeyed to far-off cities.

“For a while, life was a whirlwind of pleasures and luxuries. The world seemed boundless, and I reveled in its offerings. But as the gold in my purse dwindled, so did the novelty of my adventures. Then, a harsh famine struck, and I found myself destitute, reduced to feeding pigs while battling my own hunger. A Jewish boy feeding unclean pigs! The shameful low point of my life became a moment of clarity. I remembered the warmth of my home, my father’s kindness, and even the stern face of my elder brother.

“Swallowing my pride, I decided to return, ready to plead for a mere servant’s position. But as I approached our home, before I could even rehearse my apology, Father ran towards me. His eyes, brimming with tears, held no condemnation, only relief. He embraced me, and it felt like the weight of my mistakes melted away.

“Father wasted no time. He ordered a feast, saying his lost son had returned. As the celebrations began, I spotted my elder brother at a distance, his face a storm of mixed emotions. I couldn’t blame him. He’d been the loyal one, the ‘good son,’ and here I was being celebrated after squandering everything.

“Later, I overheard him express his frustrations to Father. And Father, ever wise, responded, ‘You’ve always been with me, and all I have is yours. But today is special. Your brother was lost, and now he’s found.’

“I approached my brother, our eyes meeting. In his gaze, I saw the journey from bitterness to understanding, mirroring my journey from recklessness to redemption. We had both come home in our own ways, learning lessons of love, forgiveness, and the bonds of family.”

Now, let’s put the short story in the first-person voice of the loving father.

First-Person Voice: The Loving Father’s Perspective

“Throughout my life, I’ve watched over my two sons: the elder, steady and dutiful, and the younger, spirited and restless. One fateful day, the younger approached me, his eyes ablaze with wanderlust. He asked for his inheritance early, eager to explore the world. Though it pained me, I granted his wish, hoping experience would teach him.

“With a heavy heart, I watched him leave, his silhouette growing smaller against the vast horizon. Days turned to months. The elder son stood by my side, our bond growing stronger, yet a part of me perpetually yearned for the younger’s return. Then, rumors circulated: my son had squandered his fortune, now impoverished in a land hit by famine.

“One evening, while gazing at the horizon, a familiar figure slowly emerged. My heart recognized him before my eyes did. Overwhelmed with joy, I ran, embracing my lost son who had finally come home. I could sense his remorse, his shattered pride. But none of that mattered. My boy was back.

“Without hesitation, I ordered a grand celebration feast. As the preparations unfolded, I noticed my elder son’s distant demeanor. When confronted, he voiced his feelings, ‘All these years, I’ve been loyal. And he gets a feast after wasting everything?’

“Drawing him close, I said, ‘Son, you’ve always been with me, and everything I have is yours. But we must celebrate. Your brother was lost, and now he’s found.’

“As the night wore on, I watched my two sons: one journeying from resentment to understanding, the other from recklessness to redemption. Their paths, though different, led them both back home. And as a father, witnessing these journeys, the lessons of love, forgiveness, and family became clearer than ever.”

Questions to Consider:

General Reflection: How did your emotional response to the short story change when shifting from third-person to first-person perspective? In what ways did each perspective affect your understanding or perception of the story’s events and characters?

Third-Person Perspective: How does the third person voice lend itself to an objective telling of the story? In what ways does the third person narrative help or hinder your connection to the characters?

First Person – The Prodigal Son: How does experiencing the short story from the prodigal son’s perspective change your feelings towards him? In what ways did the first-person narrative provide insight into the prodigal son’s motivations, emotions, and experiences that weren’t apparent in the third person version?

First Person – The Father: What new emotions or insights emerge when viewing the short story through the father’s eyes? Why? How does the father’s perspective affect your understanding of unconditional love and forgiveness? Were there moments in the first-person narrative where you felt closer to or more distant from the father’s emotions compared to the third-person narrative?

First Person – The Elder Brother: What insights can be gleaned about feelings of jealousy, self-righteousness, or entitlement from this first-person perspective? How

might this perspective help readers understand and empathize with the elder brother's struggles?

The Beauty of Writing in First-Person Voice

I've always found that writing in the first-person voice offers a unique depth and intimacy to storytelling that can be particularly potent when writing short stories.

Whenever possible, I suggest that writers use a first-person voice in their short stories. Why?

- **Immediate Connection:** First-person narratives create an immediate and personal connection between the character and the reader. Could you not feel the father's pain as he talked about his sons? Could you not feel the older brother's resentment and the younger son's wanderlust and later his brokenness? By sharing their innermost thoughts, feelings, and experiences directly, the character becomes a confidante, allowing readers to step directly into their shoes. This can foster empathy and emotional investment, crucial for keeping readers engaged.
- **Intimacy and Depth:** Through first-person narration, we are privy to the character's internal monologue. Their hopes, fears, biases, and dreams are laid bare, offering profound insights into their hearts and minds. This depth can make characters more relatable and multi-dimensional.

- **Authentic Voice:** First-person narratives often possess a distinctive and authentic voice. This voice, flavored by the character's background, experiences, and idiosyncrasies, can make the short story feel original and fresh.
- **Limited Perspective as a Strength:** The restricted viewpoint of a first-person narrator can be a powerful tool. The reader only knows what the narrator knows, creating opportunities for suspense, dramatic irony, or plot twists. This limited scope can make the unfolding of events more intriguing.
- **Immediacy of Experience:** First-person narratives often present events as they are happening, rather than being recollected. This sense of immediacy can make the short story feel urgent, pulling readers into the moment. Will the father, gazing each night upon the path, ever see his younger son again? Will the son come home? Will the younger brother wake up, go home, and apologize to the father? Or will he die of starvation in the pig pens? Will the older son, who was also given his share of the father's inheritance, stay at home taking care of the farm and his father or will he, too, venture out into the far country? The immediacy of experience puts the reader on the edge of his seat, filled with questions, and waiting to find out how the short story will end. That's the power of using the first-person voice.

For a short story to be considered award-winning, it must resonate, provoke thought and emotions, and showcase craftsmanship. First-person narratives, with their potential for depth and originality, can be a potent vehicle to achieve this.

Questions to Consider:

Understanding the First-Person Voice: Ponder the intimacy, immediacy, and relatability of the first-person voice.

Explain how it allows readers to experience events and emotions directly through the narrator's perspective.

Using the Parable as a Guide:

Setting the Scene: Using the parable of "The Prodigal Son" in Luke 15:11-32, illustrate the importance of introducing conflict or a scenario early on to engage readers.

Character Depth: Delve into “The Good Samaritan” parable in Luke 10:25-37. Imagine it told from the perspective of the injured man. How would he describe his feelings about those who passed him and the surprise of the Samaritan’s kindness.

Emotion and Plot: Using “The Parable of the Sower” in Matthew 13, discuss how one might write a personal journey of faith, exploring stages of doubt, superficial belief, distraction, and finally, genuine understanding, all from a first-person perspective.

Please allow me to say more about one important element that needs more attention.

The Short Story's Focused Theme or Idea

A good short story, like Jesus' parables, should make one focused point, something that the short story will drive home to the reader, making it memorable and life-changing in some way.

When I write a short story, I write the one main focus, the primary point of the story, on an index card and tape it to the side of my computer. While I write, I make sure that everything I include will relate in some significant way to the main focus in front of me. A short story that tries to make more than one point will quickly lose its focus, becoming vague, wandering through rabbit fields, and leaving the reader confused and disappointed.

Let's take a closer look at some of the parables Jesus told to better understand the importance of keeping the main point of the short story in clear focus. While keeping true to the main point, a writer must also know his audience, his readers, and his listeners for they show how the short story resonates to those who receive the message. Jesus did that well as we can see in the examples below.

- “The Parable of the Virgins” (Matthew 25)
 - Main Point: Be prepared and vigilant because the time of the Lord's return is uncertain.
 - Resonance: Many in the audience lived in a culture where weddings were significant, often marked by processions and festivities. Jesus uses the concept of a delayed bridegroom and unprepared virgins to emphasize the importance of being spiritually ready, making the message tangible.
- “The Parable of the Wedding Banquet” (Matthew 22)
 - Main Point: God invites everyone to partake in His kingdom, but not everyone responds. Many make excuses, while others are not properly prepared.

- Resonance: Jesus draws on the custom of wedding feasts and the expectations of an RSVP. By depicting those who refuse or neglect the invitation, He underscores the consequences of disregarding God's call.
- "The Parable of the Unforgiving Servant" (Matthew 18)
 - Main Point: Since God has forgiven our vast debts, we should likewise forgive others.
 - Resonance: By illustrating the stark difference between the immense debt forgiven by the king and the small debt the servant refuses to forgive, Jesus conveys the magnitude of God's mercy and the expectation of our reciprocal mercy.
- "The Parable of the Sower" (Matthew 13)
 - Main Point: The reception of God's word varies based on the condition of one's heart.
 - Resonance: In a farming society, listeners would understand the lack of consistency of soil quality. Jesus uses this familiar image to convey how spiritual receptiveness determines the fruitfulness of God's message.
- "The Parable of the Lost Sheep" (Luke 15)
 - Main Point: God rejoices over every sinner who repents; every individual is valuable in God's eyes.
 - Resonance: The imagery of a shepherd leaving the 99 to search for one lost sheep underlined the immense love and concern God has for each individual, challenging the self-righteousness of the religious leaders.

Jesus skillfully designed each parable to communicate profound truths in a relatable manner, using everyday scenarios to convey spiritual principles. He masterfully

tapped into the lived experiences and cultural norms of His listeners to impart lessons through short stories that still resonate today.

Questions to Consider:

Using the elements that we've studied, those that make a powerful short story, read Jesus' "Parable of the Good Samaritan," found in Luke 10:25-37 and "The Parable of the Sower," found in Matthew 13:1-9. Using this guide, dissect the two stories and ponder how Jesus crafted each parable to make a profound impact on His listeners.

Strong Opening

Focused Theme or Idea

Concise Character Development

Tight Plot

Show, Don't Tell

Significant and Memorable Ending

Every Word Counts

Reread and Edit

The Magical Elements Within a Short Story That Produce Timeless Reader Appeal

We've seen how Jesus' parables communicate timeless truths in powerful ways that still transform lives more than 2,000 years later.

Let's look at how one short story writer, O. Henry, wrote a profound and deep short story that has continued to touch the hearts of readers since its publication in 1905: "The Gift of the Magi." (Please press pause and read this short story found here: <https://www.owleyes.org/text/gift-magi/read/the-gift-of-the-magi.>)

While this original short story is 2,000 words in length, much longer than the short stories we are concentrating on in this seminar, this classic tale contains elements that can greatly help the short story writer.

Let's look at the reasons why this beloved and much-told short story has endured for more than a century.

- **Theme of Sacrifice and Love:** At the heart of this short story is the idea of sacrifice in the name of love. Both Della and Jim willingly part with their most prized possessions to buy gifts for each other, demonstrating that their love is more valuable than material objects. This powerful theme resonates

universally, appealing to the innate human understanding of selfless love and the paradoxical truth that sometimes in losing, we gain even more.

- **Surprise Ending:** O. Henry was known for his twist endings. The irony that Della sells her hair to buy a chain for Jim's watch, while Jim sells his watch to buy combs for Della's hair, is powerful. This unexpected twist not only provides a shock to the reader but also amplifies the story's message about the depth of the characters' love and sacrifice.
- **Relatable Characters:** Della and Jim are not wealthy or extraordinary in any obvious way. They are everyday people facing financial difficulties, making their struggles relatable. Their love and sacrifice become even more admirable because they are ordinary people making extraordinary choices.
- **Economic Use of Language:** O. Henry's concise and vivid prose paints a vibrant picture of the characters, their environment, and their emotions in a short space, making every word count. This economy of language is essential for short stories and adds to the story's impact.
- **Symbolism:** The two main items in the story—the hair and the watch—serve as powerful symbols. Della's hair and Jim's watch represent their pride, youth, and identity. The acts of selling these items underscores the magnitudes of their sacrifice.
- **Universal and Timeless Message:** The core message—that love is more valuable than material possessions and that true worth is determined by our actions and sacrifices rather than our belongings—is universal and timeless. It ensures the story's relevance across different cultures and eras, and it lingers in the reader's heart and mind.

Questions to Consider:

Theme Exploration: How does O. Henry explore the theme of sacrifice in the story? Are there real-life parallels you can think of?

Character Analysis: How are Della and Jim portrayed in the story? What do their actions tell us about their character and their relationship?

Role of Material Possessions: How does the short story challenge conventional ideas about the value of material possessions?

Narrative Techniques: How does O. Henry utilize irony in the story? What impact does the twist ending have on the reader's interpretation of the story?

Symbolism: Ponder the symbolic significance of Della's hair and Jim's watch. What might they represent?

Moral Reflection: Do you believe Della and Jim made wise decisions? Why or why not?

Contextual Exploration: How might the socio-economic context of the time influence the characters' choices and the narrative's direction?

Personal Reflection: Have you ever made a sacrifice for someone you love? How did it make you feel, and how does it compare to the sacrifices made by Della and Jim?

Story's Legacy: Why do you think this short story has remained a beloved and frequently told short story for over a century?

Della's First-Person Perspective: The Cost of Love

Before we leave O. Henry's Della and Jim, I want to write briefly in each person's first-person perspective. Let's see what we learn from Della as she tells her story in her own voice.

"Every time I counted the money, it was always \$1.87. It was all I had for Jim's Christmas gift. My reflection stared back, long hair cascading like a curtain. It was my pride, but love demanded more. At the hairdresser's, my heart raced as my hair was cut and sold for \$20. With it, I found the perfect platinum chain for Jim's prized pocket watch.

"When I returned home, I tried to style my shortened hair, hoping Jim wouldn't be too shocked. But when he walked in, his face was pale. Eagerly, I revealed the chain, explaining my sacrifice. He smiled gently and, reaching into his pocket, pulled out a beautiful set of combs for my long hair. We laughed and held each other, realizing that our love was the real treasure."

Let's break down briefly this story told from Della's perspective.

- The introduction sets the stage of her financial predicament and the upcoming occasion.

- Her reflection highlights her hair's importance, foreshadowing the sacrifice.
- The decision to sell her hair shows her dedication to getting Jim a worthy gift.
- The hairdressing scene emphasizes the magnitude of her sacrifice.
- Buying the chain connects to Jim's most treasured possession.
- Her nervous anticipation of Jim's reaction showcases her love and worry.
- The gift exchange becomes the story's climax, highlight the story's irony.
- The conclusion emphasizes the main theme: love surpasses material gifts.

Jim's First-Person Perspective: A Priceless Exchange

Now, let's see what we learn from Jim as he tells his story in his own voice.

"My pocket watch had been with me since my father's time. It was my most treasured item. But with Christmas approaching and only a few dollars to spare, I knew what I had to do. I sold the watch, knowing that the money would let me buy something special for Della: a set of beautiful combs she'd admired for her long, gorgeous hair.

"I could hardly wait to see her face light up. But when I walked in, something seemed off. Her hair...it was gone. Before I could process it, she handed me a gift—a chain for my watch. The irony wasn't lost on us. We embraced, realizing our gifts were mere symbols of the greater gift we shared: our love.

Let's break down briefly this story told from Jim's perspective.

- The introduction provides context about the watch, establishing its value to Jim.
- The upcoming Christmas sets the stage for his sacrifice.

- Selling the watch showcases his love and determination.
- Buying the combs introduces the gift meant for Della, emphasizing her importance to him.
- His anticipation sets up the story's tension.
- His shock at seeing Della's hair cut reinforces the irony and mutual sacrifice.
- The gift exchange is the climax, underscoring the story's central theme.
- The conclusion reiterates the overarching theme of love surpassing material value.

When we study O. Henry's short story "The Gift of the Magi" we learn valuable lessons as writers, including:

- **Economy of Language:** Every word should serve a purpose. O. Henry's precise word choices ensure that every detail propels the story forward. In a short short story, there's little room for verbosity, so efficiency in language is key to maintain pacing and engagement.
- **Effective Use of Irony:** Irony can deliver a powerful punch at the story's conclusion. The twist ending, where each character sacrifices something valuable for the other, only to render each other's gifts useless, is a classic example of situational irony. This adds depth to the short story and leaves a lasting impression on the reader.
- **Focused Theme:** Here again, we see that the short story holds a core theme or message, one of selfless love and sacrifice, allowing for a concise short story that delivers a strong message.
- **Deep Characterization:** In limited space, the write shows depth of character through actions and decisions, but through lengthy exposition, but through their actions. This technique draws readers into the short story and makes them care about the characters.

- **Setting and Atmosphere:** Even with a few words, a vivid setting and atmosphere can be established. O. Henry paints a clear picture of the couple's humble living conditions, adding to the gravity of their sacrifices. This setting choice enhances the short story's emotional weight.
- **Emotional Impact:** The writer's aim was to evoke a strong emotional response. By focusing on universal themes and genuine human emotions, short short stories can leave a profound impact on readers.

The Magic of Using Similes and Metaphors in Short Stories

There are six major reasons that great writers use and depend on including similes and metaphors in their short stories.

- **Depth in Brevity:** In a short story, every word must count. Similes and metaphors allow a writer to convey complex ideas, emotions, or scenarios in a succinct manner, adding depth without increasing word count. Instead of a long description of a character's serenity in prayer, for instance, write, "In prayer, her spirit was like a still pond, untouched by the winds of worry." That communicates with rich depth and beauty this person's prayer.
- **Emotional Connection:** Figurative language can evoke powerful emotional responses, creating a deeper connection between the reader and the story. For example, to depict God's encompassing love, one could write, "God's love enveloped her like the warmth of a sun-drenched morning."
- **Memorable Imagery:** Visual cues stick in the reader's mind. Similes and metaphors create vivid mental images that can make a short story more memorable. For instance, to portray a spiritual renewal, "His soul blossomed like a rose after a season of drought."
- **Enhance Themes:** Christian themes, such as redemption, grace, sacrifice, etc., can be underscored using similes and metaphors. For example, if tackling the theme of redemption, you could write, "His life, once a tattered fabric, was now being woven anew, each thread gleaming with grace."

- **Universal Understanding:** Similes and metaphors draw comparisons to commonly understood concepts, making abstract or unfamiliar ideas more accessible. For example, when discussing faith, you could write, “Her faith was the anchor, keeping her grounded amidst life’s turbulent seas.”
- **Echo Scriptural Patterns:** The Bible is rich with metaphorical language. Emulating this can evoke a sense of scriptural understanding and reverence. For example, in describing Christ’s sacrifice, one could write, “Just as a lamb is led to the slaughter, He bore our sins, a beacon of selfless love.”

Let’s look at some good examples of vivid similes to describe various intense emotions and experiences:

- **A Dark Scary Fearful Night:** “The night was as dark and foreboding as a pitch-black cave, where every rustle of leaves sounded like the whispers of lurking ghosts.”
- **The Excitement of a Mother When Her First Baby Is Born:** “As she cradled her newborn in her arms, her heart danced with joy like a thousand fireflies lighting up a summer night.”
- **The Thrill of a Beautiful Wedding Ceremony:** “Their wedding ceremony was a spectacle of love, with the bride’s smile as radiant as the sun breaking through stormy clouds, and the groom’s eyes shining like stars in a moonless sky.”
- **The Excitement of a Child Losing His First Tooth:** “His excitement at losing his first tooth was like a volcano about to erupt, with each wiggle of that tiny tooth feeling as thrilling as a rollercoaster ride.”
- **A Couple Who Has Just Received a Yes to Adopting a Baby:** “When they received the news that they could adopt a baby, their hearts leaped for joy, like two birds taking flight, soaring high above the clouds.”
- **Feeling the Loss of a Beloved Grandmother to Death:** “The pain of losing his grandmother was like a storm that had ravaged the landscape of his heart, leaving behind a desolate, empty field where once vibrant flowers had bloomed.”

- Intense Emotions People Might Experience (General):
 - Her anger was a wildfire, consuming everything in its path, leaving only ashes of regret in its wake.”
 - “His anxiety felt like an anchor, pulling him deeper into the sea of uncertainty.”
 - “The anticipation in the room was palpable, like the charged air before a thunderstorm.”
 - “Grief weighted on her soul like a boulder, making every step forward an uphill climb.”
 - “Their love was a timeless as the stars, burning brightly through the darkest of nights.”

For the Christian writer, similes and metaphors aren’t just literary devices. They are bridges that connect the reader’s heart and mind to profound spiritual truths. By using them wisely, the writer can craft a short story that not only entertains but also enlightens, drawing the reader closer to the themes central to the Christian faith.

Three Reasons Why We “Show, Don’t Tell” in Short Stories

“Show, don’t tell” is a fundamental writing principle that encourages writers to convey characters’ emotions, settings, and actions through descriptive details and actions rather than explicit exposition. The idea is to immerse readers in a scene, letting them deduce what’s happening or how a character feels based on context and subtle cues, rather than spelling it out.

Here are three reasons we “show” and “don’t tell” in our short stories:

- **Engagement:** It encourages active reading and deep engagement with the text, as readers infer meaning from the context.
- **Vivid Imagery:** It paints a clearer, more vibrant picture in the reader’s mind.

- Subtlety: It respects the reader’s intelligence and allows for fine distinction and subtext.

Let me give you some brief examples.

- Telling: Sarah was angry.
 - Showing: Sarah’s face turned crimson. Her hands clenched into fists, and she took a deep, trembling breath.
- Telling: The forest was peaceful.
 - Showing: Birds sang their melodies from the treetops, sunlight dappled the forest floor through the leaves, and the distant sound of a bubbling brook echoed softly.
- Telling: He was scared of the storm.
 - Showing: Every time lightning flashed, he flinched, pulling the blankets tighter around him. The roar of thunder made his heart race.
- Telling: The cake was delicious.
 - Showing: With every bite, flavors of rich chocolate, tangy raspberries, and sweet cream burst on her tongue. She closed her eyes, savoring the symphony of tastes.
- Telling: The village was old.
 - Showing: Cobbled streets, worn smooth by time, wound between ancient stone houses with moss-covered roofs. The walls told stories of centuries past in their faded murals and cracks.

Here are some clever ways to implement “show, don’t tell”:

- Use Strong Verbs: Instead of saying “He placed the book down angrily,” say “He slammed the book onto the table.”

- Incorporate the Five Senses: Describe sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and textures to create a vivid scene. Let's look at this suggestion in more detail. Here are some examples of how to do this with the senses:
 - Sight: Use vivid and varied visual descriptors.
 - Original: "The garden was beautiful."
 - Enhanced: "The garden burst into a kaleidoscope of colors as delicate petals of crimson roses, sunny marigolds, and soft lavender waltzed in the gentle breeze."
 - Sound: Create an auditory atmosphere with diverse and specific sounds.
 - Original: "Birds were singing."
 - Enhanced: "The symphony of warbling robins and cooing doves intertwined, producing a melodic harmony that whispered through the lush treetops."
- Smell: Incorporate a range of scents to evoke specific memories or feelings.
 - Original: "The bakery smelled good."
 - Enhanced: "The bakery, enveloped in the intoxicating aroma of freshly baked sourdough, mingles sweetly with the subtle hint of cinnamon and melted chocolate."
- Taste: Use rich and diverse flavors to invoke a tactile sense of experience.
 - Original: "The soup was delicious."
 - Enhanced: "The soup cascaded over the palate with a rich explosion of tangy tomatoes, creamy coconut milk, and a daring dash of spicy chili, culminating in a soul-warming culinary embrace."

- Touch/Texture: Describe varied textures to provide a tangible feel to the scene.
 - Original: “The kitten was soft.”
 - Enhanced: “The kitten’s fur was a downy blanket of pure bliss, a tender caress against the skin, enticing one into a world where every single strand whispered softness.”
- Use Dialogue: Through the characters’ words and the tone of their conversations, you can convey a lot about emotions, relationships, and settings. Here is an example about how to use dialogue to demonstrate emotion.
 - “Do you even care about how I feel?” Emily’s voice trembled, barely above a whisper.
 - “David sighed, looking away. ‘Emily, it’s not that simple.’”

Here, the dialogue conveys emotion—Emily’s vulnerability and David’s avoidance or possible frustration. The reader senses the tension and emotional distance between the two characters without it being directly stated.

- Pay Attention to Body Language: A character’s posture, gestures, and facial expressions can reveal much about their feelings and intentions. Let’s look at some examples where body language is shown and not simply told.
 - Emotion: Disappointment:
 - Tell: “George was disappointed with the news.”
 - Show: “George’s shoulders sagged, the anticipation in his eyes dimming into a dull ache. He exhaled a slow, heavy breath, his excitement seeping out of him, leaving him deflated.”
 - Emotion: Curiosity:
 - Tell: “Mia was curious about the old book.”

- Show: “Mia’s fingers traced the worn edges of the ancient book, her brow furrowing in wonder. She bit her lower lip, eyes flickering with a bright spark as she cautiously flipped open the dusty cover.”
- Emotion: Jealousy:
 - Tell: “Alex was jealous of his brother.”
 - Show: “Alex’s smile stiffened as praises showered over his brother. His grip tightened around the glass, eyes darkening, while his applause was a few beats slower and lacked the genuine cheer that filled the room.”

These examples use physical expressions, actions, and gestures to reveal characters’ emotions and states of mind, allowing readers to infer these feelings without explicitly being told what the characters are experiencing.

While “show, don’t tell” is a crucial tool in a writer’s arsenal, there are times when concise telling can be effective, especially when relaying background information or speeding up the pace. Like all writing rules, it’s essential to know when to use it and when to bend it.

Conveying Emotions in a Short Story

Conveying emotion effectively in a short story requires precision. Due to the brevity, each word must count. Here are some methods to convey emotion, followed by an example:

- Specific, Vivid Imagery: Use images that evoke emotion.
 - Example: Instead of “She looked sad,” write “A tear clung to the edge of her eyelid, refracting the dim light of the room.”
- Physical Reactions: Describe the physical manifestations of emotions.

- Example: Instead of “He was nervous,” write “A bead of sweat trailed down his temple. His fingers twitched at his sides.”
- Internal Thoughts: Give readers a glimpse into the character’s mind.
 - Example: “What if they laugh at me?” or “I can’t believe he’s really gone.”
- Use of Dialogue: The way characters speak can convey their feelings.
 - Example: Instead of “She was annoyed,” use dialogue like, “Could you just, for once, listen?”
- Setting and Atmosphere: The environment can mirror a character’s emotions.
 - Example: Instead of “She felt lonely,” describe the setting: “The room, vast and empty, echoed back her every step, a constant reminder of her solitude.”
- Symbolism: Use objects or actions as symbols for deeper emotions.
 - Example: A wilting flower can symbolize lost love or fleeting time.
- Concise, Strong Word Choice: In a short story, each word should be impactful.
 - Example: Instead of “She felt a sort of sadness,” use “Melancholy gripped her.”
- Body Language: Show emotions through actions and gestures.
 - Example: Instead of “He was worried,” write “His gaze darted around the room, lips pressed into a thin line.”
- Contrast: Use comparison to highlight emotions. Example: “Around her, everyone celebrated, but her heart remained a silent drum.”

- **Sensory Details:** Describe what the character hears, sees, tastes, touches, and smells.
 - **Example:** Instead of “He missed home,” describe “The scent of fresh-baked bread, so much like his mother’s kitchen, tugged at his heartstrings.”

Let me give you an example of how emotions can be conveyed through setting, internal thoughts, sensory details, and contrast, painting a vivid picture of a young woman’s grief and eventual comfort. Look at how this is done using only 400 words.

“The rain outside tapped incessantly against the window, each drop a reminder of the world outside—a world Lucy felt disconnected from. She clutched the old photograph, its edges crumpled from time and touch. Her grandmother’s face, once lively and laughing, now seemed to gaze at Lucy with a subtle sadness. ‘Why’d you leave me here alone?’ Lucy whispered, her voice barely audible.

“Her fingers traced the contours of the face she missed so dearly. The room, filled with shadows, felt cavernous, amplifying her solitude. A gust of wind rattled the windows, mirroring the turmoil inside her heart. She could hear the muffled laughter of children playing in puddles, their joy a stark contrast to the weight in her chest.

“Suddenly, a soft meow interrupted her thoughts. Mr. Whiskers, her grandmother’s old cat, nudged his head against her arm. His purring was a gentle reminder that, perhaps, she wasn’t entirely alone.”

Questions to Consider:

For a fun exercise, write the third-person short story above with a personal first-person voice. Then ponder the difference.

Using Active Verbs Instead of Passive Verbs in Your Short Story

Using active verbs in a short story can make your writing more engaging, concise, and vivid for these three reasons:

- **Clarity:** Active verbs often make it clearer who or what is performing the action, which is crucial in a short story where you have limited space to convey information. Passive constructions can sometimes obscure the subject.
 - Passive: “The cake was eaten by John.”
 - Active: “John ate the cake.”
- **Engagement:** Active verbs create a sense of immediacy and involvement, drawing readers into the action. This is especially important in a short story where you need to grab the reader’s attention quickly.
 - Passive: “The door was opened by Sarah, and then a scream was heard.”
 - Active: “Sarah opened the door, and a scream pierced the air.”
- **Conciseness:** Active verbs often require fewer words to convey the same information, which is vital when working with a tight word limit.
 - Passive: “The decision to leave the town was made by him.”
 - Active: “He decided to leave the town.”

In a short story, every word matters, so using active verbs can help you convey your ideas more effectively, save space, and make your writing more engaging for the reader.

The Importance of Using Universal Themes

While short stories are brief, when we use universal themes and emotions, our stories resonate with a broad audience. This allows readers to see themselves in the story, regardless of its setting or characters. Let me give you some examples of the type of topics that touch hearts universally:

- **Love and Sacrifice:** People across all cultures have experienced, valued, and recognized the profound emotional impact of loving someone or something enough to make personal sacrifices. True love often entails a willingness to prioritize the well-being of happiness of a loved one, even at personal cost.
- **The Struggle for Identity:** The quest to understand oneself, navigate personal and societal expectations, and assert one's individuality is a fundamental human experience.
- **Greed and Redemption:** The internal conflict between self-interest and ethical correction is a pervasive human struggle.
- **The Power of Friendship:** Interpersonal connections, support, and the ability to overcome obstacles through collective effort and emotional bonds are experiences and values understood and cherished across all cultures.
- **Coping with Loss:** The experience of losing someone or something significant and the journey through grief and recovery are intrinsic to the human condition.
- **Hope and Perseverance:** Individuals from all walks of life can relate to facing adversity and clinging to hope as a fundamental, shared human experience.
- **Family and Belonging:** The innate human desire is to be accepted, loved, and connected within a family or community.

- **Conflict and Resolution:** The existence of disputes, whether internal or external, and the journey towards their resolution, reconciliation, or acceptance is inherent to all human relationships.
- **Quest for Truth:** The intrinsic human pursuit of understanding, uncovering realities, and deciphering the enigma of existence transcends cultural, temporal, and individual human differences.
- **Fear and Courage:** All people experience fear and must occasionally summon courage to face challenges.
- **Power and Corruption:** The dynamics and moral implications of wielding power, along with the potential for its misuse, are seen across diverse political, social, and personal contexts worldwide.
- **Forgiveness:** The internal and external journeys toward forgiving oneself or others, and the associated emotional complexities, are inherent to all human relationships.
- **Injustice and Rebellion:** The struggle against unfairness and the drive to seek justice are timeless and always present in human societies throughout history.

Thirteen things happen when we write short stories that use common universal themes. Let's look at each.

- **Relatability:** Universal themes make short stories relatable to a wide range of readers, as they touch upon experiences, emotions, or dilemmas that are commonly shared among people.
- **Timelessness:** Short stories that explore universal themes tend to possess a timeless quality, often remaining relevant and impactful across different eras and societies.
- **Cross-Cultural Appeal:** Such themes have the power to bridge cultural gaps and communicate messages that are understandable and resonant with people from various cultural backgrounds.

- **Emotional Resonance:** Engaging with fundamental human experiences and emotions allows writers to evoke strong emotional responses and create a lasting impact on their readers.
- **Versatility:** Universal themes can be explored in many ways across various genres, settings, and character types, providing writers with flexible yet potent thematic material.
- **Human Connection:** By exploring experiences that are intrinsic to the human condition, writers can foster a sense of shared humanity, connecting readers through collective experiences and feelings.
- **Moral and Ethical Exploration:** Universal themes often allow writers to delve into moral and ethical discussions, providing a platform to explore different perspectives and provoke thoughtful consideration among readers.
- **Character Development:** Themes like love, sacrifice, and identity can facilitate profound character development, driving characters to evolve in ways that are compelling and authentic to readers.
- **Narrative Depth:** Even in the brevity of short stories, universal themes can inspire narratives with depth, creating rich, layered stories that invite readers to explore and contemplate.
- **Encourage Empathy:** By presenting situations and emotions that mirror real human experiences, writers can encourage empathy, enabling readers to place themselves in the characters' shoes.
- **Enhanced Engagement:** Readers are likely to be more engaged with stories that reflect their own experiences or feelings, making universal themes a tool to captivate and retain reader interest.
- **Legacy Creation:** Stories that touch upon universal themes often stand the test of time, becoming classics that are revisited by future generations.

- **Accessible Complexity:** Universal themes enable writers to explore complex ideas and emotions in a manner that is accessible to and can be understood by a broad audience.

Using universal themes, writers are capable of crafting stories that speak to the common threads of the human experience, creating narratives that are powerful, enduring, and widely accessible.

Questions to Consider:

Please read Jesus’ parable of “The Good Samaritan,” found in Luke 10:25-37. Ponder these insights that describe the universal themes found in this story.

Compassion: The Samaritan shows profound compassion, helping a wounded man from a different cultural and religious background without expecting anything in return.

Selflessness: The Samaritan puts the needs of the injured man above his own, spending time and resources to ensure his recovery.

Brotherhood: Despite the social and ethnic barriers of the time, the Samaritan extends help to a person considered an “enemy.”

Critique of Hypocrisy: The religious figures (a priest and a Levite) pass by the injured man without helping, reflecting a disconnect between their religious status and ethical action, which critiques hypocrisy in religious practice.

Neighborly Love: The core message, as spoken by Jesus, is that one's "neighbor" isn't limited to those within one's own group but includes all humanity, urging people to love others as themselves.

Contemplate how this parable, used to show the universal theme and concept of unconditional love and compassion toward all, regardless of social, ethnic or religious boundaries, serves as a moral compass, urging individuals to embody authentic compassion and selflessness in their interactions with others, not limiting their kindness or empathy to their own social or ethnic circles.

Digging Deeper

As you are planning your short story, here is a good template to use:

Questions to Ask as You Prepare & Plan to Write

Strong Opening: How am I starting my short story in a way that will captivate the audience from the beginning, drawing the reader into the narrative and hooking them to keep reading to the end?

Focused Theme or Idea: What one universal theme will I choose in order to resonate deeply with the reader and help him remember it long after he has finished reading the story?

Concise Character Development: In my short story, how can I distill the essence of my characters' motivations, conflicts, or transformations into a few touching moments or words?

Tight Plot: In my short story using the structure of beginning, middle, and end, how will I ensure every word will propel the narrative forward?
How will I use verbs to keep the writing tight and focused?

Show, Don't Tell: In "showing" instead of "telling," how can I create vivid mental pictures, allowing my reader to experience deeper meanings and emotions, making the experience more meaningful?

Significant & Memorable Ending: How can I end my short story in order to leave a lasting impression on my reader?

Every Word Counts: How can I make every word count in my short story?

Reread and Edit: How will I edit my short story down to its core, refining, cutting, and polishing it to make a powerful and memorable story?

Instructions for Writing a Short Story to Enter into Christian Writers for Life's Story Contest for *Experiencing God's Presence*

We welcome you to enter our contest, writing a first-person, true, 500-word short story on the topic (and our book's title) *Experiencing God's Presence*.

The first step is to take the new class "How to Write an (Award-Winning!) Short Story" and work through the accompanying workbook.

When you finish, email your short story to info@christianwritersforlife.com with a declaration that you have completed the class "How to Write an (Award-Winning!) Short Story."

Below are some additional instructions for entering your short story and possibly winning an inclusion into our CWFL anthology *Experiencing God's Presence*.

Contest Rules:

Theme: *Experiencing God's Presence*. Write your true first-person short story about a time in your life when you clearly felt God's presence. (See below for some ideas.)

Story Length: Please write a 500-word story. Please write a 50-word biography that describes yourself, your writing, etc. (This is a good opportunity to promote yourself, your writing, your book titles, your website, your writing history, etc.)

Audience: Your reading audience will be a general one of all ages, and stages of life and faith. It, no doubt, will be meaningful to those who will be inspired by your own personal experience with God, and to those who wish to gift someone they love with the book.

Submission Guidelines and Requirements

Eligibility Criteria: Any member of the Christian Writers for Life Facebook community can enter the contest. Taking the online CWFL class "How to Write an (Award-Winning!) Short Story" is a requirement for entry.

Entry Fee: Free

Payment: No payment

Entry Deadline: December 31, 2023

Judging Criteria: Your short story will be judged on the quality of the writing, your story-telling ability, and how well you can “speak” to your audience.

Notification: If your story wins a place in CWCL’s anthology, you will be notified and promoted with the other winners on January 15, 2024.

Publication: The anthology will be published and available to purchase on: March 1, 2024. You, as one of the award-winning authors, will be able to purchase author copies of the book at a discounted price.

Copyright: You will own the copyright to your story. After your story is published in the anthology, you will be free to publish it anywhere you wish as a reprint. (We will teach you how to sell the article as a reprint. Note: You’ll want to include the name of the book, where it was originally published, and the publishing date when you sell reprint rights to a magazine.)

The purpose and goals of this contest:

To teach you how to write an award-winning short story, a skill you can use to write stories for a lifetime.

To provide you with an opportunity to promote yourself as a writer and your books, works, etc.

To provide you with an opportunity to make extra money—to buy books at a steep discount in order to sell them at retail cost to readers at bookstores, book festivals, conferences, etc. (We will teach you the nuts & bolts of selling your books.)

To add an additional publishing accomplishment to your growing writing resume—establishing you as an award-winning writer.

To open more doors to be published in many other areas, including the magazine marketplace.

Choosing a Short Story Idea:

Think about an insightful moment, time, place, situation, etc. when you experienced God's presence first-hand and in a unique way. This should be a time that restored your hope, faith, or taught you a lesson, etc. We want to bring hope and encouragement to our readers' hearts, allowing them to learn something significant and beautiful.

Here are some settings and situations that might prompt your memory in choosing a short story theme for the anthology *Experiencing God's Presence*:

Nature

Places of Worship

In Prayer or Meditation

Through Acts of Kindness

Listening to Music

Family Gatherings

When a Baby Is Born

During Times of Personal Reflection

At Community Events

When Engaged in Art and Creativity

Acts of Forgiveness

Travel and Exploration

During Silence, Solitude, and Soul-Searching

During Personal Sickness

When Helping Others in Need

In Dreams and Visions

When Studying God's Word

In Acts of Gratitude

In Times of Challenge and Personal Crisis

During Holidays and Celebrations

In Moments of Divine Inspiration

During Acts of Selflessness

When a Loved One Dies

In the Company of Loved Ones

During Communion/The Lord's Supper

In Acts of Environmental Stewardship

During Times of Compassion

In Acts of Generosity

During Times of Fear and Uncertainty

During a Divine Miracle

Congratulations! You have now completed the course “How to Write an (Award-Winning!) Short Story”! You are equipped with the skills and knowledge to enter short story contests and to sell short stories to publications all over the world.

God bless you as you write for Him!

NEXT STEPS

GETTING STARTED

**THE BASIC FOUNDATIONS OF
WRITING TO PUBLISH**



**THE
IMPORTANCE**

OF

PLOT



**TRADITIONAL
PUBLISHING**



**WRITING YOUR
FAMILY
STORY**



**WRITING
NARRATIVE
NONFICTION**



**CREATING
REALISTIC
CHARACTERS**

