



The Lantern English Co.  
The Creative Writer

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## **The Short Story – Syllabus**

**Course Description:** Do you have an idea that you would love to get on paper? Have you always wanted to complete a written project? Would you like to convert that novel-writing prowess into compact form? You've come to the right place. In this course, we'll discover one of the best forms for storytelling and write a complete piece of your own. With weekly guidance, you'll experience the complete story-writing process, from choosing characters to editing your second draft.

**Prerequisite:** *Intro to Creative Writing* or equivalent writing experience.

### **Course Outline:**

**Week One:** Defining the Short Story

**Week Two:** Characters & Dialogue

**Week Three:** Setting & Description

**Week Four:** Plot & Structure

**Week Five:** Writing (Take 1 - The Body)

**Week Six:** Writing (Take 2 - Introduction & Conclusion)

**Week Seven:** Editing the Draft

**Week Eight:** Submitting Your Final Short Story!

**Grading Information:** All assignments will be graded using *The Creative Writer Rubric* and averaged to receive a final course grade.



## The Short Story

### Lesson One: Defining the Short Story

#### SAMPLE LESSON

If I asked you to define a short story, what would you say? It isn't hard to guess at your answer: "A story . . . that's short." There! We've done it. End of the lesson, right?

Well . . . unfortunately, it isn't quite that easy. While short stories are exactly what comes on the tin—stories that are short—they have their own challenges, joys, and surprises. This week, we will dig into the defining characteristics that make those unique traits happen.

#### HOW SHORT IS SHORT, ANYWAY? –

Here's the bad news: No one can agree on just how long any written project "should" be. There aren't set guidelines that you can follow for everything you write—one agent, teacher, publication, or writing contest will likely have different guidelines than the next!

Here's the good news: It's easy to find a "range" that we can use as a guideline. According to [betterstorytelling.net](http://betterstorytelling.net), a shorter short story (picture something small for a newspaper or a piece of "flash fiction") should be under 2,500 words—that's roughly 6 1.5-spaced pages of 8½ by 11 paper. Your typical short story, however, can range from 2,500 words to 7,500 words—or 6 to 21 of those 1.5-spaced 8½ by 11 pages. From what I've read, I'd agree with that range. The Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers of America specify that, for their Nebula award, a short story must be under 7,500 words. I've seen flash fiction contests specify a short story length of anywhere from 100 to 1,000 words.

With that considered, for this course, **we will be considering 400 words as our lowest point and 3,000 as our highest.** That way, you will have the room to tell a compelling story, and I will have the ability to review it thoughtfully each week.

## WHAT MAKES WRITING A SHORT STORY DIFFERENT? –

There are a few traits that set short story-writing apart from the novel-writing, essay-writing, et cetera. Obviously, a short story has two main components: it's short, and it's fictional. That sets it apart from other forms of writing. However, how does that affect us?

First, **our ideas, characters, and settings must work (and excel) in a shorter format.** We will go into this in more detail in our later lessons, but here's the basic idea: Too many characters or plotlines will “clutter” a short story. There won't be enough time to dwell on each one, so it will overwhelm or confuse your reader . . . or mean that you can't accomplish them all to the best of your ability!

Second, **we have less time to make an impact.** In any piece of writing, the beginning lines are vital for making a first impression (common sense, I know!). However, in a short story, those few lines are a much larger part of your tale. You don't have an entire chapter to build on them—odds are your entire piece will be the length of that one chapter. **That is why we have split up writing the *body* of your short story and writing the *introduction & conclusion*.** Those first and last impressions are necessary for catching your reader's attention!

Third, **short stories are less of a commitment, can be great for those “unknown” or “out-of-the-box” ideas, and help train us to finish our projects.** If you don't know if your idea would be “big” enough for a novel or are unsure about writing something long, the short story is the perfect place to begin. Since it's shorter, it requires less of your time, and you won't need to worry about whether or not your idea will last you through chapters and chapters.

Ready? I'm excited. Let's get started!

### Assignment 1A: Let's Get Down to Business (To Read Something Fun!)

Go out and read a short story! We have included some examples below, and would be happy to help you find more if none of these strike you.

#### Requirements for your story choice:

- Professionally-written and published
- Something you *enjoy*! If you start reading a story and don't enjoy it, pick another one.

## EXAMPLE STORIES –

Please check with a family member or guardian before selecting your story.

- “**The Red-Headed League**” or “**The Dancing Men**” by **Sir Arthur Conan Doyle** (Sherlock stories are simply great, and any out of Doyle’s collections would make a great example story!)
- “**The Ransom of Red Chief**” by **O’Henry**
- “**Scarlet Stockings**” by **Louisa May Alcott**
- “**On the Gull’s Road**” by **Willa Cather**
- “**Walter Mitty**” by **James Thurber**
- “**The Cask of Amontillado**” by **Edgar Allan Poe** (This one is very creepy, like most Poe stories, so read only if you like his content!)
- “**Evidence**” by **Isaac Asimov** (This is a part of *I, Robot*. You might need a brief “crash course” in the overall story of *I, Robot*, but this story stands on its own. Feel free to Google details on characters like Susan Calvin if needed!)

### Assignment 1B: Let's Get Down to Business (To Write Something Fun!)

Once you have read your story, answer the following prompts using complete sentences in addition to proper grammar, spelling, and punctuation.

#### Questions to Answer:

- What’s the title? Who wrote it? When was it written?
- What was your favorite part? Did you have a least favorite part?
- Compare the story to a novel (or two) you’ve read. (Are there fewer characters, less complex plots, et cetera?) Give specific examples of differences or similarities between the story and novels that you’ve read . . . *and, while you may notice the things that we referenced in the example parentheses, we would like to see your original ideas, too!*

**BY THE WAY . . .** now is also a GREAT time for you to start coming up with ideas for your own short story! Keep brainstorming over the next few weeks, and we will ask for your ideas on Week 4.