

Flash Fiction - What Is It and How Do You Write It?

by *Helen Khan*

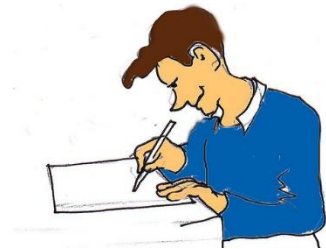


Flash fiction is having a comeback. It has been around for centuries but then it was called fables or parables up until the 20th century when it was called the short, short story; now it is called flash fiction. Some have even given it a technical term, "nano fiction". So what exactly is flash fiction? It is a literary style that is noted for its extreme brevity. The fictional piece can be as short as 53 words or as long as 1000, but generally it hovers around 250 to 1000 words.

It is understandable why flash fiction has taken flight in an era when reading has taken second place to television and other electronic means of storytelling. The long novel is not as popular as it once was; short is in.

So where do you find flash fiction? Today it is not only in books and magazines, but displayed on advertisement panels on buses, train stations and even on coffee sleeves. It is in commonplace spaces.

Most writers might be excited that they don't have to make their story long. Two hundred and fifty words, or even better, writing 53 words seems like an easy feat. Yet, it isn't as easy as it seems. Brevity in writing still has to make sense; it still has to have a powerful impact on the reader. The fictional piece must be concise and precise but still tell a story. It needs a beginning, middle and end.



Try writing a story of a thousand words or more. Then take that same story and reduce it to 250 to 400 words. You will have to make sure that your story has the following components:

Does it have a distinct plot?

Can you point out the three parts of a story, beginning, middle and end? If these are not clear and distinct, you do not have a story.

What is the story's point?

What is your story's point? Does it have a theme? Or do you just have a rambling of written words and phrases that don't really convey much?



Does the story grab the reader hard and fast?

Remember that this is a fast-moving story and must grip the reader at the very beginning and have a fabulous end. This is a short, high-impact piece of writing.

How essential are the words in your story? This story genre requires concise and precise writing. Have you written any unnecessary sentences or words? You still need to be descriptive, but do you have too many adjectives? Can you use a precise adjective that conveys the message perfectly rather than using two or three? For example, writing the 'giant stomped' has a greater impact and takes less words than the 'big giant walked angrily'.



Take a look around you. Where do you see flash fiction? You might find you like this fiction genre and try to write it yourself. Give it a try.

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