

Writing Workshop

CAN “MICROFICTION” PAY OFF BIG?

R^oSPEC
Rochester Science Fiction, Fantasy, and Horror

A 200-word short story...

A Politician Is Born

Mega action star, Harry “The Abominable” Snowman – in solar system-wide, blockbuster movies, such as *The Last Mars War*, *Harry’s Revenge Against the Yetis of Phobos*, and *Harry Fights the Europa Ice Worms* – called his long-time agent and his best friend.

“Shel, darling. I’m feeling a bit type-cast. I really want to do something else. Something big, of course, but also new. How ‘bout I do a rom-com?”

“That won’t ‘show you the money’ that way, Big Abs. The age-demos on Mars love your *Rambo*-esque style. Stay with what you know. *Maybe* there is a gig I can get for you. I’ll get back to you.”

Shel’s compromise? Harry starred in *Mr. Harry Goes to Washington*, which made a planet of money, got him a Best Actor *Oscar*, and it showed off his “friendlier” side. His fans saw him as someone who could

persuade others without destroying anything, except the crooked politicians in Earth’s biggest city.

What’s next for Harry? He has formed an exploratory team to run for Mars’ president. The polls show he *might* just win.

“You were right, Shel. A rom-com wouldn’t have helped my career. Hey, I need a campaign manager. You in?”

“I am, Big Abs!”

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Meeting agenda

07:00 - 07:15: A short talk about “microfiction” and how you can make it pay off big for you

07:15 - 08:00: Draft your flash story or poem that incorporates the word: **curse**

08:00 - 08:10: Meeting break

08:10 - 08:45: Read your flash story or poem for feedback

What is “microfiction?”

During this workshop, we will use the blanket term **microfiction** to mean **a type of ultra-short narrative that is extremely brief in both word count and overall content.**

This writing style can provide authors an opportunity to present characters and story plot development, and this style can incorporate a literary quality that implies a larger story.

The many types of **microfiction** or **flash fiction** are referred to by names and word counts, such as:

- **six-word story** (“For sale: baby shoes, never worn,” often attributed to Ernest Hemingway)
- **American sentence / haiku** (a story in a single, 17-syllable sentence; similar to haiku structure)
- **280-character story** (“twitterature” or “twiction,” up to 280 characters; sometimes told across a series or thread of posts)
- **hint fiction / short prose poem** (usually 25 words or fewer, focusing on a single, evocative moment)
- **nanofiction** (other stories under 25 words)
- **dribble** (a “micro-saga,” exactly 50 words, excluding the title)
- **55-Fiction** (a story with a 55-word limit)
- **drabble** (a “micro story” of exactly 100 words, excluding the title)
- **postcard / sudden fiction** (stories up to 1,000 words, which could “fit on a postcard,” often accompanied by an image)
- **short-shorts / short-short stories** (stories up to 1,500 words)

Publishing formats

Other forms of story presentation are often used by publishers to solicit submissions that engage with a particular theme and audience:

- **“hermit crab fiction”** (stories taking the form of something else, such as a recipe, a list of items, an obituary, or a set of instructions)
- **“napkin fiction”** (narratives written on cocktail napkins; an “impromptu” feel)
- **“palm-of-the-hand stories”** (coined by Yasunari Kawabata for stories that fit in one’s palm)
- **“smokelongs”** (stories meant to be read in the time it takes to smoke a cigarette)

What are the components of microfiction?

Such a compressed form of the **short story** cannot be just a random, truncated piece taken from a longer work. Those forms are best handled as a **review quotation** or a **jacket blurb**, which are completely different workshops.

Of course, microfiction must be **brief**, but it also must have a **purpose**.

Like the purpose of any good story, your microfiction should have the parts of the standard **story arc**:

- a **beginning**
- a **middle**
- an **end**, and, if appropriate,
- a **twist** or **surprise** at the end

Why should I write such short stories?

When you write under such strict constraints, you must **make every word count**. Writing microfiction is one way to:

- **hone your writing skills**
- **blast through creative blocks**, and
- **produce a finished, polished work quickly**.

And by repeating this process, not only in your microfiction but in your longer fiction, it will help make your writing leaner, more focused and readable, and more effective in presenting your story ideas.

Hone your writing and technical skills

- *Be concise and precise* – “Omit needless words” (*The Elements of Style*, Strunk and White)
- *Remove backstory and padding*
- *Use strong verbs and nouns; reduce adverbs and adjectives*
- *Show, don’t tell*
- *Control pacing, structure, and impact*
- *Be ruthless in your editing!* – “Kill your darlings” (first coined by Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch)

Blast through creative blocks

- *Writer's block is real!* – a 100-word story is easier to envision than a 100,000-word novel
- *It's playtime!* – a 100-word story lets you try new styles and ideas

Produce a finished, polished work quickly

- *Satisfaction is guaranteed!* – a completed, polished 100-word story is the best writing “high”
- *Increase your writing portfolio!*

How do I start and what about character and plot development?

1. Select a syllable / word count and style (haiku, short poem, drabble, short-short, etc.)
2. Use strong imagery. Make every word count.
3. Stick to one moment in time.
4. Work with just one or two characters. Don't spread your story too thin.
5. Try using the first person point of view.
6. Surprise your reader.
7. Make good use of your title.

Writing websites to help your microfiction pay off big!

- **Three Reasons Short Story Writers Should Be Writing Flash Fiction** by Margery Bayne
<https://writingcooperative.com/three-reasons-short-story-writers-should-be-writing-flash-fiction-c9cb31b963fe>
- **Try it, You Might Like it: 5 Reasons to Write Micro Fiction** by Women Writers, Women's Books
<https://booksbywomen.org/try-it-you-might-like-it-5-reasons-to-write-micro-fiction>
- **Five Reasons to Write Flash Fiction: Understanding the Literary Love Child of the Short Story and Poetry** by Nancy Stohlman
<https://www.writersdigest.com/write-better-fiction/five-reasons-to-write-flash-fiction-understanding-the-literary-love-child-of-the-short-story-and-poetry>
- **45 Great Reasons to Write Flash Fiction Right Now!** by Filip Wiltgren
<https://www.wiltgren.com/45-reasons-to-write-flash-fiction-right-now>
- **Concision and Precision in Flash Fiction** by Barbara Westwood Diehl
<https://baltimorereview.org/blog/post/recision-and-precision-in-flash-fiction>
- **Micromanagement: 7 Reasons You Should Write Microfiction** by Aeryn Rudel
<https://rejectomancy.com/2024/11/27/micromanagement-7-reasons-you-should-write-microfiction>
- **What Exactly is Microfiction?** by nycmidnight
<https://www.nycmidnight.com/howtowritemicrofiction>
- **What Is Micro and Flash Fiction?** by Elaine Mead
<https://writeordiemag.com/features/what-is-micro-and-flash-fiction>
- **Writing Micro and Flash Fiction** by Holly Lyn Walrath
<https://medium.com/write-wild/writing-micro-and-flash-fiction-1a1624352cf2>

Active microfiction markets that pay

There is a vast landscape of microfiction and flash fiction markets out there on the Web. Here are a few examples of what you will find:

- **Baffling Magazine** (Publishes speculative flash fiction with a queer bent. Project of Neon Hemlock Press. Pays \$0.08 per word for original stories under 1,200 words.)
<https://www.bafflingmag.com/submissions>
- **Craft** (A literary magazine for fiction and nonfiction. Pays \$100 for original flash fiction and creative nonfiction of less than 1,000 words, and \$200 for original short fiction and creative nonfiction.)
<https://www.craftliterary.com/submit/>
- **Daily Science Fiction** (The notable “active” exception. Sadly, DSF is defunct.)
- **Electric Literature's Commuter** (Publishes strange and diverting poetry, flash fiction, and graphic narratives. Accepts previously unpublished fiction, poetry, and graphic narrative under 1,500 words. Opens four 1-week submissions periods per year. Responds in three months and pays \$100.)
<https://electricliterature.com/about/submit/>
- **Every Day Fiction** (Attempts to share a new piece of flash fiction online almost every single day. They pay \$3 for each published story of fewer than 1,000 words.)
<https://everydayfiction.com/submit-story/>
- **Flash Fiction Magazine** (Accepts fiction stories between 300 and 1,000 words. Pays pay \$40 for stories selected to be in *The Flash Fiction Magazine* anthologies.)
<https://flashfictionmagazine.com/submissions/>
- **Flash Fiction Online** (Publishes “brief, beautiful, and dynamic flash fiction – complete stories told in 500-1,000 words – across a range of speculative and literary genres.” Opens from the 1st to the 21st of each month. Pays \$80 per story.)
<https://ffo.submittable.com/submit> (submissions)
<https://www.flashfictiononline.com/current-issue/> (current issue)
- **Fractured Lit** (Opens year-round for micro and flash fiction submissions. Pays \$50 for original micro fiction (of 400 words or less) and \$75 for original flash fiction (of between 401 and 1,000 words).)
<https://fracturedlit.com/submit/>
- **New Voices (The Masters Review)** (Opens their *Masters Review's New Voices* category year-round to any new or emerging author who has not published a work of fiction or narrative nonfiction of novel length. Authors of short story collections are welcome to submit. Pays \$200 for short fiction and narrative nonfiction of up to 7,000 words, and \$100 for flash fiction of up to 1,000 words.)
<https://mastersreview.com/submissions/>
- **Orion's Belt** (A literary speculative-fiction online magazine. Publishes one story per month of 1,200 words or less. Pays 8 cents per word for accepted stories.)
<https://www.orions-belt.net/submissions>
- **SmokeLong Quarterly** (An online literary magazine of “flash narratives.” Submissions must be <= 1,000 words. Pays \$100 per piece upon publication in the quarterly issue.)
<https://www.smokelong.com/guidelines/>
- **Three-Lobed Burning Eye** (A speculative fiction magazine published online twice per year. Publishes short fiction (1,001-7,500 words) and flash fiction (less than 1,000 words). Pays \$100 for short fiction and \$30 for flash.)
<https://www.3lobedmag.com/submissions.html>

Stuck for an idea? Try a prompt generator

- <https://www.servicescape.com/writing-prompt-generator>
- <https://writingexercises.co.uk>
- <https://thestoryshack.com/tools/writing-prompt-generator/>

Yes, you are allowed to break time-honored tropes!

- **101 Fantasy Tropes for Writers**
<https://writerswrite.co.za/101-fantasy-tropes-for-writers/>
- **101 Sci-Fi Tropes for Writers**
<https://writerswrite.co.za/101-sci-fi-tropes-for-writers/>
- **14 Popular Fantasy Tropes (and How to Revitalize Them)**
<https://blog.reedsy.com/fantasy-tropes/>
- **The ABCs of Horror Tropes**
<https://www.denofgeek.com/tv/the-abcs-of-horror-tropes/>
- **Speculative Fiction Tropes**
The Arcana Wiki – Distilling the Real World for Gaming
<https://arcana.wikidot.com/speculative-fiction-tropes>
- **Ten tropes you'll find in science fiction - over and over again**
<https://io9.gizmodo.com/ten-tropes-youll-find-in-science-fiction-over-and-ove-5628989>
- **TV Tropes**
The All Devouring Pop-Culture Wiki
<https://tvtropes.org>

Wikipedia lists

- **Fantasy Tropes**
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fantasy_tropes
- **Horror Tropes**
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Horror_fiction
- **Masquerade Tropes**
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Masquerade_\(trope\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Masquerade_(trope))
- **Outline of Science Fiction**
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Outline_of_science_fiction#Genres_of_science_fiction
- **Science Fantasy Tropes/Themes**
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Science_fantasy
- **Science Fiction Tropes/Themes**
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_science_fiction_themes

TL/DR the web resources above? Here's a woefully short list of writing prompts...

- Something unexpected walks/comes into a bar.
- You're alone and there's a knock at the door.
- There's this button that reads, "Do Not Press".
- A character is given the worst superpower/magical ability.
- [Insert thing here] suddenly starts talking to you.
- I need you to understand something before I kill you.
- That was when I invented it.
- A character is standing in a vast, seemingly empty landscape.
- A character has a recurring or deep, dark fear.
- Something important is lost.
- It was a love of [insert favorite thing] that was taken too far.
- There is an animal (or alien) in front of you.
- A celebrity is sent back in time.
- Before they can make any further progress, they have to get past that slobbering [insert creature/person/thing].
- It hadn't been as hard as this earlier.
- A verdant park stretched out around me. I have no idea how I got here.
- He never let his lack of knowledge hold him back on any subject.
- Even if you prove me wrong, I will never agree with you.
- It was then I began to feel superfluous to the plan.
- He listened closely to the whispering.
- I had been watching them quarrel through the window.
- And that was why it was my favorite meal.
- He gave me it just before he died.
- Little things seemed to matter an awful lot to them.
- It was a love of art that was taken too far.
- It was over as quickly as it had begun.
- It was hard to command any sense of gravitas with [insert type of] stains on your shirt.
- We couldn't have fit any more in if we tried.
- It was the finest meal she had ever tasted. If only she had known what was in it.
- It was a compelling and convincing argument and for that reason she chose to ignore it.