

THE ART OF Shorts

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Clarify Your Meaning

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What is your story about?

Unless you're planning a surprise ending, it helps the reader to know in the first sentence or two what the story is about.

Show (don't tell) the premise.

Also, avoid murky meanings. "Huh?"

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Of course, you're not going to start off with "This story is about..." We'll discuss intros later, but here are two completely different options to get a reader hooked.

Action Intro:

"Whoa, Jake! Slow down on that thing," Mr. Long cried as Jake careened past on his bike.

Descriptive Intro:


Class wars were a thing at Mount Topaz High, the most elite prep school in southern Colorado.


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Clarifying the Object

Gazing across the cresting waves, he longed for her
return. (10) -becomes-

Is he a dog? Gazing across the cresting waves, he longed
 for the treat-bearer's return. (11)

Is he in love? Gazing across the cresting waves, he longed
 for his love's return. (11)

Is he marooned? Gazing across the cresting waves, he
 longed for his ship's return. (11)

Evoke Natural Emotions

By showing your reader quickly what your story is about, they'll know how to react. If it's a love story, make it romantic. A phobia, scary. A long journey, prepared and enduring.

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Don't tell your reader what to feel.

“When the window shattered, Jessica was so scared.”
Instead, show them **WHAT** was scary and/or **WHY**
something was scary.

“Chink! Jessica jerked toward the window as the
glass shattered, her memory of the last break-in still
fresh in her mind.”

Once again, this rule is meant to be broken. Use
telling for emphasis and personality.
(Excerpt continued...)

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"As a worn baseball bounced across the floor, playing pinball between her tennis shoes, little Cory's freckled face popped over the sill. "Sorry, Jess! Max hit a fly ball, and boy, did he get a home run!" Jessica soft-pitched him the ball as her heartrate slowed. Well, that was scary!"

This shows how Jessica is working to calm herself and justify her reaction after seeing it was a mistake. Or she could add: "It scared me, Cory! You boys need to be more careful."