

I. Introduction

- a. The Art of Shorts (TAOS) was inspired by a homeschool mom friend of mine and is written with middle and high school-age kids in mind. However, all writing levels are welcome!
- b. *Disclaimer: This course is intended to be as helpful and fun as possible. Information included in this course may or may not match with what you have learned in the past. Writing is a subjective exercise, and in my experience, every teacher and author has a different opinion on what makes for the best writing. TAOS course information is based on what I have learned formally and informally as well as my own opinion. If you don't agree with something, that is perfectly acceptable! We are all writers here, and each of us is beautiful and different. Writing is not a competition. Let us learn from each other.*
- c. A note to parents and teachers: The focus of these exercises is NOT grammar and spelling. Give your students the grace to enjoy the process of learning to write short fiction without worrying about grammar and spelling until the final edits. Fiction grammar also tends to be less structured than nonfiction and paper writing.
- d. KEY
 - i. **Bold** – Research questions and assignments (**recommended** but not mandatory)
 - ii. **MC** – main character
- e. Word(s) Count!
 - i. Short Stories (SS) range from less than 1,000 words to around 30,000. Longer shorts are sometimes called novellas.
 - ii. Flash fiction (FF) tends to be less than 500, sometimes only one or two!
 1. Flash Fiction differs from a short story not only in size but also in format. It is often written immediately after receiving the prompt using the author's first or second idea. The purpose is to test your skills as a writer and your creativity. Sometimes, these pieces reveal new ideas for larger stories or allow a writer to write outside of their normal comfort zone.
 - iii. But can you really tell a meaningful story with so few words? YES!
 1. A higher word count doesn't alone make a story better. It's the content and how it is presented that make a story great.
 - iv. Many famous authors have also written short stories and flash fiction! If you don't recognize a name, I recommend that you look them up.
 1. James Joyce, Edgar Allan Poe, Agatha Christie, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, Roald Dahl, Neil Gaiman, and more!
 2. **RESEARCH QUESTION: Do any authors you enjoy also write short stories?**
- f. But does anyone actually read short stories and flash fiction? YES!
 - i. My Readers Love Shorts! Here's why: They're busy but still want to enjoy a good story. Some can't physically read for long periods. A well-written SS or a piece of FF provides enjoyment in a manageable package.
 - ii. And for Writers: Shorts are an amazing way to hone your craft! Long novels may take months to properly edit. A shorter story may be gone over many more times in a shorter period. There are also less loose threads and potential problem areas.

- iii. Think of writing shorts as molding and shaping a clay figurine. You can hold it in your hand, see it all at once. You don't have to remember what you wrote ten chapters ago. It's all right there within a few pages or less.
- g. General Guidelines for this course:
 - i. Flash Fiction:
 - 1. Less than 100 words: 1 Scene
 - 2. 100-300 words: 1-2 Scenes
 - 3. 300-500 words: 1-3 Scenes
 - ii. Short Stories
 - 1. 500-10,000 words: 1-2 Parts
 - 2. Over 10,000 words: 2-3 Parts
 - 3. Max 30,000 words (3 Parts)
- h. Come along with me as I share what I've learned from writing and publishing/preparing to publish over 20 short stories and pieces of flash fiction. But beware...it's addictive.
- i. **ASSIGNMENT: Read a short story!** You may choose your own, but here are a couple suggestions:
 - i. Elementary: [The Tale of Peter Rabbit by Beatrix Potter](#)
 - ii. Middle & High: [The Aged Mother by Matsuo Basho](#)
 - iii. Many more may be found at: <https://americanliterature.com/home>

II. Small but Mighty

- a. A piece of Flash Fiction is like a commercial or a short film. It is often one scene filled with vivid imagery and with a single intended message or moral. Frequently, the characters' emotions drive the story.
 - i. For example: a scene of a new mother holding her baby might convey *joy* over the birth of her child as well as *doubt* in her abilities to be a good mother. The message would most likely be that she has everything she needs inside to be a good mother.
 - ii. Another example: A boy is taking a test. If he does well, he passes the class. If he does poorly, he fails the class. He would probably go back and forth from optimistic to nervous. Other emotions might be despondent, confident, or even scared. What are the consequences if he fails the class?
- b. A Short Story is comparable to a short film or a movie.
 - i. A well-written short story usually follows only 2-3 storylines, maybe 4 if a fourth one is very minor.
 - ii. A short story might include:
 1. A journey from A to B
 - a. Literal or figurative – a trip to the zoo or learning how to make the perfect loaf of bread
 2. A growing relationship – They may either begin the story by meeting or already know each other. They become closer because of the trials in the story.
 - a. Romance – many short stories have themes of romantic love and funny first dates, but they can also deal with serious trials that test an established relationship.
 - b. Friendship – becoming friends and maintaining friendships takes work. This can be funny or serious as they find themselves in different challenges.
 3. The resolution of a conflict.
 - a. What is the conflict?
 - b. Why does the conflict exist?
 - c. How can the conflict be resolved?
- c. *Key: Make the most of what you have.*
 - i. When you have so few words, everything you write matters. In a longer novel, there may be scenes that are not essential to the main 2-3 storylines. Often, these are centered around side characters or less important parts of the main characters' lives. Well-written short stories cut those scenes out, keep the story moving, and stick to what is most important to the main characters.
 1. For example, in my short story, *The Doctor's Daughter*, here are the storylines:
 - a. Practical: Nurse Edith and new doctor Colm learn how to run her late father's medical practice together.
 - b. Romance: Colm tries everything he can think of to woo Edith.

- c. Personal: Edith comes to realize her own beauty and self-worth and accepts Colm's love as genuine.
 2. If I wanted to expand the story into a full-length novel, I could have:
 - a. Added flashbacks to Edith's first love who passed in the War
 - b. Added more information about Colm's past (all I share is his conversion as it pertains to Edith's perception of him)
 - c. Given side stories to Louisa and Tilly (who have their own short stories later)
 - d. Shown more scenes of them at work in the clinic
 - e. Added a conflict related to the running of the clinic
 - f. Added a conflict related to the town in general
 3. Why didn't I, then?
 - a. The first three (practical, romantic, and personal) were all that were important to the story. Including the extra scenes wouldn't have added anything to the story I wanted to tell, which was the *story of Colm and Edith falling in love despite their age difference*.
- ii. This is one reason writing short stories can improve your writing! You're cutting out the fluff and filler, polishing your storyline, and streamlining it down to its purest form. Writing shorts teaches an author how to:
 1. use their words effectively
 2. take out things that aren't needed (like excess words and unnecessary scenes)
 3. use synonyms, antonyms, and various literary devices properly
- d. Flash Fiction in a Nutshell: A Snippet, a Moment, a Scene.
 - i. Flash fiction is best when kept simple. Don't try to fit too much information into one piece of flash fiction. Most of my pieces have two main characters, and may or may not have 1 or more others. However, the more characters you have, the less developed they can be. Here are some of mine:
 1. *Kings & Queens*: A person playing chess, the opponent, the guard at the prison (no names, main character's gender is not given, but I decided later it was a man dubbed Chess Guy)
 2. *Solar Eclipse*: A woman (although it is in first person and gender is only implied by the connection to *Kings & Queens*) and the faerie queen (no names)
 3. *One Year*: Oona Ryan and Finn MacDonnell (a woman and a man)
 4. *The Island*: Finn MacDonnell, Oona Ryan, a socialite, a wealthy landowner
 5. *Fear*: two speakers with no identifying information
 6. *The Weight of Memory*: Chess Guy, the faerie queen, sailors (no names)
 7. *Moon Glow*: Grandmother, Tsukiko (the main character), her brother Haru, her sister Hoshi, and two unnamed enemies
 - a. This story had the most named characters. By using their familial relationships and snippets of personality, though, the

reader is able to quickly form an impression of their character without further development.

- ii. Keep the number of characters to 1-3, at least for the ones you will develop.
 1. Main character (MC)
 2. MC's friend
 3. MC's enemy
 4. You may choose to reference a family member, other friend, or person of interest, but keep it simple. Call them by their title rather than a name if you can: Mom, Dad, Grandma, the pop singer.
 5. Do not describe every character! You don't even have to say much about the looks of the MCs! Hair color, eye color, physique, race, and clothing/earrings/tattoos, unless they play a role in the story, are unimportant details in flash fiction. Even full-length novels often give sparse physical details. The reader can form an image of the character on surprisingly little information.
 - a. Ex. Jake gaped at Susie from the other side of the cafeteria, her fair curls spilling over her shoulder, her slim ankles encased in strappy sandals. The Coke can crunched in his fist. What had gotten into his best friend?
 - b. What information can you gleam from that moment?
 - i. Susie has curly, blonde hair.
 - ii. She has a slender body type.
 - iii. She is wearing dressy clothes. She doesn't normally wear dressy clothes.
 - iv. She is probably trying to impress either some popular girls, a guy, or both.
 - v. Jake doesn't like her new look, or maybe he secretly does.
 - vi. He is afraid that something inside his best friend has changed.
 - vii. He is afraid he will lose her. He may even be jealous of another guy's attention.
 - viii. They are at school and it is lunchtime.
 - ix. Emotions:
 1. Susie: hopeful, possibly shy or uncomfortable
 2. Jake: anger, jealousy, frustration, irritation
 - c. I could have written the scene more like a newspaper report:
 - i. Susie walked into the school cafeteria at lunchtime wearing new dressy clothes, including some strappy sandals. She was of a slender build. Her curly blonde hair was down. Jake squeezed the Coke can in his hand. He was so frustrated with his best friend for changing how she looked just to be friends with those popular

girls. She was perfect the way she was. The jock she has a crush on was looking at her too. Jake was jealous.

- d. Now, which one would you rather read? *Option 1* because it is shorter, has a better flow, and allows the reader to come to their own conclusions. It creates a moving picture rather than a static one.
6. Each character **MUST** play a role in the story. They must have a purpose. Don't spend time describing someone who isn't a part of the story.
 - a. If Grandma lives in the house but isn't in the room while your MC fights with his parents, leave her out. She is not important to the story.
 - b. Exception would be if mentioning her would stop the argument.
- iii. Condensing the idea in your head to a small amount of words can be challenging and daunting. Choose the most important parts of your story and spend the most time on those. We will talk more about this later!
- e. Enriching Your Writing: I'm going into more detail on the following in upcoming lessons, but here are some things to keep in mind:
 - i. The 5 Senses
 - ii. Strong Emotions
 - iii. Simplicity
 - iv. Rich Vocabulary
 - v. Relatable Characters & Setting
- f. In this course, we'll cover:
 - i. enriching your writing,
 - ii. cutting out filler,
 - iii. finessing your words,
 - iv. clarifying the meaning,
 - v. and more!
- g. **ASSIGNMENT: Think of your favorite memory. Write 3-5 sentences like you are describing it to a friend.** Think about the following questions:
 - i. What do you See, Hear, Smell, Taste, & Feel?
 - ii. What emotions come up?
- h. **REMINDER: A note to parents and teachers:** The focus of these exercises is NOT grammar and spelling. Give your students the grace to enjoy the process of learning to write short fiction without worrying about grammar and spelling until the final edits. Fiction grammar also tends to be less structured than nonfiction and paper writing.
- i. Feel free to ask questions, leave comments, or send me a private message.

III. Enriching Your Writing

a. The 5 Senses

- i. What does the character See, Hear, Smell, Taste, & Feel?
- ii. You don't need to use all 5 in every scene. Sight is the most common, but adding a familiar smell or sound adds depth. It helps your reader relate to the story.
- iii. For example: Wrapping Kirk's letterman jacket around her shoulders, Susie inhaled his spicy cologne. Crowds cheered as the seniors ran onto the field, but Susie only had eyes for one. "Want one?" Jill asked, holding out a salty fry. "No, thanks," Susie replied. "I couldn't eat a thing."
- iv. In this scene, the reader can feel the warmth of Kirk's jacket, smell his cologne, hear the noise of the crowd, see the football players running out, and taste the fries. (I'm not entirely happy with this example, but I hope it gets the point across. I used all 5 senses intentionally, but...)
- v. The rule of thumb is to conjure up 2-3 senses in each scene. Don't tell the reader what they should sense. Simply describe the scene.

b. Strong Emotions

- i. Unless your characters are automatons, they show emotions. "Action" emotion often drives short fiction. Think bold outbursts, angry rants, passionate pleas, love's sacrifice, and jealous rages.
- ii. Emotions can also be subtle or internal in short fiction. Think of the brooding hero. What is on his mind?
 1. The trouble with subtlety in short fiction: if the author doesn't show or tell his thoughts in some way other than by a show of emotion, the reader is in the dark.
- iii. Actions speak louder than words. What your characters DO moves the story forward unless the piece is ABOUT a character's thoughts. Some stories are like this, and there is nothing wrong with it, but in my opinion, action is more interesting to read.
 1. Why? It is all well and good for a character to contemplate a topic, but if they never come to a conclusion...which usually leads to an action/change in their lifestyle...nothing really happens in the story.
 2. I can think about making dinner all day, but if I never actually make dinner, nothing changes. I don't accomplish anything, learn anything new, improve my skills, or feed my family. I also don't burn the roast.
 3. If a granddaughter spends a story thinking about how great her grandmother is, how kind, caring, and sweet, but at the end of the story, she doesn't decide to call her up and tell her or send her a card or make a visit, what does the reader get from the story? A nice sentiment about the grandmother. *But to each, their own. This is just my opinion.*

c. Simplicity

- i. Don't overcomplicate. Familiar words keep explanation minimal. In fantasy, consider common terms, such as "Dragon" instead of "Hyvth." For spice, you could choose "Wyvern" or "Leviathan" over "Dragon."

- ii. We've already talked some about keeping to 2-3 main storylines, maybe a fourth.
- iii. In short stories, I prefer 3 storylines: practical, relationship, and personal.
 1. Practical:
 - a. Journey – literal or figurative (see previous lesson)
 - b. Conflict – external, person/person, person/nature, person/technology
 2. Relationship:
 - a. Romance – friends to lovers, enemies to lovers
 - b. Friendship – making a friend, enemies to friends
 - c. Family
 3. Personal:
 - a. Growth – emotional, maturity, self-worth/confidence
 - b. Conflict – internal, person/self
- iv. In flash fiction, one or two is best. Think: a lead up to an important decision or a big reveal that is made at the end.
- v. Some stories rely heavily on one type of storyline, others mix and match. You choose what you enjoy writing the most!
- vi. Simplicity in setting: It is possible to create an interesting new setting in short fiction, but you must keep your descriptions recognizable and memorable. This is where learning to use your words effectively really comes into play. You don't need to spend 1/3 of your words creating a setting. We'll cover more of this in a minute.
- vii. The 5 W's and an H:
 1. Who: Characters, narrator (I include narrator here because sometimes they are outside of the story, such as a child telling a story about their parent as a child.)
 2. What: Premise – what is the story about? Keeping to the premise can keep you on track by helping you avoid chasing rabbits (aka unrelated story ideas)
 3. When: Setting – A simple date notation and/or the use of period appropriate clothing, technology, events, and words will do. If you're writing a period piece, it's up to you how much you modernize it. Some writers prefer to go all in, and others prefer to combine modern vernacular (speech and wording) with that from the past. I fall into the second group because I enjoy the romance of the past mixed with elements of our modern culture. Vintage vibes.
 4. Where: Setting – Readers can get by on very little setting information. If it's not important, don't describe it. Is your setting a small village in England in the late 1800s? Most readers will have enough of a picture already. It doesn't matter if what they imagine exactly matches what you imagine. However, if some element of the setting is extremely important AND highly unusual, you may need to describe it.

5. If something is common in everyday life, don't describe it. Likewise, if it has been written about many times in the past, don't describe it. Your reader will know simply by the name, and you'll save words. Modern London, a cattle farm, and suburban neighborhood all require very little, if any, additional information.
 6. Another reason not to overly describe the setting is to let the reader's imagination form the image based on their own likes and dislikes. If they prefer slate grey stone houses with small fenced gardens to lime-plastered, thatch-roofed cottages with riotous flower gardens, does it really matter? On the flip side, if it matters to you, go ahead with your word count in mind.
 7. Please note: I DO describe my settings, but only what is important. A bakery is a bakery. An apothecary is an apothecary. A little stone chapel is a little stone chapel. A horse farm is a horse farm. See where I'm going with this? *I could go into more detail, but I would rather spend my setting details on the sights as a couple walk along a lovely country lane or the front garden where they share a first glance, not the relatable aspects of the village.*
 8. KEY: Choose spots where the reader will want to linger for a few minutes and enjoy the scene. "The Five Senses" idea.
 9. Why: Premise – what is forcing the characters down this path? Keep it simple.
 10. How: Plot – In short fiction, the PLOT is the most important part of the story. Spend MOST of your word count keeping the story moving!
- d. Exceptions!
- i. If you're dead-set on "Hyvth" (which I made up), use it! Just be prepared to explain what on earth that is (or anything else) through vivid imagery rather than an encyclopedia paragraph.
- e. Rich Vocabulary
- i. Write to your intended audience level. If you're writing for children to read on their own, don't use words that are over their head. Same goes for adults. Don't use complicated words without a purpose.
 - ii. Choose words that convey image and emotion: "exquisite" vs. "beautiful."
 1. Words that are more specific are preferred because they create a more intentional picture in the reader's mind.
 2. If a woman is *beautiful*, she is very pretty. But if she is *exquisite*, she is above all others.
 3. If a town is *large*, it's big. If a town is *rambling*, it's really big and spread out.
 - iii. *TIP: Using words that cover multiple meanings lowers your word count!*
 - iv. Use special words one or two times. Repetition is boring and lowers the impact of the word.
 - v. Look for synonyms. Think outside the box for descriptions:
 1. "Pretty as a picture" or "exquisite as a Rembrandt."

- vi. Make sure your words are appropriate for the subject. A man is not usually called *pretty* or a woman *gallant*. Certain words are commonly gender-related, and using them with the opposite gender is confusing to readers. This also applies to things other than gender. Flowery words about the conditions in a hospital may not be considered good taste. You need more serious descriptors.
- f. Use a Thesaurus!
 - i. Repeating the same word over and over is repetitive...but varying your words using synonyms repels boredom.
 - ii. Think:
 - 1. bag, satchel, sack, kit
 - 2. happy, elated, ecstatic, pleased
 - 3. scared, afraid, fearful, anxious
 - iii. Just make sure the word means what you think it means! There's nothing more embarrassing than using a word the wrong way. *Oval-shaped* vs. *ovular* – two COMPLETELY different meanings! I'm using this example because I looked this word up the other day, not remembering the correct usage off the top of my head. Even seasoned writers use a thesaurus!
- g. Relatability
 - i. Tropes (familiar story types) are popular because readers know what to expect.
 - 1. Hero vs. Villain
 - 2. Forbidden Love
 - 3. Saving the World
 - 4. Falling for your best friend
 - 5. And many, many more!
 - 6. **ASSIGNMENT: Choose three of your favorite books and match them with 2-3 tropes.** Ex. *Harry Potter & the Sorcerer's Stone*: Hero vs. Villain, Making New Friends, and Boarding School Stories
 - ii. Relatable Characters
 - 1. *Give readers a foundation to build on.*
 - 2. Choose recognizable personalities, but you don't have to stereotype. Nerdy Hero & Cowardly Jock are common, but don't forget the Cowardly Nerd and the Heroic Jock!
 - 3. Things get tricky here if you don't want to be predictable. Some readers enjoy knowing how characters will react based on their personality type. Others enjoy when a character acts "out of character," or in an unexpected way. The choice is ultimately the author's. Write the character as you know them in your head. Give them a solid reason for acting the way that they do, and most readers will accept it.
 - 4. Ex. A shy girl stands up for her friend because she loves her friend more than she fears being made fun of, not because she suddenly becomes out-going.
 - iii. Relatable Setting
 - 1. *Give readers a foundation to build on.*

2. A village, a cottage, a beach, Out West, Historic England, the desert, a high school, a stable, a castle, a pirate ship...
3. Use adjectives to add detail: A thatched-roof cottage surrounded by lush gardens.

IV. Cutting Out Filler

- a. Easy Does It - Don't take a chainsaw to your writing to decrease your word count! You're doing delicate surgery here. Think things through, and make sure to read over each cut. Add it back if you need to!
 - i. Make sure to keep your intended meaning. It is possible to cut so much out that the reader doesn't understand what you are trying to say. This is one place where a pre-reader comes in handy!
- b. Clear Out the Clutter - If the meaning is implied, cut out the word (or even the sentence). Think of excess words as clutter. If you don't need it, get rid of it!
- c. That being said, you don't want your story to sound choppy and boring.
 - i. NOT GOOD: Jake went to the store. He bought Susie a coke. He took it to her. She drank it. (18)
 - ii. BETTER: Jake bought Susie a coke, her favorite. She took a long swig and smiled at her friend's thoughtfulness. (18)
 - iii. Each option has the same word count, but see how different they are! The first option simply tells the facts. The second adds flavor and meaning to each action.
- d. Example (w/Word Count):
 - i. Looking out over the ocean, he wondered when she would come back. She had been gone for an awfully long time. (21)
 - ii. -becomes-
 - iii. Looking over the ocean, he wondered when she would come back. (11)
- e. Why did I remove the sentence?
 - i. By the narrator wondering when "she" would come back, it is implied that she has been gone longer than he expects. I could keep it for flavor, but there are better ways of expressing his emotions.
 - ii. Stay Tuned for more with this example!
- f. **ASSIGNMENT: Pre-reader Review Worksheet** (printable from my website). Using a previous week's prompt, exchange your writing with a friend and follow the instructions on the worksheet.
 - i. **Parents/Teachers:** The Pre-Reader Worksheet is something you might want to do multiple times, pairing up different students each time (same story or different) or pairing the same students for different stories. Every reader will have a different take, so it's a good idea to have more than one child read each child's story if you can. You can also use this as a grading tool if this class is used for a grade. What did they get right? Where do they need to improve?

V. Finessing Your Words

- a. Each Word Matters - Choose each word with purpose, especially when writing short fiction.
- b. Specific over generic is a great start:
 - i. Happy -> Ecstatic
 - ii. Walking -> Striding
 - iii. Blue -> Cobalt
 - iv. That being said, sometimes “boring” words are appropriate for one of your characters, or a character might grow from boring to interesting in the eyes of your MC. You can show this by slowly changing the way they are described.
 1. At the beginning, Susie sees Jake as her *best* friend. Then, he becomes her *thoughtful/sweet* friend. Later, he might become her *handsome* friend. Last, he becomes the *handsomest guy in school* – how did she miss that?!
 2. Her PERCEPTION of Jake changes throughout the story, and if I was writing Jake and Susie’s love story, I would need to show how their feelings change from friendship to romance by *changing the way they describe each other to the reader*.
 3. You would also show this in any other relationship – even good to bad – as well as other aspects of the story. A teen moves to a new town – hate to like – ugly/boring words to pleasant and flattering.
 - v. Choose descriptors that fit with your story. If it is set in space, choose spacey words. On a farm, country words. In the past, vintage words (vernacular). In the present, modern words (vernacular).
 - vi. You are striving to create an *immersive atmosphere*. From the first sentence, your reader should be transported into a new world, whether it’s a far-off planet or a local high school.
- c. Create a Rhythm – *Read your story aloud*. I also use the “read-aloud” function on my word processor all the time! Listen for:
 - i. Run-on sentences without pauses – Sometimes, writers use long sentences to avoid sounding choppy. Just make sure to use your commas correctly and avoid run-ons. Sometimes, two sentences are better than one.
 - ii. Choppy/too similar sentences – Remember this bad example: *Jake went to the store. He bought Susie a coke. He took it to her. She drank it.* Every sentence is Subject, Verb, Object. Add prepositional phrases to the beginning, adjectives, and yes, even adverbs to add flavor.
 1. Some writers hate adverbs. I don’t mind them as long as they are used properly and not too often. If you can use a different descriptor, do, but sometimes, an adverb is just enough without being too much.
 2. Remember: you are allowed to break writing “rules” in your personal writing. NOTHING is set in stone.
 - iii. Vary your sentence structure - Don't start every sentence with "He/She/It/The..." Use prepositional phrases and different word orders to spice things up. Questions and incomplete sentences are also acceptable in fiction.

1. Ex. Jake spotted Kirk across the gym. What did Susie see in the jerk...er, the jock? If she thought he was handsome, Jake didn't stand a chance with his crooked teeth and the scar on his chin from the infamous bicycle incident. He was just a humble nobody. Ugly and worthless.
 2. A side note: use the word JUST sparingly! Writers tend to ~~just~~ put it in all over the place, but in most cases, you can ~~just~~ leave it out! I used it in this example for emphasis on *just* how much of a humble nobody poor Jake thinks he is!
- d. A Trick for Rhythm and Motion
 - i. "Rule of Three" Repetition: Use of the same word, sentence structure, or synonyms/similarities for EMPHASIS.
 - ii. Ex. He was tired to the bone, chilled to the marrow, and wet through and through.
 - iii. This is one of my favorite writing tricks because it creates a fuller picture for the reader and can actually help lower your word count. It keeps them in that moment long enough to absorb it. BUT like any trick, don't overuse it.
 - e. Use a Thesaurus! (I keep stressing this because it is so important!)
 - i. Synonyms and Antonyms provide a wider variety of word choice, just make sure you are using the word correctly! Double-Check with a Dictionary!
 - f. Example (w/Word Count)
 - i. Looking over the ocean, he wondered when she would come back. (11)
 - ii. -becomes-
 - iii. Gazing across the cresting waves, he longed for her return. (10)
 - iv. *Gazing* and *longed* are stronger, more emotional words. *Cresting waves* is a prettier, more vivid image than *ocean*.
 - g. **ASSIGNMENT: Get out your piece for Prompt #1: The Ocean. Use what you have learned so far to make it even better!** Keep the original! If you're using a computer, make a copy and work with it for this assignment.

VI. Clarify Your Meaning

a. What is your story about?

- i. 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?"
- ii. Of course, you're not going to start off with "This story is about..." We'll talk more about introductions later, but here are a couple things to consider:
 1. "Once upon a time" is a common fairy tale story starter, but I wouldn't recommend using it in your writing. Be creative!
 2. I enjoy dropping readers right into the action, and this is often recommended, but sometimes, an introduction can be more descriptive.
 3. *Action intro*: "Whoa, Jake! Slow down on that thing," Mr. Long cried as Jake careened past on his bike.
 4. *Descriptive intro*: Class wars were a thing at Mount Topaz High, the most elite prep school in southern Colorado.
 5. Both options would provide the reader with enough interest and information to get started.
- iii. Examples showing how different storylines may change a sentence to make the meaning clearer.
 1. Gazing across the cresting waves, he longed for her return. (10)
 2. -becomes-
 3. Gazing across the cresting waves, he longed for the treat-bearer's return. (11)
 4. As a Love Story
 - a. Gazing across the cresting waves, he longed for her return. (10)
 - b. -becomes-
 - c. Gazing across the cresting waves, he longed for his love's return. (11)
 5. Or is he marooned?
 - a. Gazing across the cresting waves, he longed for her return. (10)
 - b. -becomes-
 - c. Gazing across the cresting waves, he longed for his ship's return. (11)

b. Evoke Natural Emotions

- i. By showing your reader quickly what your story is about, they'll know what to expect and how to react. If it's a love story, make it romantic. A phobia, scary. A long journey, prepared and enduring.
- ii. 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.
- iii. Ex. *Chink!* Jessica jerked toward the window as the glass shattered, her memory of the last break-in still fresh in her mind.
- iv. Once again, this rule is meant to be broken. Certain genres and characters may appropriately use telling, but it is more for emphasis and personality. For

example, a more outspoken or expressive narrator-character would be more likely to say, “Well, that was scary!” to the reader than a more objective/distant one.

- v. Ex. *Chink!* Jessica jerked toward the window as the glass shattered, her memory of the last break-in still fresh in her mind. 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!*
- vi. The reader already knows Jessica was scared by the smashed window and why (a previous break-in), so her thought could be left out. However, I might choose to add it in as a way to show how Jessica is working to calm herself down and justify her reaction after seeing it was only a little boy’s mistake. She is expressing her feelings to the reader.
- vii. Jessica might express her feelings to Cory instead. “It scared me, Cory! You boys need to be more careful.”
- viii. **ASSIGNMENT: Get out your piece from Prompt #2. Keep the original. Edit it based on what you’ve learned.** Show instead of tell.
- ix. **EXTRA CREDIT:** Have the MC *say* the first thing they are (already) *thinking*. How do the other characters need to change in response? Have a character think something instead of say it. How does that change things?

VII. Story Drivers

a. What drives your story?

i. Characters - focus on the *growth or defeat* of your characters

1. In a C-driven story, the setting is less important than the internal journey of the characters. The focus is on how the characters change throughout the story.
2. Ex. A rookie football player gains the confidence and skills to become the quarterback. A young witch learns how to use her powers to become a powerful sorceress.
3. External challenges are critical in character growth, but they are not what pushes the story forward. The story moves forward because the MC(s) learn how to overcome their weaknesses.
4. C-driven stories are often told from first-person POV or third-person limited. They typically include a lot of thought, internal dilemmas, and soul-searching. Romances are c-driven stories, as well as those about family dynamics and teen growth. YA novels are often c-driven with a heavy emphasis on plot and setting in fantasy and science fiction.

ii. Plot - focus on the *circumstances* your characters are in

1. In a P-driven story, the setting is very important, and usually overshadows the characters' internal journeys. The focus is on how the characters defeat whatever external challenge has been set before them.
2. Ex. Defeat the dragon. Rescue the maiden. Save the world. Pass the test. Survive the winter.
3. A ragtag group of warriors journey to defeat an arch-villain using their pre-set skills (more often) or the brand-new skills they learn on the way (less often) [see next point]. They learn and grow as well as have setbacks during the story, but in general, the focus is on the external problems. Superhero movies, like *Big Hero 6*, have many elements of p-driven stories (but I would argue that BH6 is more c-driven due to Hiro's internal struggles after losing his brother. This just goes to show how we perceive things differently!)
4. *Side note:* The reason that pre-set skills are preferable is that taking more than 2 characters from discovery of a craft (such as taking up archery) to mastery of that craft would be a long, daunting, arduous process for the writer and slow, dragging, and boring for the reader. It is preferred with a cast of several characters (a team, squad, band) to give most of them a moderate skill level (or a foothold at the very least) into their craft, and it keeps the story moving. They might not be the best, but they've had some practice already. Usually, the 1-2 MCs are the ones who grow the most.
5. *Think about Harry Potter, Hermione, and Ron:* Harry is completely new to magic. He starts the story at 0/10. Muggle Hermione is book-smart and comfortable with magic (3/10). Ron comes from a magical family, so

he is used to magic (7/10). None of them are 10/10, and Ron isn't very good with magic, but they are not all on the 0/10 level.

6. P-driven stories are often told from third-person omniscient or third-person-limited POV. Sometimes, no internal thoughts are given, and the story is more of a narrative. While many stories of the past were more p-driven and external with little to no character thoughts, today's writers tend to place greater emphasis on character thoughts and internal growth. This is all up to the personal style of the writer. YOU choose what you prefer.
- iii. Emotion - focus on what you want the reader to *feel* while reading/takeaway
 1. I would put a lot of modern 'serious' fiction into this category, pairing it with c-driven. In e-driven stories, very little external action may take place. It contains a lot of thought, soul-searching, and sharing of feelings (at least with the reader).
 2. Ex. A wife is waiting outside her husband's hospital room, talking with the doctor, hoping to get good results but fearing the worst.
 3. Sadness seems to be a huge driver in these stories, but other emotions such as fear, anger, or even joy or excitement may drive the story.
 4. Some e-driven stories end on a sad note or with only a tiny glimmer of hope. (Her husband dies of cancer, but her formerly-estranged family rallies around her.) Others end in a joyful celebration, often championing the power of prayer, love, friendship, or community. (A couple finds out they're finally adopting!)
 5. Some would put these in c-driven, but I feel like they need a separate category. Emotional stories are often about circumstances so far out of the MC's control (cancer, disease, infertility) that there is nothing they can "do" to change their fate (slay the dragon). Of course, moments of hope exist (medical treatments), but in general, the outcome is out of their hands. E-driven stories are more about *accepting* the hand you have been dealt, relying on an external power to solve the "problem" (God, a treatment, an agency), and the emotional journey of the MC.
 - b. Character Drivers (internal)
 - i. Memories – good or bad
 - ii. Morals
 - iii. Goals – selfish or altruistic
 - iv. Family/Friends – responsibilities, maintaining a relationship
 - v. Desires/Wants/Needs - incl. Romance
 - vi. Likes/Dislikes
 - c. Plot Drivers (external)
 - i. Change in situation (income, location...)
 - ii. A new project/adventure/journey
 - iii. A call to action/challenge
 - iv. Courier mission (like *Lord of the Rings*) – taking something somewhere
 - v. Turf War/Battles

- vi. Saving something (person, old building...)
- d. Emotional Drivers
 - i. Missing someone or something
 - ii. Sickness (esp. extreme or terminal)
 - iii. Love (romance or friendship/family)
 - iv. Revenge/Hatred
 - v. Overlap with Character Drivers
- e. Only One Driver per Car
 - i. Most stories are driven by multiple things. However, one driver is Primary: usually Character or Plot.
 - ii. *LOTR* is plot-driven: get the ring to Mordor.
 - iii. *Pride and Prejudice* is character-driven: becoming a better person
 - 1. Ex. Darcy: humble and Lizzy: understanding
- f. **ASSIGNMENT: Choose three books (not in the same series) and tell whether they are character-driven, plot-driven, or emotion-driven. Explain why you made that choice.**
- g. **A note to parents/teachers:** This topic is somewhat subjective. Writers often use multiple drivers, and different readers pick up on different things. As long as the student makes a valid, strong argument, I would accept it.

VIII. Impact & Mirroring

- a. Intros, Middles, & Endings
 - i. Intros hook a reader. It is the first taste of the story. Make them want more.
 - ii. Endings give the final impression. What is the takeaway?
 - iii. The middle is a sensible path from Intro to Ending and shows the trials and how they're overcome.
- b. Introduction – Impact
 - i. Create an impact by starting off with:
 1. One word (Homesick), a phrase, or a question directed at the reader
 - a. Emotional, powerful, and strong words are best.
 - b. A word that implies the theme. Starting off with “Homesick” implies the MC will not be homesick at the end, at least in my story. The “problem” will be “fixed.”
 - c. Ex. I could start Jake and Susie’s story with:
 - i. Busted! (If her parents caught her talking on the phone instead of doing her homework.)
 - ii. Water Girl. (I also like “Invisible.”)
 1. Aside: These could also be the title of the story.
 - iii. Just a friend. (I also like “Best *friend*.” With emphasis on friend.)
 - iv. Are boys always so dense?
 2. Right in the Action – No build up! This is a favorite.
 - a. Ex. Jake careened down the bike path, dodging roots and dreaming of summer vacation.
 - b. Or: Careening down the path, Jake dodged roots and dreamed of summer vacation.
 3. With Speech or in a Conversation (“They’re here.” or “You are not serious.”)
 - a. Looking through my FF, I use this a lot!
 - b. Ex. “Jake’s looking good this year,” Lauren said as the guys ran another play. “Hadn’t noticed,” Susie replied, her eyes glued on Kirk, the dreamy quarterback. “Do you think I should wear my red shirt tomorrow?”
 4. A descriptive intro: A remark to the reader explaining the *status quo* (how things are looking right now)
 - a. Ex. It was an unspoken rule. Water girls never dated the quarterback.
 5. A date or location note for setting is more of a notation prior to the story, but it lets the reader in on the setting if you want them to know up front.
 6. Other story starters: I keep thinking of more!
 - a. A memory – but you need to come back to it later. It must be a significant memory! The story will explain why it is important that the MC remember the event, and how that event shapes

who they are today. No memories about what they ate yesterday for lunch unless you explain your reasoning! *Aka, gas station sushi is a bad idea! They're so sick that they can't go into school today, and thus, they are recruited by a secret society of superheroes...* Get the point? Of course, they ate lunch yesterday. The reader doesn't care unless that meal *changes their life*.

- b. A prologue – again, it must be significant to the outcome of the story. Use prologues sparingly. If you can explain the situation in 1-2 sentences during the intro scene, do that instead. The action and/or speech in the prologue must be part of the MC's *important* past, not just an interesting tidbit about their past. Often, prologues happen before the MC is born or when they are a child. Only include it if it is important to the story.
 - i. Ex. A child left at an orphanage in a mysterious manner.
 - ii. An unpunished or unsolved crime that fuels the mystery, suspense, or action in the story or that is being investigated by the MC
 - iii. Something that is an example or predecessor of the story itself [Imagine *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* as a prologue and the *Hulk* as the present story. The past influences the future.]
- c. A flash-forward scene that ends on a cliff hanger (the next scene begins something like “24 hours earlier...”) These are especially fun in suspense and mysteries when the intro is more descriptive with a lot of set-up. It gives your reader a taste of what is to come and keeps them motivated through the downtime. However, you should avoid as much downtime as possible! Keep things interesting and moving. If it's not important, consider leaving it out.
- c. Example from the same scene:
 - i. Premise: Two friends walking home after school. The big test is tomorrow, Homecoming Friday.
 1. One Word, Phrase, or Question directed at the reader:
 - a. Doomed.
 - b. Failure is not an option. (Story must explain why!)
 - c. What kind of teacher schedules a test on Homecoming Day?
 2. Right in the Action:
 - a. The kicked pebble soared toward Mrs. Grable's pink flamingo collection...and missed. If Ben couldn't hit that, how on earth would he pass Mr. Johnson's history test?
 - b. Side note: Mix-and-match! Sometimes, I like to start my action scenes with a sound (*Ping!*) or a bit of speech (“Whoa!”).
 3. Speech/Conversation:

- a. “Ridiculous, that’s what it is!” Ben said, kicking a rock. It soared like a missile toward Mrs. Grable’s pink flamingo collection...and missed. If he couldn’t even hit that, how on earth would he pass Mr. Johnson’s history test?
 - b. Or: “Ridiculous, that’s what it is!” “Tell me about it, dude!” Kyle replied, shaking his head at his best friend Ben. “I studied all night for the last one, and what do ya think? I bombed it!”
4. Descriptive:
- a. The two boys walked home from school the Thursday before Homecoming, defeat plastered on their fifteen-year-old faces. Ben kicked a rock, sending it flying toward Mrs. Grable’s extensive pink flamingo collection, while Kyle ranted about the last bombed exam. Even if they studied all night, Ben knew they wouldn’t pass Mr. Johnson’s history test.
5. *Please note:* Not all of these intros contain the same information. Telling a story well is all about learning how to time when you share your information. You don’t want to dump everything on the reader all at once, which is why descriptive intros are often frowned upon.
6. RULE-BREAKER ALERT: I used “walked” in the last example on purpose. This is a time when a “boring” word is appropriate. They’re not *sauntering* or *striding* or *shuffling*. They’re walking, neither excited to get home nor anxious about arriving at home. Their mood isn’t affecting their speed, and thus, *walked* is the best option for my scene. The reader will pick up on their mood in the end of the sentence (*defeat plastered* on their fifteen-year-old faces).
- d. Mirroring (what I call it, anyway)
- i. I love using mirroring in FF, especially.
 - ii. It is beginning and ending a story with a similar rhythm. Think of it as two bookends. The intro is often a negative emotion, and the ending is often positive, but you can change it up.
 - iii. Ex. from my "The Island" FF
 1. Homesick.
 2. The isle of emerald green. A turf fire in winter. His family's white-washed cottage.
 3. STORY MIDDLE
 4. Skin the creamy white of lime. Warm curls dark as peat. Eyes verdant green.
 5. Finn was home.
 - iv. Did you catch...?
 1. My use of synonyms, similar ideas, emotion, rich vocab, rhythm, and the "rule of three."
 - v. Another type of mirroring is the repeat of the first sentence(s) of a book or something early in the story with a twist. You don’t copy it word for word, and the sentiment changes based on what happened in the story.

1. I used this in my novel *Caparina*:
 2. Intro: *"One hundred and seventy-five years ago, our ancestors left their home on a faraway planet and sailed to Tishvovali to create a new life for themselves and their children...Our ancestors conquered this moon's barbarous natives and established order and peace."*
 3. Ending: *Like the original colonists before them, they would create a new life for themselves and their people on Tishvovali and bring true order and peace to the moon through love.*
 4. This is popular and recommended because it reminds the reader where the story started and how much has changed. It can also help the writer to make sure they stayed on track with their story. Did you accomplish what you set out to do?
- e. While introductions are important, they are only the beginning! You need to put most of your work into the middle and ending of the story. Don't stress over which intro you should use. Do what feels right for your story and keep writing! You can always come back and change it if you decide you prefer something else.
- i. Not sure what to use? Try this!
 1. Is your story...?
 - a. Character-driven: Speech/conversation
 - b. Plot-driven: Action, descriptive
 - c. Emotion-driven: One word
 2. No wrong answers!
- f. Reminder: This course is meant to guide, not dictate. Please feel free to ask questions, share your tips, and put your own spin on your stories!
- g. **ASSIGNMENT: Choose three books and make note of how they begin. How does this affect the reader? Would the impact be better or worse if they used a different intro?**
- h. **EXTRA CREDIT:** Look for a book that uses mirroring. Hint: A lot of children's picture books use mirroring, as well as YA books.

IX. Middle Ground

- a. While this section does apply to flash fiction in terms of writing a compelling scene, it is more geared toward a short story or novel. Some 1-2 scene FF will not follow this pattern, and that's ok! In FF, it can be fun to end on a cliffhanger (aka at the climax but before the resolution) and let the reader come to their own conclusion. Personally, I would rather a short story give at least a hint of a conclusion, since I have spent a longer time reading it.
- b. This course is not exhaustive on every single type of story or scene. Your great idea may not fit in with what I say regarding the Middle/Body below. That's okay. Mine don't always either! Think of the following as guidelines and work around them as needed.
- c. Pacing – how quickly the writer tells the story (NOT the internal timeline of the story)
 - i. Pacing is so important! In stories with more than one scene, you don't want to start with a lot of action, have a big lull in the middle, and then end with a BOOM. A well-written story oscillates between ACTION – lull – ACTION – lull...ending with a CLIMAX and the resolution (generally a *comforting* end). A story that never stops with the action can be exhausting, so try to give your reader a few lulls.
 - ii. Lulls don't need to be boring or long, though! The point is to give your reader a chance to catch their breath and reflect on the story thus far. Lulls are the time for characters to exchange information, reveal feelings (not only romantic, this also includes friendship, fears, concerns, etc), share special moments (again, not always romantic), and describe the setting or situation.
 1. In novels, lulls are also used as moments to recap what has happened so far or to summarize what needs to happen before the climax. In my novels, I like to give a summary or overview of how things are looking about 2/3 of the way through, just to make sure my characters, my story, and my readers are all on the same page. It helps me as a writer to make sure I haven't gotten off track and lets me know where I need to focus my attention in future scenes.
 2. A summary or overview is NOT an aside, a note to the reader. I put them in conversations (a huddle-up moment or group meeting) and an MC's thoughts or reflections. They should feel like a natural part of the story and not take your reader out of the story. *Your goal as a writer is to keep the reader IN the story!*
 - iii. Don't info dump at the beginning and then rush the ending! Sprinkle the theme, setting and character descriptions, and conflict throughout the story. By the end, the reader will have all the information necessary to form a conclusion.
 - iv. Occasionally repeat elements of the theme and character/setting descriptions to remind the reader and to add flavor (point out things that the MC notices or that you want the reader to take note of – how the light glints off her auburn hair, how seeing a young couple with a child cements the theme of family...).
 - v. A basic rule of thumb: the introduction (Act 1) is the first 25% of the story, the body (Act 2) makes up the middle 50%, and the resolution (Act 3) is the final 25%. (This may vary based on the story and genre.)

- vi. Stories for children and young adults typically have shorter introductions and resolutions because of their shorter attention spans. Many adult books today are cutting down on intros and resolutions for the same reason.
- vii. Stories with unfamiliar worlds (fantasy and science fiction, especially) tend to have longer introductions because the reader must be given enough information to understand the world so that they may enjoy the story to its fullest.
- viii. The length of your resolution will depend on your story. The number of storylines will affect it the most. I prefer to wrap up side stories early, sometimes before the climax, so that the resolution focuses on the larger, more emotionally captivating storylines. This is why many romances (and stories with romances in them) end on a kiss – it is the culmination of the theme of the whole book: love is triumphant.
- ix. When you are setting up your conflicts, I don't recommend developing them all at once. You may overwhelm the reader. You may *introduce* them, or at least the concepts in the first sentences, but keep it brief.
 - 1. NOT GOOD: If in the first moments of the story, Jake almost runs his bike over Mr. Long and gets detention, Lauren tells Jake that Susie is going on a date with Kirk AND he tries to talk her out of it, he bombs his Spanish test, and he goes to practice only to find out he is demoted to back-up running back because Mark told a lie about him to the coach, that's really too much to be believable. Spread it out a bit!
 - 2. If you really must make Jake have an absolutely awful day from the get-go, divide the conflicts between show and tell.
 - a. You can change the order of events to make some memories: Jake is distracted by news of the date SO he almost runs over Mr. Long on the way to practice that morning where he finds out about the lie. He bombs the test because of everything else.
 - b. Or figure out a way to make it work. I'm out of ideas here!
- d. *Need EXTRA help?* Plotting-pacing outline for any length of story: Example from my "Mirror, Mirror" FF
 - i. Start with a Hook – something that catches the reader's attention
 - 1. *Who brings a book to lunch?*
 - ii. Show status quo
 - 1. Allan has a crush on Bella. They are not friends.
 - iii. Explain the problem/what the MC wants to change
 - 1. He wants to get to know her.
 - iv. Show what is standing in their way (internal or external)
 - 1. They don't know each other and he is shy about approaching her.
 - v. An unimportant tidbit that BECOMES very important
 - 1. The gang's going for ice cream after school.
 - vi. Increased longing for a desired outcome (fuel for the impetus)
 - 1. He continues to watch her, noticing every little thing she does.
 - vii. Moment of doubt

1. Rhoda catches him staring. He doesn't think he stands a chance with Bella.
- viii. Prompt to get moving (impetus)
 1. Rhoda makes a casual meeting seem so simple.
- ix. Attempt
 1. He starts walking across the cafeteria.
- x. Failure (real or imagined) or doubt
 1. Bella looks like she is leaving.
- xi. Moment of bravery
 1. He doesn't want to lose this opportunity. *I need to know her name.*
- xii. Beginning of Climax
 1. Allan says hi.
- xiii. Moment of doubt
 1. Would she hate him for interrupting her reading?
- xiv. Uncertainty
 1. She responds without revealing how she feels. He asks her name. She gives it to him.
- xv. When unimportant tidbit BECOMES very important!
 1. He asks her to go to the creamery.
- xvi. Teetering on the brink of disaster (height of climax)
 1. She delays her answer by packing her things. The last moments of doubt creep in and threaten to consume him.
- xvii. Final result of the MC's efforts
 1. She agrees to go with him.
- xviii. Satisfying end (may or may not be happy for the MC, but it must be satisfying for the reader!)
 1. She seems to like him too. He is thrilled.
- e. In a longer story, you would repeat the steps Attempt, Failure (real or imagined) or doubt, and Moment of bravery multiple times. Additional Prompts to act from external sources are also repeated occasionally before Moments of bravery.
- f. Each storyline would follow a similar pattern, sometimes overlapping in the same scene.
- g. Little successes: Giving your characters little moments of success along the way is encouraging to both them and the reader. It's like finding a four-leaf clover on a bad day or feeling the comfort of prayer. It provides motivation and hope that things are going to work out. Most readers don't enjoy sad or unhappy endings (except in genres like horror where it might be expected), but an ending doesn't have to be picture perfect either ("happily ever after" or HEA). Sometimes a "happy-for-now" (HFN) is the best option, especially in a series following one character's journey.
- h. Show 1-2 Scenes (FF)
 - i. Flash Fiction and Super Short Stories shouldn't cover more than 1-2 scenes (or maybe 3 for super shorts).
 - ii. I personally enjoy the 1 Scene approach, developed well, for FF.
 - iii. This is somewhat subjective because some scenes, even in books, are naturally very short, like when a movie cuts to a different storyline or another character's

POV from a different location (Two teammates in the same building but fighting two different bad guys in two different rooms would constitute two separate scenes).

- iv. 1-2 well-developed scenes are preferred over 3 or more choppy ones. Jumping back and forth a lot is confusing to the reader and might push them out of the story.

- i. Short Story Scenes

- i. Each scene should have a purpose. You don't have to show every step of the character's day. You also don't have to provide time stamps or location notes each time. Unless you're writing a spy mystery or government agent story, I would just work any notes about time and location into the first sentence or two. Unless time and location are important to the scene, you may not even need to reveal them at all.
- ii. Ex. If all Lisa is doing is brooding over her friend's betrayal in the previous scene, you don't have to say it's two hours later or that she's at the library. Now, if she's going to run into Greta or meet up with Bobbie, you should at least mention the location. Time is often the least relevant of all setting details, in my experience. If they're not eating, about to sleep, just waking up, attending an event, on a deadline, or about to be late, time is usually immaterial and the reader will automatically put it in the timeline without thinking about it.
- iii. A humorous note about writing scenes: When I first started writing fiction as a teen, I felt like I needed to walk the reader through each literal step of the character's movements. Ex. (The doorbell rings) She got up from the couch, walked to the door, turned the knob, and opened the door. LOL, that does NOT make for interesting reading! INSTEAD, you choose what is important. Your characters don't need to appear to teleport, but you don't need to plot out each step. "She got up from the couch and opened the door" would be more than sufficient. "She answered the door" would be best.

- j. Continue Rhythm and Richness

- i. Don't overdo the "rule of three" or any literary device, but use them as needed to keep the middle interesting.
- ii. Avoid a historical narrative by showing emotion, consequences, and speech or inner dialogue/turmoil.

- k. Tells and Red Herrings

- i. Give the reader little nuggets of information which may or may not influence the outcome. *Tells* are things people do unconsciously that give away what they're thinking (like how your parents automatically know when you're lying or that something is bothering you). *Red Herrings* are false clues which misdirect the reader. Red herrings are popular in mysteries, but they're also important in every other fiction genre as well! Give your reader something to chew on and debate over.

- l. Sense

- i. The Middle or Body is the path the story takes from introduction to resolution. No matter how zany or crazy that path is, at the end, the reader must be able to make sense of it.
- ii. A bunch of unconnected events is not a story. Side stories must be interwoven with the main storylines. Do this by overlapping characters between the storylines. Setting alone isn't strong enough.
 1. If a book covers the lives of four different characters that live in the same apartment building, but their paths never cross, their stories never overlap, and their lives are completely unaffected by one another, that is not a story. It is four stories. It would be like reading chapter one of one book, then reading chapter one of another book, then reading chapter one of a third book, then reading chapter one of a fourth book, then going back to chapter two of the first book and starting the process all over again. Not fun.
 2. Interconnection doesn't mean they would all be best friends or rivals, but their lives **MUST** affect one another.
 3. Ex. Businessman George says hello to nurse Hattie every morning as they pass on the stairs. Hattie picks up widowed Mrs. Neely's mail and delivers it to her every day. Mrs. Neely feeds Kara's goldfish while she is on vacation. Kara and George discuss an article in the newspaper.
 4. Perhaps nothing major happens, like George and Kara falling in love, but little moments must happen between them to help or hurt the morale of the other characters, even just a teeny bit, to make the story cohesive. It is **EVEN BETTER** when each character contributes to the happy ending of the others.
 - a. Mrs. Neely encourages George to pursue Kara, Nurse Hattie saves Kara's life, George and Kara fall in love, and George invests in Hattie's dream of opening a clinic for the needy, thus helping Mrs. Neely. Yes, it's sometimes over-the-top and unrealistic, but *interconnection* is what makes it a story.
- m. **ASSIGNMENT: Pull out Prompts #4-6. Write the timeline of events and see how it compares to the Plot-pacing outline above.** Edit it as you see fit.

X. Leave an Impression

- a. End on a High Note...or a Low One
 - i. The ending might just be the most important part of your story! How your reader enjoyed the ending will most strongly affect whether they enjoyed the story, whether they would recommend the story to another reader, and whether they would want to read another of your stories. But don't despair! Most readers are open to a variety of endings. Choose what you believe is best for your story!
 - ii. Leave the reader with hope, an HEA (happily ever after), or don't. Perhaps, things didn't end so well for your characters.
 - iii. What's the lesson there? What is the takeaway for your readers?
 - iv. A well-written ending does not require "and the moral of the story is..." If you did your job well, they will understand the takeaway without you spelling it out.
- b. Types of endings (not exhaustive, in my own words)
 - i. Happily Ever After (HEA) – common. From now on, nothing horrible is going to happen.
 1. Most fairy tales (*Cinderella*, *Sleeping Beauty*, *The Little Mermaid* [not counting Disney sequels])
 2. *Howl's Moving Castle* (Studio Ghibli) gives this feeling to me too.
 - ii. Happy for Now (HFN) – most common. Bumps may appear in the future, but right now, the characters have everything they want.
 1. Ex. *My Mirror*, *Mirror* FF – Allan and Bella are interested in each other and are going to the creamery together after school. They may not end up getting married, falling in love, or even dating, but they're happy at the moment.
 2. *My Neighbor Totoro*, *From Up on Poppy Hill* (Studio Ghibli)
 - iii. Alive to fight another day – typically at the end of a book in a long series (superhero, detective, YA series about one MC or a group of friends)
 1. *Nancy Drew* mysteries, *Harry Potter* 1-6 by J.K. Rowling
 - iv. New Life – popular, everything has changed for the MCs
 1. *The Giver* by Lois Lowry, my novel *Caparina*
 - v. Old Life-New Normal – more realistic, more of an internal change. Braver, stronger, more confident, contentment but in the same setting as the beginning.
 1. "A new school and a new home, it is a bit scary..." to which Chihiro replies "I think I can handle it." *Spirited Away* (Studio Ghibli, English Dub)
 2. *Inside Out* and *Coco* (Disney), *Kiki's Delivery Service* and *When Marnie Was There* (Studio Ghibli)
 - vi. Remember the fallen – the MC is the last one standing...but they're standing
 1. All I can think of is the final *Hobbit* movie...not everyone is dead, but Bilbo loses some friends who are larger characters
 - vii. Sacrifice for the greater good – less popular, the MCs die or must part from one another, but the goal was achieved. The enemy/hard situation is either

defeated or set back. War stories would fit well here if the MCs don't make it back home.

1. *Rogue One* (Star Wars-Disney) and *The Secret World of Arrietty* (Studio Ghibli)
- viii. All is lost – the bad guys win (horror) or the MC wasn't bright/cautious enough to best the bad guys (common in nursery rhymes and some darker fairy tales)
 1. *The Boy Who Cried Wolf* (fairy tale)
- ix. Cliffhanger/Open to interpretation/Hints at a HEA
 1. *Porco Rosso* (Studio Ghibli) – hints at likely HEA between Porco/Marco and Gina but it is not shown.
- x. Surprise Ending/Plot Twist – SPOILER ALERT! In longer stories, the surprise isn't usually the Final ending, more of a major *plot twist*. In FF and SS, writers sometimes end on the plot twist and leave the reader to wrap up the ending they like most. (See note below)
 1. *Wreck-It Ralph* (Disney) – King Candy is Turbo, the bad guy!
 2. *Coco* (Disney) – Hector is Miguel's great-great-grandfather (I cry every time!)
 3. *Moana* (Disney) – the goddess isn't really bad, her heart was stolen
 4. And my favorite: *Frozen* (Disney) – Hans is evil. Whoa, didn't see that coming!
- c. Surprise Endings
 - i. If done WELL, surprise endings can be fantastic. However, they can also turn off readers from future stories. Giving very subtle clues throughout the story will help readers better receive the surprise ending without giving it away. They can look back and go, "Okay. I didn't see it coming, but that makes sense! Wow!"
 - ii. Plot twists – Be careful with plot twists. They can ruin a story if they're out-of-the-blue, insensitive, or cliché.
- d. Lessons and Morals
 - i. Every story DOESN'T have to have a lesson or a moral. Sometimes, they are just for fun. However, if you want the reader to learn something specific, make sure it is clear by the final word.
- e. **ASSIGNMENT: Choose your favorite piece(s) from this course and edit based on everything you've learned!**
- f. Speaking of Endings...
 - i. I had no idea how much I had to say about writing short fiction! And this isn't even everything! I hope you enjoyed it and found something helpful.
 - ii. How did you enjoy this course? Let me know!
 - iii. Is there anything else you're wondering about? Ask away!
 - iv. Do I need to clarify anything? Happy to help!
 - v. Thanks so much for playing!
 - vi. If you're interested in me creating another writing course, what topics would you be interested in? Let me know!