

THE ART OF
Shorts

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Middle Ground

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Pacing: How quickly the story is told

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.

Flash Fiction is the exception. Action is king.

Lulls

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.

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Pacing is NOT the story's internal timeline.

A basic rule of thumb:

Introduction (Act 1) - the first 25%

Body (Act 2) - the middle 50%

Resolution (Act 3) - the final 25%

See Full Course Notes for a
Basic Plot-Pacing Outline with Example

Pacing Tip

Don't info dump at the beginning and then rush the ending! Sprinkle the theme, setting and character descriptions, and conflict throughout the story, repeating them occasionally. By the end, the reader will have all the information necessary to form a conclusion.

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How many scenes should you show?

Flash Fiction and Super Short Stories shouldn't cover more than 1-2 scenes (or maybe 3 for super shorts). I personally enjoy the one scene approach, developed well for FF. 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.

Short Story Scenes

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.

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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.

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Continue Rhythm and Richness

Don't overdo the "rule of three" or any literary device, but use them as needed to keep the middle interesting.

Avoid a historical narrative by showing emotion, consequences, and speech or inner dialogue/turmoil.

Tells and Red Herrings

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. Red Herrings are false clues which misdirect the reader. Give your reader something to chew on and debate over.

Sense

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.

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.

Interconnection

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Interconnection doesn't mean they would all be best friends or rivals, but their lives **MUST** affect one another.

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.

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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.

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It is EVEN BETTER when each character contributes to the happy ending of the others.

Ex. 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.