

KILL YOUR DARLINGS

KYD School Writing Prize Helpful Hints: Fiction

What is the issue at the heart of your story?

Before getting started, sit down and decide what the main issue you want to explore is, then write it down. Choose only one main issue, and you should be able to sum it up in a few words. Having this decided and laid out simply at the beginning means you can then build your story out from there.

Writing your story

There is no one right method – you might be someone who has the spark of an idea, sits down, and writes it all out in a couple of hours. You might be someone who plans out every part of a story before writing a word. You might be somewhere in between.

The below is a list of questions and suggestions that will help strengthen your work – but they can be used beforehand, for planning, or afterwards as a kind of checklist.

WHO: What characters are in your story? How many are there? Do they all need names? And what purpose do they serve?

Having too many characters in a short story can be overwhelming for readers. Make sure that every character in the story is serving a purpose – whether that be plot, characterisation of the main character, suspense, misdirection or to build a sense of the setting.

Decide whether the story will be told in first, second or third person. This is something you can go back over and change after your first draft if you feel that something isn't quite working.

WHAT: Decide the plot of your story. The basic structure is exposition (setting the scene), complication, resolution – but how much time you spend on each and what order they go in is up to you. The main thing to remember is to make the plot tie back to the central issue that your story is about.

WHERE: Choose the setting. This can be kept vague or specific depending on how important it is to the story. The main thing to keep in mind here is don't describe stuff for no reason. There is a limited number of words available to work with, so only *keep* what is necessary and only *describe* what is necessary. Give enough clues to the reader that they can imagine what they need to for themselves.

WHEN: Is this taking place in the past, present, future or an alternative reality? There are different ways to let the reader know. If time is really important to the plot – or if it takes place in more than one time – then you can even put it in a little sub-heading. Otherwise you can be more subtle – paint a picture of the things that are around to give clues, such as clothes, technology, character vocabulary, transport, and/or famous events.

WHY: How do the events tie back to the main issue? You don't have to talk about it in overt, obvious terms, but the issue is the skeleton holding your story up, so you need to make sure that the idea is always present or driving events, even if it isn't immediately obvious to the reader.

HOW: There is no one right way to structure your work – it depends on what you think works best for the story you want to tell. You can do it chronologically, you can start with a flashback to build suspense, you can have one point of view or multiple points of view. The main thing is to have a reason – even if that reason is as simple as it makes it easier to follow what is happening. One good thing to remember too is that you don't need to have a plot twist for it to be a good story.