



# Creating Short Fiction: The Classic Guide to Writing Short Fiction

*Damon Knight*

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## **Creating Short Fiction: The Classic Guide to Writing Short Fiction** Damon Knight

Distilled from decades of teaching and practice, this book offers clear and direct advice on structure, pacing, dialogue, getting ideas, working with the unconscious, and more. Newly revised and expanded for this Third Edition, *Creating Short Fiction* is a popular and widely trusted guide to writing short stories of originality, durability, and quality. Celebrated short-story author and writing instructor Knight also includes many examples and exercises that have been effective in classrooms and workshops everywhere.

## **Creating Short Fiction: The Classic Guide to Writing Short Fiction Details**

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# From Reader Review Creating Short Fiction: The Classic Guide to Writing Short Fiction for online ebook

## Sarah says

I've wanted to attend the Clarion Writing Workshop since I was fourteen. I'm sure books by the Clarion instructors are no match for the actual experience, but they'll have to do for now. And, well, this one will have to do for always, since Damon Knight passed away a few years ago and therefore isn't on the current list of Clarion instructors.

As with any writing guide, there are parts that are more and less useful depending on where the reader is as a writer. For me, the most interesting parts of this particular guide were the annotated story, in which Knight broke down everything he had done in a short piece and why, and the section on controlling a story. Knight compares the experience to that of a stage magician, and proceeds to break down those skills. He says the writer needs to command, to focus attention, to hypnotize, and of course, to create illusions. "There is no such thing as *a* story. The words on paper are only instructions used by each reader to create a story. The story itself exists in the reader's mind and nowhere else. And it is different for each reader, because no two people have the same experience, background, training, interests, and so on." These aren't exercises: they're psychological tools.

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## TrumanCoyote says

Actually, I'd give this one more like 2-1/2 stars. It gets pretty Oregonian in places (and all that business with the pronouns and such started to come off sounding vaguely anti-male), and it's also rather snobby and pedantic at times. But I did after all make it through the whole thing, which is more than I can say for most writing manuals. Anyway, the stuff about the stages in a proto-writer's career was illuminating, especially his account of his own fumbling efforts in that direction. And at least the guy has written some worthwhile stuff in his career; it's not like all he writes is writing books. However, all that talk of "students" soon grew pretty dreary; it's especially annoying when one of them points out something that everyone else missed yet still continues to be relegated to that ghetto classification. It all seems rather inbred and artificial, as most college things do. Anyway, I doubt if I really got much out of all of this beyond the usual inane injunctions (like "Be observant!" or "Omit needless words!"). So would I (like Harlan) "commend this book without reservation"? Nope. A more interesting matter is: I wonder if Damon would've bought it himself had he been the reader and not the writer... ;)

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## Greg says

The funniest thing about this book was, while reading it, I became absorbed in its advice so much so that I didn't pay attention to how old it was. I came across a line about "new technology" and following that, home word processors. I was floored to say the least. But the advice is just that good, the advice is without restraint in the realm of time. Highly Recommend it!

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## Kira Gold says

Er. Well. Classic indeed.

This made me think of old college professors mouthing lectures they'd written back in the 1970's--the most modern storytelling reference was to the movie *Alien*, and almost every writing example used was by a white male author who hasn't published anything for 50 years.

But there are a lot of nuggets in this lesson, and it's worth a read if you're in the mood for good textbook stuff. I was struggling not to skim three-quarters of the way in, but this is more likely my old study habits kicking in rather than the quality of the book.

One line that I jotted down:

When the demands of one person rise to a level that another person can't tolerate, there is conflict.

ETA: Just discovered the author died 15 years ago. An introduction explaining this might have put the dated material in better context. I'd have been less frustrated.

## Staticblaq says

Some very sound general writing advice. Not enough practical advice on writing Short Fiction for my expectations - nothing on SS structures, and the differences between short fiction and longer fiction, thenuances that can make short fiction writing more challenging.

????? ???? says

[illegible]

### Therese Gilardi says

love this book, especially the clever way the author sneaks in references to his wife kate's work as though she is just another writer out there ....

## Seth says

Among the few practical and *practicable* writing books, this is a classic.

Knight was a fabulous short writer. With many authors that doesn't translate to writing good writing advice, but Knight as also introspective, insightful, and interested in theory. The book contains both cognitive models to help organize thinking and steps/processes to help get stories done.

The book begins with a great introduction on "Three Reasons I Should Not Have Written This Book" two being myths/half-truths about whether writing can be learned and one being the belief that learning about writing stifles creativity. Knight addresses them without dismissing them entirely. He admits to his personal dogmatism without claiming either to be right or to have minimized it in the text. And he gives several practical and practicable techniques for reading a book on writing.

After those incredibly educational three pages, we get to the actual material :-)

The sections of the book are interesting:

1. Developing your talent as a writer (21 pages, 5 exercises)

Motivation, stages of development, observation

2. Idea into story (75 pages, 2 exercises)

Getting ideas, research, constraints, conflict, plot types, theme, meaning, some excellent and detailed examples

3. Beginning a story (47 pages, 4 exercises)

Five questions about your story, four decisions to make

4. Controlling a story (29 pages, 9 exercises)

Being interesting, compression, surprise, tone, voice, style, dialog

5. Finishing a story (9 pages, 1 exercise)

What to do when stuck, targeting a market, working with editors

6. Being a writer (16 pages)

Bylines, work habits, drugs and alcohol, reading, networking, spouses/partners, etc.

That's an interesting layout: it's both structured/linear/small-chunk (idea, beginning, "controlling," and finishing) as well as theoretical/cognitive and large-chunk/big picture (developing talent, "controlling" as a metaphor, "being a writer"). That's both part of Knight's talent as a writer and part of his message for writers, that the small and cognitive details are *equal to* the larger structure and more fuzzy concepts like voice, style, structure, and character. The exercises, examples, and suggestions complement this.

The book is written in very small sections, many no more than a page, that pack a lot of training into a small number of words--sometimes almost covertly.

A major part of the value of the book is in Knight's rare ability to cover multiple elements of the process of writing at once. In his classes on managing a school classroom and in his classes on public speaking, Michael Grinder uses the "ABCs" of *kinds of teaching*: teaching Attitude, teaching Behavior (or skill), and teaching Cognition. Very few teachers do all three well and extremely few combine them into one. Knight does that here.

In a TusCon panel on writer's block, I presented the model that a writer needs five things: *motivation* to write, *conviction* that the story is worth writing and they can write it, *decision* to write the story and about the elements of the story, *creativity* to create the story, and a *process* to write. Most writing books cover one or two (Writing Down the Bones covers motivation and conviction, the Fundamentals of Fiction Writing series cover decision and process, etc). Knight covers each of these both explicitly in their own sections and implicitly/covertly in his presentation.

## Saeed says

[illegible]

I was hoping to gain a better understanding about the structure of a short story, though (particularly as I'm far more used to novel structure) and felt that section could have been better developed.

The information found in this book could be applied to all forms of writing, not just short story form. The author effectively describes all aspects of writing craft in a simple and straightforward manner. My favorite part of the book is Part II Idea into Story. Within this section, the author discusses how it is not enough to have a singular idea, but that one must connect it to at least another and develop it further. This section also covers research, plot, character, setting, and what a story should be.

## Mike says

Too many books on writing are written by people who aren't primarily known as good writers. This is not one of them. Damon Knight was a well-respected and prolific writer, as well as a teacher of writing over many years at the highly-regarded Clarion workshops.

His depth of knowledge and insight are on display on every page of this book. Though a lot of the advice is foundational and suitable for beginners, as an intermediate writer I found plenty to learn. Occasionally, it feels like a collection of thoughts around a theme rather than an argument that flows throughout a section, but each portion contains valuable gems.

Although Knight was a science fiction author, very little of the advice is specific to SF. Most of the advice would also be just as useful for novelists as for short story writers. However, the section on short story structure provides confirmation of something I'd begun to suspect, but have never seen taught anywhere else. A lot of writing advice tends to assume that a short story is just like a novel, only in miniature, and needs to have what Knight calls the "plot skeleton" (five-act, or at least three-act, structure). Knight's opinion--and mine, based on reading a great many successful short stories that don't have that structure--is that a short story can have any of a number of structures, as long as it does have a structure, a unity, and a sense of completion. (Many of today's short stories seem to dispense with the sense of completion, but personally I find those stories unsatisfying.)

Even though it's now several decades old, most of this book--apart from a couple of things about technology and the industry at the very end--has aged well, and the advice remains useful and relevant. Surprisingly, much of it hasn't been repeated endlessly in other people's advice books, either.

Definitely worth reading, especially if you write short stories.

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## Arezu Wishka says

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## Shaye says

This book immediately feels invaluable to me as I am trying to navigate my way into writing more short fiction. This book is practical and filled with great exercises, as well as plenty of useful advice. I will be returning to this book frequently in the coming years.

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## Emily Irish says

Great book on the fundamentals of writing good fiction. The only reason this didn't get 5 stars from me is because the name is misleading. The book talks a lot about good general fiction practices, but offers no specifics on *short* fiction, what makes it different from novels, or advice on how to write a strong story with limited space. Still, I'd recommend to any writers of fiction.

