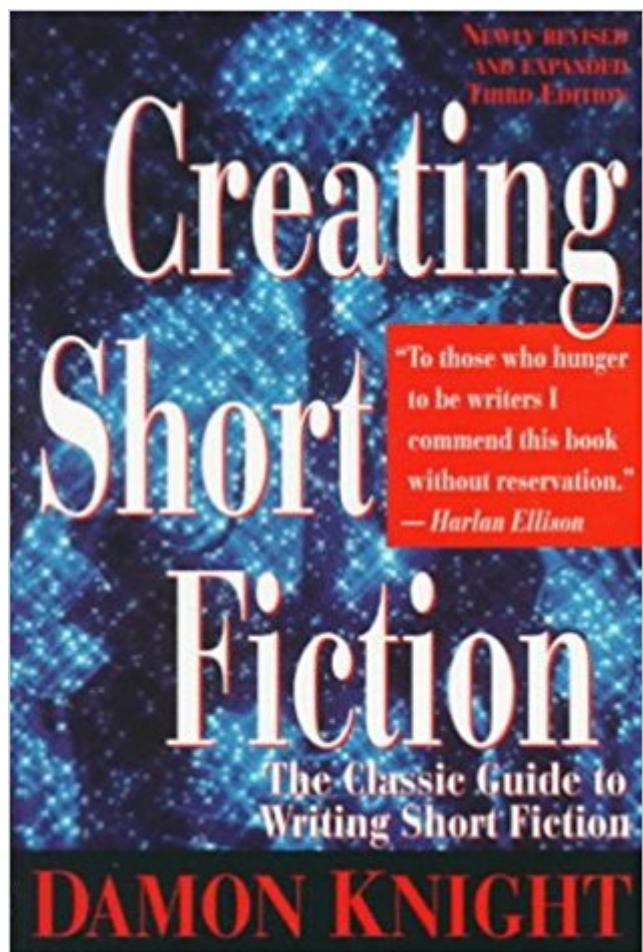


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# Creating Short Fiction: The Classic Guide To Writing Short Fiction



## **Synopsis**

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.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

As an MFA student I've been looking at a lot of books about how to write fiction, and very few of them do anything other than encourage you to keep writing. This book teaches you how to write a short story, and encourages you to write a =better= short story (without imposing its own definition of "better"). It is the only "how-to" book in fiction that I have found that I can recommend, and I use it in my own teaching

Knight's, *Creating Short Fiction* is, perhaps ironically, a short book but he manages to cover the craft of writing from nurturing talent to getting the story completed to what its like being a writer. A lecturer at the Clarion Workshop and author of many short stories and novels he knows how to write. But he doesn't give the reader a step-by-step guide to story writing. Such a recipe, in my limited experience, doesn't exist and Knight does well to avoid trying to give one. What the reader

will find are discussions about the elements every story must have and how to use them. He also discusses what a story is and is not, how to generate ideas, and even a few work habits the reader might find effective. The elements of stories and story writing can be found in many other books. Rather than simply parrot them, Knight is candid about which techniques he doesn't like and why; but that isn't to say the would-be author is allowed to break every rule. He give examples of stories and authors that show the successful use of a particular element or technique e.g. first person subjective point-of-view. And Knight includes diagrams that make the concept of story structure and viewpoint easier to understand. All of this advice is given in a conversational style that is never condescending. Creating Short Fiction helped me to understand that, like painting or drawing, writing is highly individualized. Every art form has its accepted rules and techniques. And each artist must learn to build upon that foundation, combining the fundamental elements into unique patterns. There are a few editorial errors, mainly of omission, that make the book feel as if it were the choicest bits from a much longer work. Overall this is an excellent book for the beginning writer, and perhaps the experienced one.

CREATING SHORT FICTION is an excellent introductory text for writers who want to try their hands at making short stories and starting a novel. However, published writers will learn much from it as well. It has, for example, one of the best analyses of point of view that I have seen in text or scholarly article. Reading Damon Knight's chapter on viewpoint will expand the understanding of many published authors who speak at writers conferences and professors who write introductory texts on literature. This text is about how to write fiction, not a book about how it was like to be a writer of fiction. Its occasional reference to science fiction, fantasy, and detective fiction is a useful corrective to the snob view that such "sub-genre" fiction is unworthy of being mentioned in a "literary" creative writing course. One hundred years from now, some of the short stories and novels that will be literature will come from such sub-genres. My college sophomore fiction-writing students begin with CREATING SHORT FICTION. In the second semester, they use Janet Burroway's WRITING FICTION: A GUIDE TO THE NARRATIVE CRAFT, also an excellent more-advanced text, now in its 6th. edition.

This is easily one of the best books available on writing short fiction -- and I've read a LOT! Definitely top five. I purchased this book years ago and have read it several times. I've been reading it again and I've been amazed at the new gems I keep finding hidden inside. I'm currently hard at work on several short stories. Just last night I read a passage in which Knight speaks to a particular

problem I've been trying to address: "Madame de StaÃ«fÂ«l once wrote, 'If I had more time, I should have written you a shorter letter.' She meant, of course, that she was working out what she wanted to say as she went along, instead of thinking it through and then saying it briefly. If you are writing short stories this way, they are probably running to seven and eight and ten thousand words, and editors are probably sending them back. Compression is a matter of planning and method -- like packing things carefully in a suitcase instead of throwing them in helter-skelter." Above is the opening paragraph to two-and-a-half pages of material on "Compression." It ends with an exercise well-designed to address the problem. Knight's instructions are always specific, never nebulous, and they are relevant, workable, and reliable. As an example: two weeks ago I used one of several methods that Knight outlines in the book to generate an idea for a story. After generating the idea, I did some brief research and then outlined the story as I saw it (Knight addresses these latter two, but I followed my own methods for research and used Algis Budrys's ideas for outlining). When I sat down to write the story, it took me 6 days, and I ended up with a tale nearly 8,500 words long, which is longer than I wanted it to be. I set the story aside, so that I could cool off before editing it, and immediately started work on a new story. Meanwhile, I've been reading Knight's book. And then last night I come across his discussion on "Compression" and I have found in it material that I \*know\* will help me to shorten the story I've written and make it more appealing to editors. If you do the exercises and apply what you learn, your writing cannot help but improve. Finally, of all the books I've read on writing, Knight's has, I think, one of the best and most thorough discussions on point-of-view I've ever read. I've never had a problem with POV, but the chart in Knight's book is so incredibly helpful and handy I've copied it and have it on my desk where I can always see it. The section on POV alone makes the book worth many times its price. That it's packed to overflowing with similar items makes it invaluable.

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