

Flash Fiction Tips from Published Authors and Lit Mag Editors



On starting out in flash fiction



Read! Any form, any length, any genre. When you get to a sentence that resonates with you, stop! What does that sentence make you feel? If you could write a story around that one sentence, different than the story the sentence exists within, what would that story be? Don't try to recreate the story you're reading or the feeling. Just tell yourself a story using that sentence. Get the story down as succinctly as possible adhering to the flash word count. Nothing fancy. That's for editing.

Mario Aliberto III, author of the flash chapbook, *All the Dead We Have Yet to Bury* (Chestnut Review, 2025)



What I've learned in a fair few years of writing flash is that there's no right pen to write with, no shit-hot notepad to acquire, there's no ideal location in which to create, or perfect time in which to do it. A biro will do. A receipt or a torn off piece of A4 work very well. At the office, inside a parked Renault at the service station, wherever. For ten minutes at lunch, in the evening, or just after you've flossed your teeth. What counts is that you've decided to write, and you might decide to write again, and again.

Kik Lodge, author of *Scream If You Want To* (Alien Buddha Press) and *The Bully in my Pillow* (Stanchion Books).



Here's a tip for anyone writing flash fiction for the first time... or maybe your hundredth: Every story starts with you making a wild guess about who your narrator and protagonist should be. And if you're working through a draft or trying to edit every fine detail, and feel that it's not quite working, it's often because your guess wasn't quite right. If you try telling the story from a different perspective—maybe that minor character is actually the narrator!—you often find that it gets you closer to the emotional core and character work you wanted to do from the beginning.

Joel Hans, author of *The Bedtime Emptying of Our World*

General tips for writing flash fiction



What story do you want to tell? Start there. For me, story is the core theme of what you are writing, the bones of it all. These stories are told all the time by flashers and novelists alike - grief, coming of age, love found or lost, survival, personal transformation, good versus evil etc etc. The whole will not hold without these bones - which can be layered under gorgeous, lyrical words, mingled into a hermit-crab structure, or wrapped in a weird, dark or speculative setting. That is the flesh you add onto the bones. However you choose to present it, never lose sight of the story. That's where all the feels are. You can learn to do all the cool stuff like hermit crabs and single-sentence pieces and anaphora repetition - but you should *know* the story. Know the bones.

JP Relph, Editor of Trash Cat Lit and author of *Sick Ink* and *One For Sorrow*



Imagine your narrator has only two minutes to tell their closest friend *the thing*. Capture the urgency of the telling to pump your story with energy. Channel the intimacy to create voice.

Kathryn Aldridge-Morris, author of *Cold Toast* (Dahlia Books)



Characters in flash fiction are too often not memorable at all. Don't sacrifice the most essential element of your story to space limitations. Build a picture through specificity. Practice to make it second nature. A blue shirt is generic, but a crew-neck, plunging V-neck, turtleneck, fisherman's knit, or merino top tells us so much about the person wearing it. Something as simple as taking a sip of coffee can tell readers a great deal about your character. Is the joe in hand decaf, espresso, instant, or green tea? One specific word gives us a world.

Lorette C. Luzajic, editor of *The Ekphrastic Review* and *The Mackinaw*, and author of *Disgust*, *The Rope Artist*, *Winter in June*, and *Pretty Time Machine*



Err on the side of zooming in, use sensory and emotional detail and consistent metaphors, and aim for a Turner-like sense of the thing, rather than explication. Trust your reader.

Sumitra Singam, author of *Mother Karma*, and organiser of Yeah Nah zoom meetings



When I write, especially in the very short fiction form, I always keep sound and imagery in mind—more so than the plot or characters themselves, and I'm not sure if that's an effective approach, but it just makes the experience fun and engaging for me. Ideally, I rely on sound and imagery to push the characters or plot forward. My favorite attempts, when writing, are trying to create those disguised alliterations, or maybe just a couple of words, back to back or close to each other, in each sentence or so that begin with the same sound (such as, "same sound"). It sparks the creativity for me, leading to imagery and rhythm. Sometimes it's the other way around, where I fixate on images first and create its sounding effect afterward. Either way, after that, I'm like, I sure hope this makes sense—or that there's a narrative here. Again, this just makes the process that much more gravitational for me—a propeller of some sort ("some sort").

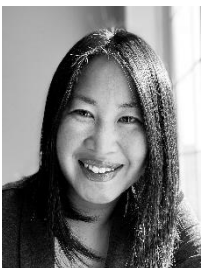
Shome Dasgupta, author of *Cajun South Brown Folk* and *Histories of Memories*



Arrive late and leave early. We hear this all the time about flash, because flash isn't just about the number of words. It should be flashy! Always start in the middle of the action and don't try to resolve everything. No Hallmark endings. Start with something you know so well you could describe it with your eyes closed—a chore, a room, a habit, a small irritation. Anchor the piece in sharp, sensory truth first. Then add one impossible element and treat it like it's normal: the kitchen is the size of a shoebox, the dog gives advice, the elevator skips emotions instead of floors. Don't explain the weirdness—let the real details do the convincing. In flash, the familiar earns the absurd. This type of speculative writing allows the writer to explore deeper themes in a unique way.

Tracie Adams, author of *Our Lives in Pieces* and *Not Finished Yet*

On distilling a flash fiction down to its purest form



Listen to your gut. That one line, that one word that you love but you know deep down doesn't quite fit? Remove it. Then read your piece out loud. If you don't notice it missing, leave it out. Don't discard it completely, save it into another document. Some things find their forever home later.

Jenny Wong, author of *Shiftings & Other Coordinates of Disorder*



Every word must do a team's worth of jobs. So, all verbs, adjectives, adverbs, and, ideally, even nouns should somehow hint at the underlying emotions and/or themes, and/or deepen scene, and/or progress character development!

Amy Marques, author of *PARTS* and *Foot Notes* and co-author of *Are You Willing?* and editor/artist for the *Duets Anthologies*

On adding layers



Finding the delicate balance between inference and clarity is a skill. Subtext and metaphor are important to provide depth and power in flash, but they are there to serve the story, so don't be so cryptic that you sacrifice meaning. Layers are offered for the reader who chooses to look beneath the surface. It's your job to make them want to.

Gillian O'Shaughnessy, author of forthcoming collection, *Salt City Runaway*



When your story needs a boost, return to what I like to call "The S's", (which all actors live by):

- Have you created a STATUS imbalance between your characters? How can you accentuate it further?
- How are you using SUBTEXT? e.g. In what ways can your characters hint at their true meaning without directly addressing it?
- What are the STAKES? Is enough at stake? What are your characters at risk of losing?

And, although I'm a big believer in the rule of threes, if you need more S's to catapult your story, consider introducing/amplifying: Sex and Stream of Consciousness. Sexual tension can supercharge all the S's and good old Stream of Consciousness will get you inside the heads of your characters to unlock their true motivations.

Coleman Bigelow, author of the flash fiction collection *Man's Best Friends*

On writing prose poetry



Recall a vivid experience or memory infused with sensory images and feelings. Now write the memory as a scene or vignette, allowing the sights, sounds, feelings, smells, and tastes it invokes to drive the narrative without worrying about high stakes or a traditional story arc. Focus instead on bringing the memory to life on the page as cinematically as possible, emphasizing lyricism and rhythm. Let it flow without considering where it's going, how it will end. Write without paragraph breaks, possibly as one breathless paragraph or sentence if that feels right.

Kathryn Silver-Hajo, author of flash collection, *Wolsong*, YA novel, *Roots of the Banyan Tree*, and flash collection, *Spinning: Love, Family, and other Strange Entanglements* (forthcoming fall 2026).

On writing six-sentence stories



Immediately establishing setting helps ground the reader. With only six-sentences there isn't room for more than one or two characters. Focus the story on one event or moment in time.

Jeff Harvey, author of *Life Would Be Perfect If* (Bottlecap Press 2024) and founding editor of *Gooseberry Pie Lit Magazine*

On editing



When editing, it's helpful to make separate lists of the characters, objects, sensory details, and themes that appear in the current draft of your story. It's usually surprising to see how many of each there are. Evaluating each set as a grouping can reveal how characters and objects are working with and against each other (and, more importantly, if they are all necessary or if something/someone is missing). In shorter pieces it's also helpful to make a list of your verbs in comparison to your themes. This provides an editing opportunity to insert verbs that reflect your theme and elevate your prose - just be careful not to overdo it.

Ellen Weeren, writer, creative writing teacher, and facilitator of *Reason to Write* writing retreats and workshops



When editing flash (or any form of fiction), my goal is to make it shorter, but put in more of the good stuff. To that end, here are a few strategies:

- Skip the transitions. Place one sharp, distinct, active piece after another and trust the reader will follow, without having each dot connected for them.
- Replace a paragraph of exposition with a lively exchange of dialogue and a line or two of action, occurring in the story's present time.
- Use precise and evocative details: dried mustard under a girlfriend's thumbnail, the moist funk of an old dog's breath. A few memorable phrases can create a rich sense of time, place, character, and emotion.
- When revising, ask yourself, "What is this sentence doing?" Even, "What is this word doing?" If it's not moving the plot or revealing character—with vigor, muscle, and sensory detail—it likely isn't necessary.

Timothy Boudreau, author of *Saturday Night; Love You, Miss You, Goodbye Forever* (forthcoming): *Stepdad on the Dance Floor* (forthcoming), and *All We Knew Were Our Hearts* (forthcoming).



I can think of few things more important in my writing life than having a few trusted readers I stay in close contact with and regularly exchange work with. It's crucial to have at least one writing/critiquing buddy who has great judgement in terms of craft, who reads deeply, listens carefully to rhythm, style, word choice, etc. and offers honest, helpful feedback. It's also fun and affirming to have your own nucleus of writing/critiquing companions you can rely on to be there for you to help with your struggles and celebrate your successes.

Kathryn Silver-Hajo, author of flash collection, *Wolfsong*, YA novel, *Roots of the Banyan Tree*, and flash collection, *Spinning: Love, Family, and other Strange Entanglements* (forthcoming fall 2026)