

The Five Elements of a Short Story

1. Plot
2. Character
3. Setting
4. Atmosphere
5. Style

Characteristics of Each Element:

1. Plot - The arrangement of incidents or events in a story.
Plot Line:

Opening Situation - The reader is often told where and when the story occurs; introduces the character (s).
 - a. Inciting Force - A conflict is usually established between characters.
 - b. Rising Action - The conflict between characters develops and becomes more pronounced.
 - c. Climax - The moment of greatest suspense.
 - d. Falling Action - The action leads to the resolution or final outcome.
 - e. Final Outcome - The writer wraps up and ties up any loose ends in hopes that the reader will leave the story satisfied.
2. Character - The plot can only exist with character(s). The main character is placed in a situation that contains a problem he must overcome: therefore, conflict exists. Most stories also have minor characters who either help or hinder the main character's attempt to solve his problem. When examining character, we must always look at his motivation. What makes him behave this way?
 - a. Flat Character - a character who doesn't go through a change. These characters are usually one-dimensional.
 - b. Round (Dynamic) Characters - a character affected by the events of the story. These characters are usually fully developed in terms of personality. They are described in more detail and their personalities emerge more fully. Round characters usually become enlightened, learn, grow, or deteriorate by the end of the story.
 - c. Protagonist - The main character of the story.
 - d. Stereotyped Characters - a character who is so well known that little has to be said about him/her. These characters are immediately recognizable because of the role he/she plays.

Examples - the strong silent gunfighter, the nerd, the beautiful international spy, the mad scientist, etc.

- e. Antagonist - This character opposes the protagonist. Often, he/she is an opponent to the main character and is sometimes right and justified in his/her actions.
- f. Conflict - Two types:
 - i. Internal - man versus himself
 - ii. External - man versus man
 - (1) man versus nature
 - (2) man versus society
 - (3) man versus unknown
 - (4) man versus supernatural
 - (5) man versus time

We learn about a character by examining 5 areas:

1. what he says
2. what he thinks
3. what he does
4. what is said about him by other characters and the narrator
5. an author's direct statement

In character analysis, look at the character's dialogue; his appearance; his actions; his environment; his character type; what motivates the character; is his motivation consistent.

3. Setting - The physical background of the story - where and when the story takes place.
4. Atmosphere - This element has a closer connection to the setting because the setting often determines the atmosphere. The atmosphere is the mood or tone of the story. Physical surroundings affect a character and determine his mood. Atmosphere is usually established at the beginning of the story. It takes in characters, clothing, furniture, natural surroundings, light, darkness, shadows, weather.
5. Style - The ways the author expresses himself and conveys his ideas and central purpose. Style is very personal - no two writing styles are alike. In order to determine a writer's style, we must look at the following areas:
 - a. Diction - word choice. Word choice can be formal, informal, colloquial or slang.
 - i. Formal diction is usually found in academic texts, academic papers and formal discourse.

- ii. Informal diction is relaxed conversation and is found in writing that has a lighter tone and is sometimes humorous.
 - iii. Colloquial diction is the everyday usage of a particular group. Example: In Cape Breton people say "A bun of bread", "A sup of pop", etc.
 - iv. Slang is defined as a newly coined word not accepted for formal usage yet, and is usually not found in the dictionary.
- b. Sentence structure - Indicated by whether or not the sentences are short, long, simple, compound, complex, compound-complex.
- c. Point of View - The vantage point from which the author presents the action of the story. It is the person telling the story: the narrator.
- d. There are different types of narration:
- i. third person narration - when the person telling the story is not part of the action.
 - ii. first person narration - This is a major, minor, or a silent character who tells the story.
 - iii. Omniscient narration - The author who knows everything about the characters and events and who can enter the mind of any character at will.
- e. Irony refers to some sort of discrepancy between what is expected and what actually happens.
- i. Verbal irony - the opposite is said from what is really intended (sarcasm) Example - "Wasn't that a smart move!!"
 - ii. Dramatic irony - a contrast between what a character says and what the reader knows to be true.
- f. Symbolism - A literary symbol means something itself in the story but also suggests a wealth of meaning beyond what it actually is. An object, a situation, and actions can all be symbolic tools.
- g. Imagery - There are two types:
- i. Sensuous imagery - Images that appeal to the 5 senses: visual (sight); auditory (hearing); tactile (touch); gustatory (taste) and olfactory (smell).
 - ii. Figurative imagery - metaphor; simile; personification; apostrophe; etc.
 - iii. Simile - a comparison of two unlike objects or persons that have point(s) in common - use of "like or as" Example - I wandered lonely as a cloud.

- iv. Metaphor - a direct comparison between two unlike objects or persons without using "like or as" Example - She is a bear in the morning.
- v. Personification - giving personal attributes to inanimate objects or abstract ideas
Example -The firing of the rifle left the silence terrified.
- vi. Apostrophe - addressing or speaking to the dead as if living; to an object as if it is alive; to the absent as if they are present and able to understand the speaker
Example - "Walk softly, March, forbear the bitter blow."
- vii. Hyperbole - an exaggeration used in order to make a point or to emphasize -
Example - I have told you a million times to clean your room.