

Secondary Writing Manual

This manual is designed to help guide students and teachers through the short story writing process. It includes some tips on crafting a story, an editing checklist, a page of suggested written or visual prompts to stimulate creative thinking and a marking criteria. Start early enough to produce your most polished writing. You'll be surprised at how much you can improve your work by drafting, editing and refining.

What makes a good story?

A [hook that captures the attention of the audience](#). E.g. “*EXCUSE ME!*” Antonia whisper-shouted at the receptionist. Her temples pulsated as she desperately considered how to attract the attention of one person whilst avoiding the attention of everybody else. She failed. All eyes glared at her accusingly.

A [compelling storyline that moves your reader along](#). Write so that your reader will want to know what is going to happen next and will not want to put your story down. Use ideas, techniques, structural elements and plot devices to help with this.

A [believable plot](#). Although you want to surprise and engage your audience, your plot needs to be believable. The sequence of events should support the conclusion. Each idea should add something important to the story. If you take it out, does it matter?

[Interesting, believable characters](#). The reader needs to feel like they know the main characters personally. Include characteristics, thoughts, personality traits, good and bad habits and relationships with others when creating characters so readers care about them.

[Authentic action](#). You can achieve this by choosing appropriate verbs e.g. pouncing, stalking, grinning. Sentence structure, paragraphing and dialogue can help to create desired pace.

[Clever use of descriptive language](#). Carefully select adjectives, verbs, adverbs and nouns to describe events and situations. E.g. Don't just say “The bird was in the tree eating pine nuts.” when you can say “The cockatoo perched brazenly on the limb of the pine tree, straining precariously to pillage the last pinecone.” This gives us a better picture of what you are trying to say.

[Dialogue – real, not forced](#). Listen to the way people speak in different contexts - formal, informal, colloquial language, at school, on the street, in the supermarket, at home, etc. E.g. “*Remember to unpack your school bag!*” Mum called from the laundry after greeting Phoebe. “*Give us a break, Mum,*” Phoebe retorted as she threw her bag down and headed straight for the pantry.

[Showing not telling](#). This is one of the most important points. Don't tell us what happened – show us! Make the reader feel they are part of the story. Include dialogue with authentic voice. Don't just describe what you can see, but appeal to all the senses. Instead of: *The man went to the ANZAC parade with his granddaughter*, try, “*Come on, Love.*” *The old man's carefully polished shoes clicked unevenly on the pavement. His uniform hung loosely from his tired frame and smelled of mothballs, but his chest swelled with humble pride as he grasped his granddaughter's hand. Isabelle almost struggled to keep up with him.* You now have some atmosphere, mood and a character that we care about.

A [satisfying ending](#). Your story should end with a feeling of conclusion. Whatever problem you built into your story has been dealt with and the character should have ended the journey with a sense of resolution that satisfies the audience, for better or worse.

Editing checklist

You've finished your first draft. Congratulations!

Now put your story down for at least 24 hours to let it "settle". Come back with a fresh view. This is when the big errors will be obvious. First of all, make a copy of your original story if you are using a computer. Now, read your story out loud. Listen carefully to how it sounds. Note any parts when the story doesn't flow well, or where the meaning is unclear. Be honest and be prepared to delete or cross out words, sentences or even paragraphs. The best writers do this.

Now read it again and consider these points:

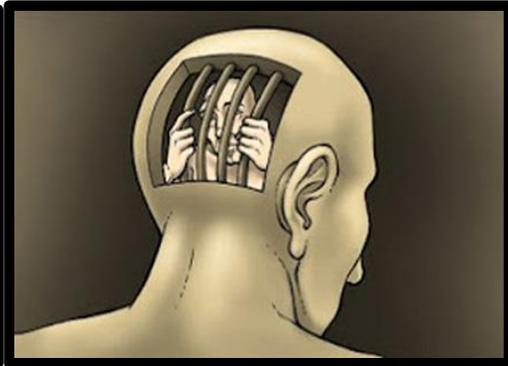
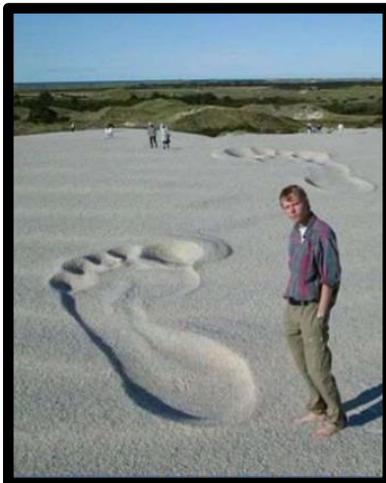
- Is the story engaging? Does it make you feel excited, sad, amused...?
- Does the plot make sense? Do I need to explain anything more clearly? (Did I rush to get to the end?)
- Check the following carefully: **Orientation**: Does the opening paragraph hook the reader? **Body**: Do I have a strong crisis, complication or problem? Do the series of events provide enough detail? **Conclusion**: Does my story end? Will the reader be satisfied?
- Have I "shown" the reader what happened – not "told" them?
- Are my characters interesting and believable? Will the reader feel like they know my characters?
- Are all the characters necessary to support the plot?
- Will the reader feel as though they are part of the story? Have I created a realistic setting?
- Does the language I have chosen help the reader to imagine and feel what I am describing? Is there a better vocabulary choice or technique I could use?
- Do I have enough dialogue? Does the dialogue make the story move along? Have I used a new line for each new speaker? Is the character's voice authentic?
- Have I used paragraphs to structure my story effectively?
- Have I used a variety of simple and complex sentences?
- Have I used connecting words and phrases to link sentences together?
- Is the tense I have chosen to use, consistent throughout my story?
- Have I punctuated all my sentences correctly? (Capital letters for proper nouns, full stops between sentences, quotation marks etc)
- Have I checked my spelling? (Use the dictionary. Don't rely on spell check)

Ideas and suggestions to get you started

This year, we have decided not to have a theme, however if you are struggling for ideas, you may find some of the ideas below useful for getting you started. These are suggestions only. They are **not a requirement** of the competition.

- Someone knocks on your door. When you open it, the person standing there looks exactly like you...
- You are watching TV when a character calls someone on the phone. Your phone starts ringing...
- The day after attending a funeral, you see the person who died, on a busy street. When they notice you looking, they disappear into the nearest shop...
- When you walk off your plane into the airport after a family holiday, you enter into a media frenzy. It appears you are famous...
- You tell a white lie to cover for a friend. Your web of lies grows out of control...

Visual Prompts



Secondary Marking Criteria

The criteria assessed in the secondary writing task are:

Criterion	1	2	3
1. Reader Engagement – The writer’s capacity to engage and affect the reader.			
2. Text Structure – Effective structure that includes an orientation, complication and resolution.			
3. Expression - Construction of grammatically correct sentences and paragraphs appropriate spelling and punctuation.			
4. Characterisation – The portrayal and development of Character.			
5. Setting - The development of a sense of place and context.			
6. Vocabulary – The range and precision of the language used.			
<p>7. Technique - The crafting of a text that is effective in structure and content.</p> <p>Sophisticated structural and language devices may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – foreshadowing – flashbacks – red herring/decoy – plot twist/subversion of expectation – circular/parallel plots – symbolism/figurative language – personification, simile, metaphor, allegory – alliteration, – in media res – evoking an emotional response – encouraging reflection – displaying irony – building tension – effective use of dialogue – subject/verb agreement – tense consistency – showing, not telling 			