

TIPS FOR WRITING YOUR 500 WORDS STORY



Planning

CHOOSE WHAT TO WRITE ABOUT

We want to publish a wide range of stories, from tragic to humorous, extraordinary to familiar, and everything in between. What's important is that you write from your own experience, and make us feel like we are right there with you.

It's also important to stick to the theme. We will be releasing a new theme each month, so you'll have the opportunity to share all kinds of stories with us.

BRAINSTORM

A blank page or screen can be daunting, even for experienced writers. Start by brainstorming your ideas.

Put yourself back in the moment. What did you see, hear and smell? What was the weather like on that day? What were you wearing? What was going through your mind?

Jot down your memories, phrases, and possible titles. Then allow time for your ideas to develop. Think about how to tell the story when you're in the garden or driving to work, not just when you're sitting in front of your computer.

HONE IN

Before you begin to write, remember that 500 words is only about one page. Your story will be stronger if you explore a single moment in depth, rather than try to cover too much ground.

Try summarising your story in two or three sentences. This is a great way to figure out where the heart of the story lies, and will guide your decisions about what to include, and what to leave out.

Writing

BEGINNING, MIDDLE AND END

Think of your story as having three parts: a beginning, a middle and an end. But that doesn't mean that it needs to unfold in a linear way.

THE BEGINNING

When you are writing online, it's crucial that you capture your reader's attention in the first few sentences. Here are some great ways to open a story and 'hook' your reader:

- **Cut to the chase** – try opening the story at the very heart of the action, a turning point, or a moment of excitement or anticipation. Then you can go back and explain how you got to that point.

Example: *'Swathed in a motel towel I scanned the corridor, with my knee against our door. I thrust one case with a right hand bowling action. It flopped over. I strode forward with the second bag. Snap went the door behind me.'*

Rosslyn Thomas

<https://open.abc.net.au/projects/500-words-caught-out-28dn4ay/contributions/naked-in-the-hallway-11qj6ey>

- **Paint an atmospheric scene** – entice your reader with a vivid description of a place or a feeling. Include details about the sights, smells and sounds, to put us in your point of view.

Example: *'The surface of the Caribbean was flat and calm, and as I swam, a tiny bow-wave preceded me. On the horizon I could see a ship, very small in the distance but in reality a large naval frigate. My ship, I slowly realised.'*

Michel Dignand

<https://open.abc.net.au/projects/500-words-caught-out-28dn4ay/contributions/sprung-04hy4uc>

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- **Use suspense or surprise** – set the reader up with a mystery that will be revealed, or catch them off guard with a statement that is contrary or unexpected. We'll feel compelled to read on to find out more.

Example: *'My father walked out through the front door when I was five...I don't remember my grandmother's arrival some years later, although it ultimately proved to be a far more significant event.'*

Robbie Rowlands

<https://open.abc.net.au/projects/500-words-caught-out-28dn4ay/contributions/doors-43og4gi>

THE MIDDLE

This is where the action happens. It's up to you to choose what you reveal in the story, and when to reveal it. Which elements can you express in a quick sentence or two, and which parts do you want to draw out, so the reader experiences the moment as it unfolds?

THE END

Leave us with something to think about. Share your reflection on the events you've described, or what impact the experience has had on you. You can wind up the story in a couple of sentences, but it's important to leave the reader feeling satisfied.

WRITE SIMPLY

Your story will have more impact if your writing style is simple and direct. This is especially important when you are writing online.

Avoid complex sentences. Well-chosen nouns and verbs can be just as descriptive as lots of adjectives and adverbs. If one word can convey the same thing as three, go for the shorter option.

VARY THE PACE

Vary the length of your sentences and paragraphs to keep your reader engaged. Use shorter sentences and paragraphs to draw attention to an idea, a turning point, or a discovery.

ADD A TITLE AND DESCRIPTION

Spend time thinking about a catchy title and short description that captures the essence of your story. Don't be too coy – a reader wants to know what they're in for if they click and read on.

CHOOSE AN IMAGE

You don't have to include an image with your story, but a good image will attract more readers. You can choose one of your own photos, or search online for a Creative Commons image.

Editing

READ IT ALOUD

This is a sure-fire way to discover spelling and grammar mistakes that your spell-check missed, and to test how your writing flows.

Are there any sentences that are overly long, or feel clunky when you read them aloud? Are there times when you've used the same word or phrase more than once? Does the order feel right? Is your opening strong?

ELIMINATE, ELIMINATE

Can you find any phrases that could be expressed more simply, or any information that isn't essential to the story? If in doubt, leave it out!

GET FEEDBACK

Show the story to a friend. You don't have to take feedback on board, but sometimes a 'second pair of eyes' will see something you didn't, or come up with a great suggestion that will improve the story.

GRAMMAR MATTERS!

Small mistakes in spelling, punctuation and grammar will spoil the impact of the story.

Have one last check through before you hit the submit button.