

ESSENTIALS OF THE SHORT SHORT

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THE popularity of the short short story (1000-15000 words) is steadily increasing. Beginners in greater numbers are realizing that the short short offers them an interesting challenge in the way of plotting, characterization, action, and dialogue. It is a good proving ground for embryo technique.

The amateur author would do well to try his wings on short shorts for two excellent reasons. First, they're easy to write. Secondly, they present interesting and difficult problems.

They're easy because the opportunities for publication are more numerous than in other forms of writing. With short newspaper fiction being syndicated daily throughout the world, the author has a rather hungry market for his wares. And the amount of time necessary for writing a short short is naturally not so great as that required for 3000- or 5000-word stories.

That second point brings us to the reason why short shorts are *not* so easy. Because of the brevity of the stories, the plot must be simple and direct, characterization terse but significant, exposition down to nothing but a few telling phrases.

Flashbacks are better not used at all. Necessary information should be handled expertly in dialogue. There is no room for elaboration of past events. For that reason it is best to choose material where little understanding of what has gone before is necessary. And the short short that employs the well-known asterisks to take us from twenty years ago to the present is defeating one of its prime purposes, namely, unity of effect, by that simple break in the type.

I would summarize the following points as the most important do's and don't's in writing the short short story:

1—Choose the elements of your plot with an eye to their inherent drama. This will excuse you from lengthy introductions. For instance, a plot woven around a man about to die, or a man who has