

**HOW TO WRITE A SHORT  
STORY; AN EXPOSITION  
OF THE TECHNIQUE OF  
SHORT FICTION**

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How to Write a Short Story; An Exposition of the Technique of Short Fiction by Leslie W. Quirk

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**LESLIE W. QUIRK**

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# HOW TO WRITE A SHORT STORY

AN EXPOSITION  
OF THE TECHNIQUE  
OF SHORT FICTION

BY  
LESLIE W. QUIRK

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## PREFACE

**T**HE material in the following pages is a series of suggestive talks rather than a scholarly discourse. I leave to others the discussion of polish, atmosphere, and artistic handling; I take for my theme the writing of a short story that will sell.

There are many writers throughout the country, with good educations, with clear brains, and with the ambition to see their work in print, who are failing merely because they are not familiar with the technique of the short story. It is to these that I would appeal.

In the following pages, therefore, I have aimed above all else to be practical. I have written in the first person, without even the shield of the editorial "we." I have addressed my

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reader directly, in a desire to impress upon his mind the fundamental requisites of a salable short story. In a word, I have endeavored to point out, more or less systematically, every step by which an idea may be converted into a short story, fit to appear between the covers of a reputable magazine.

L. W. Q.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
PREFACE . . . . .	3
INTRODUCTION . . . . .	7
I THE PLOT . . . . .	11
II METHOD OF NARRATION . . . . .	21
III THE INTRODUCTION . . . . .	31
IV THE STORY PROPER . . . . .	41
V CONCLUSION AND CLIMAX . . . . .	51
VI THE PREPARATION OF MANUSCRIPT	59
VII THE PLACING OF THE STORY . . . . .	69



## INTRODUCTION

**N**OWADAYS a good short story is a cash asset. The demand is steady, the market unlimited, and the prices good. No other form of writing attracts half the attention nor commands half the rates of payment. "Fiction," says Jack London, "pays best of all, and when it is of a fair quality, is most easily sold." A literary beginner, I firmly believe, has a much better chance in this field than in any other; and if he possesses a fair education and is in earnest, he has the chance to make a good living and acquire a modest fame.

Every day that passes adds new markets for the short story. Says Frank A. Munsey:

"The great field to-day is for writers of fiction. There is not half enough to go around. Publishers all over the world are reaching out for both short and

long stories. Good ones are extremely difficult to find. Prices have gone up and up and up, but the supply does not begin to equal the demand. Nothing appeals to so wide a class or gives so much pleasure. Love, romance, mystery, adventure, will never lose their charm. They are as fresh to-day with the human heart as they were in old Pompeii and countless ages before."

Nor is the call only for stories by well-known authors. The editors of the very best magazines are constantly on the alert for new writers. Mr. Alden, editor of *Harper's*, says that were it not for these contributors "the magazine would languish in all its fine tissues for lack of the infusion of new blood."

To-day the literary beginner who succeeds is the one who welcomes suggestions. He knows he cannot turn author on the instant, merely by wishing; the wish-appeasing genii are not abroad in this enlightened age. On the contrary he realizes that he must study the profession; must fit himself for the work.

"In my own case," says William Dean

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Howells, in his recent book, "Literature and Life," "I noticed that the contributors who could be best left to themselves were those who were most amenable to suggestion and even correction, who took the blue pencil with a smile, and bowed gladly to the rod of the proof-reader. Those who were on the alert for offence, who resented a marginal note as a slight, and bumptiously demanded that their work be printed just as they had written it, were commonly not much more desired by the reader than by the editor."

In conclusion, it may not be amiss to suggest that the short story writer often becomes a novelist. It is true that all who can write short fiction cannot produce a readable book, but a little reflection will show that a large percentage of the novelists served an apprenticeship writing short stories.