

## [four-elements-that-every-flash-fiction-story-needs](#)

### 1. Realistic Characters/Settings

The obvious concern in flash fiction is “how do I make my characters and setting real in 1,000 words or less?” I have a few suggestions for you.

- Show us things about your characters/settings that make them unique. In other words, skip the boring stuff—your readers can fill that in on their own.
- Keep your number of characters and settings low. One major or supporting character per every 300-500 words is a good metric, and most flash fiction stories only have one setting.
- Stick with one character point of view if possible, or *maybe* two.
- Whenever possible, write dialogue that both advances the story and reveals character.

### 2. Solid Plot/Structure

“My story can only be 1,000 words long. Do I even need story structure?” Of course you do, perhaps now more than ever. A solid percentage of the stories Splickety rejects are for one reason: nothing is happening. Adding story structure and having a recognizable plot can help you get published instead of rejected.

Here are some ideas on how you can do that better:

- Establish a recognizable beginning, middle, and end. Your story can begin in the middle of something, but the conflict and characters have to develop in the middle. We also need some kind of resolution at the end, even if it’s somewhat obscure.
- In your beginning, start with a gripping hook (just like in a novel) to pull us into the story.
- Your end line should also pack significant punch.
- Remember: above all else, something has to happen.

### 3. Gripping Conflict/Tension

If you haven’t heard by now, great fiction of any length needs both conflict and tension in order to drive the characters and the plot. There are two kinds of conflict under which all other kinds fall: internal and external. Both are useful tools for motivating your characters and moving the story along by creating tension.

Here’s how:

- In general, conflict means that something opposes your character.
- Internal conflict means that something within your character opposes him. Ask him questions to figure out what it is. Is it a hidden disease? A hurt from his past? A dark secret? Self-doubt?
- External conflict comes from outside the character, usually from one of three sources: other characters (antagonists), the setting, or events.
- Combine the two types of conflict against your character and he’s in for a rough ride—which means your readers can expect a compelling story.

\*Not all conflict in your story has to be resolved in the traditional sense. It’s okay to let the reader wonder how things worked out as long as you plant clues that give them an indication. If you’ve ever seen the movie *Inception*, you know what I mean.

### 4. An Excellent Editor

Yes, you need to pay your flash fiction the same respect you’d pay your novel by ensuring that it is well-edited. Some of us are capable editors on our own, but that doesn’t mean we shouldn’t get help here.

For example, I run a flash fiction magazine, have written six unpublished novels, and also hawk my own services as a freelance editor. Of anyone in the world, I should be the most likely person to not need an editor for my own flash fiction, right?

No matter how good of a writer you think you are (or actually may be), you need to have another set of eyes read and edit your piece before you submit it, especially if it’s to Splickety. We even included that provision in our submission guidelines. Here are two practical editing strategies that will help you make sure your piece is virtually perfect:

- Remember that every word cut is to your benefit.
- Read great flash fiction.