

Short Stories / Q&A

Lynn Johnston

Write Smarter, Not Harder

www.writesmarternotharder.com



What Is a Short Story?

Flash fiction:	less than 2,000 words
Short Story:	2,000 - 15,000 words
Novella:	15,000 - 50,000 words
Novel:	50,000+ words

What Can You Do With Short Stories?

- Self-publish (paid)
- Submit to contests, anthologies and magazines
- Collect in anthologies (paid or free)
- Free samples (temporarily or permafrees on Amazon, on blog/website, on wattpad and other free fiction sites)
- List building
- Bonuses (for buying a longer work)

Self-Publish (Paid)

Amazon Short Reads

- Unrelated (except, perhaps, by genre)
- Interrelated (same world, same theme, epigenetic)
- Serials
- Series

Put info on your other work in the back matter—not just cover images and blurb, but first scenes/chapters.

Don't forget your bio and website, and mention the free story you're giving away to anyone who joins your mailing list!

Submit to Contests, Anthologies, Magazines

Pros:

- Status of a traditionally-published author
- Builds your resume (important if you're querying agents)
- Usually you also have the right to reprint your story, so you can still make money with it elsewhere
- If you win a contest, you can say you're an award-winning author

Cons:

- Low pay, often a flat fee instead of royalties

Collect in Anthologies (Free or Paid)

Do it yourself: a collection of your own short stories

- Stick to one genre
- Easier to sell if they're related in some way (content, emotional experience)
- Great for collecting serials or series

Do it with friends: a collection of short stories by multiple authors

- If your group is self-publishing, only one person can get paid through Amazon and must distribute royalties (i.e. it's complicated)

Free Samples

Use them to:

- Give readers a taste of your writing and the emotional experience they can expect if they buy your other work
- Attract readers to a specific longer work or group of longer works

Can be permafrees (good if the story is intended to attract reader to a longer work) or a limited-time offer.

Put info on your other work in the back matter—not just cover images and blurb, but first scenes/chapters.

Don't forget your bio and website, and mention the free story you're giving away to anyone who joins your mailing list!

List Building

Give away a free short story in exchange for joining your email list.

Any autoresponder out there will allow you to create a simple opt-in form for your website and upload a PDF or zipped file that will be automatically sent to anyone who signs up.

Put info on your other work in the back matter—not just cover images and blurb, but first scenes/chapters.

Bonuses for Buying a Longer Work

Make sure the longer work's Amazon description lets readers know they are getting a bonus short story with their novella.

Use for:

- Cross promotion: do you have two series in the same genre?
- Extra content: character backstory, a significant event from longer work from another character's POV, a between-the-novels special episode

What Kinds of Stories Should You Write?

Depends on...

- Genre
- What you're promoting
- What else you write
- How quickly you write

(Thanks to George for this excellent question!)

Write to Reader Experience

What's the thread that unifies your fiction? (Hint: it's all about the experience you're giving readers.)

- Content (i.e. military fiction)
- Theme (i.e. redemption)
- Emotional Journey (i.e. falling in love)
- Intellectual focus (i.e. philosophical or issue-oriented)
- Genre-based (i.e. a puzzle to solve)
- World-view (i.e. love conquers all)

The most important thing is that this story be representative of your work, so that it will attract the kinds of readers who will buy your other work.

Putting It All Together, Approach #1

Let's say you have a novel coming out in 3 months. You could:

- Write a short story about the novel's protagonist during a period before the book starts, to introduce your protagonist to readers, including info about/first chapter of the longer book, and use it to build a mailing list of potential buyers for the novel
- Write a short story set in the novel's world but featuring a different character, perhaps one who makes a minor appearance in the novel, and make it permafrees on Amazon
- Write a short story that gives the same reader experience (doesn't have to be in the novel's world) and sell it through Amazon short reads
- Write a short story that happens between the first novel and second and release it after the first novel and before the second, and include info/excerpts on both novels, to bring in new readers and keep existing fans excited about the series

Putting It All Together, Approach #2

Let's say you want to make a go of writing unrelated or interrelated short stories in a particular world. You could:

- Make a central story (one that features multiple people in this world interacting) permafrozen on Amazon – something that both gives the flavor of the collection
- Write stories that focus on each of the individual characters featured in the central story and sell them through Amazon Short Reads
- Write a short bonus story in this world that you can give away as a list-building tool
- Write a guide to the world you're writing in, which includes the world's history, bios of the characters, and teasers for the various stories, and give it away on your blog/website
- Publish all of the above in a box set, a print version via CreateSpace, and an audiobook via ACX

How Do You Know You're Doing The Right Things?

No one knows before they try.

You have to test.

Look for ways to do a small test before you invest a lot of work.

If writing a 5,000 word short story is a lot of work for you right now—accept that you are where you are, and you have to build on your current skill level. There are tools you can use to improve faster, but there's no substitute for practice if you want to get good. Master the basics of your craft now, so that you can write better and faster later.

Patricia asks...

Q: The technical side of list-building is intimidating. Besides, what do I say to my list?

A: GetResponse has an easy-to-use interface, and I'm told MailChimp is also user-friendly.

Having a list doesn't necessarily mean you have to email every day; many fiction authors say they send out a newsletter once per month, or just when they have news.

George asks...

Q: How do I build a relationship with the people on my list?

What do you have in common with the people on your list?

How can you help the people on your list?

What aspects of your personal life are you willing to share with the people on your list?

One of the biggest mistakes I see fiction authors making is that they blog about how to write—which means they're not attracting readers, they're networking with other authors.

Alex asks...

Q: How and where do I publish short stories?

Paid: Amazon, Smashwords, OmniLit, All Romance eBooks

Free: Amazon, Smashwords, OmniLit, All Romance eBooks, Scribd, Wattpad

Submission guidelines for traditional magazines/anthologies:

- duotrope.com
- writersmarket.com
- <http://publishedtodeath.blogspot.com/2013/06/top-5-online-resources-for-short-story.html>

Alex also asks...

Q: How can I find fans for different genres? What should my short stories be priced?

Where you find fans depends on genre, and what kinds of promotional techniques you're willing to try. Genre-related blogs, forums, discussion groups, GoodReads, deal sites—there's a tremendous number of ways to find readers, and that could be a class in itself. How much money you can spend, how extroverted you are, and many other factors can affect your promotion strategy.

In the US, short stories seem to be doing best at free and \$0.99. If you're outside the US, look at the Amazon site that serves your area of the world and see what the bestselling short stories in your genre are selling for.

What are your questions?