

The Long and Short of Fiction

Most fiction is written in the form of a novel or a short story. The main difference between these two forms of fiction is their length. A novel is a long (book length) fictional story. A short story, on the other hand, is a short fictional narrative that can usually be read in one sitting.

Novels and short stories are written about a wide variety of subject matter. Some deal with very serious topics, while others are light-hearted comedies. Some portray realistic characters with real-life problems, while others are fantasies that portray outrageous, unbelievable characters. Because a novel is longer than a short story, its plot and characters are usually much more complex than those in a short story. Short story plots are generally brief and uncomplicated.

Read each statement below and decide whether it describes a novel, a short story, or both. In the blank before each statement, write N for novel, S for short story, or B for both.

1. ____ I am a form of fiction.
2. ____ I can usually be read from start to finish in a short amount of time.
3. ____ I am written in prose (everyday language).
4. ____ I am sometimes humorous.
5. ____ I have a plot.
6. ____ I usually portray a wide variety of characters.
7. ____ Sometimes I am only a few pages long.
8. ____ My subject matter can be very serious.
9. ____ I usually contain several chapters.
10. ____ My plot is generally not very complex.
11. ____ Some parts of me can be true, but other parts are made up by my author.
12. Think about your favorite novel. How do you know it is a novel rather than a short story?

13. How would writing a novel be similar to writing a short story? How would it be different?

