

Fictional Writing Takes Many Forms 490

by Dana Ailer

Any writing that is not completely factual is considered to be fiction. This category of writing includes many formats including (but not limited to) novels, short stories, personal essays, and screenplays.

The intent of fictional writing is to allow authors to share their perspective with readers. For example, a small tree might be described by different authors as “sinister,” “spindly,” or “graceful.” All 3 adjectives might accurately describe the tree, but in each instance the reader would visualize a very different situation. A “sinister” tree is scary and menacing, a “spindly” tree is weak and thin, and a “graceful” tree is flexible and lovely. Fictional writing expands on this idea, allowing authors to use self-expression to draw an imaginative atmosphere and mood around people, events, relationships, and objects. In this way, fictional writing gives readers insight into a situation or experience they’ve never personally encountered.

All forms of fictional writing utilize a few basic elements. A character is a person or entity present in the story, or the ‘who.’ The setting is the location and time of the story, or the ‘where’ and ‘when.’ The plot is the story line, describing the events of the story. Plot can be described as the ‘what.’ A story’s style, or its ‘how,’ includes format, point of view, and tone. The theme of a story is its overall message.

Works of fiction come in all shapes and sizes. A novel is a work of more than 40,000 words, while a novella has 17,500 to 40,000 words. A novelette contains 7,500 to 17,500 words, and any work of less than 7,500 words is considered a short story. As the world becomes more hectic and attention spans shrink, new formats for fictional writing are emerging. Flash fiction is very short, sometimes less than 100 words, and Twitter fiction is a work of up to 140 characters, which is short enough to fit into a single Tweet.

All these different lengths of fictional writing can be further categorized based on their subject matter. Mystery stories, science fiction, romance novels, suspense thrillers, horror stories, and westerns are all popular genres. Works of fiction can also be classified by the age of their target audience. While young adult fiction can fall into any genre, it always concerns topics that are important to teenagers and has a main character that is between the ages of 12 and 16. The recent popularity of the *Twilight* series is a good example of how young adult fiction can have wide appeal to readers of all ages.

Publishers of fictional writing divide works into even more categories. Commercial fiction is a work of any length or genre that has a wide appeal to many different types of people. Literary fiction may also be a work of any length or genre, but this style appeals to a smaller, more intellectual audience. Mainstream fiction might be either commercial or literary, and concerns a theme which is familiar to most readers. Topics such as parenting, career stress, and coming of age are all within the mainstream fiction category.