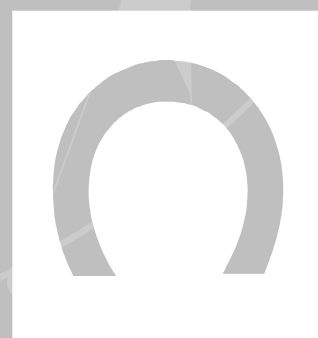


LEARNING english



**EFFECTIVE
READING**
**A GUIDE TO READING
LITERATURE IN ENGLISH**

BBC
WORLD
SERVICE

Welcome

Reading – and listening to – literature can support your English studies in many ways. The ideas and opinions which you discover can give you insight into countries and cultures where English is used every day. The language you discover while listening or reading can help enhance your own use of English. Every year, BBC World Service broadcasts many short stories, plays and abridged novels in English, as well as discussions about literature. This booklet is designed to show you how you can use these programmes to increase your understanding of English literature and to improve your own use of English language.

Using extracts from BBC World Service programmes, the booklet will help you ...

- ① improve your general understanding of literature.
- ② develop strategies for dealing with unfamiliar words.
- ③ recognise the sequence of events in a story or novel.
- ④ identify the narrator's point of view.
- ⑤ interpret mood and atmosphere in literature.
- ⑥ find opportunities for speaking, based on your reading or listening.
- ⑦ improve your own creative writing in English.

How to use this booklet

Each page looks at a different area related to literature. On each page you'll find ...

- a short introduction which explains the topic.
- an extract from one of the BBC World Service's literature programmes.
- a reading task to accompany the extract(s).
- key tips to help you read more effectively.
- a task to help you practise what has been explained.

Tune in

BBC World Service Learning English radio programmes are broadcast globally on different short wave frequencies. In some places you can also listen on long wave, medium wave or FM. Programmes are also broadcast round the clock on the internet.

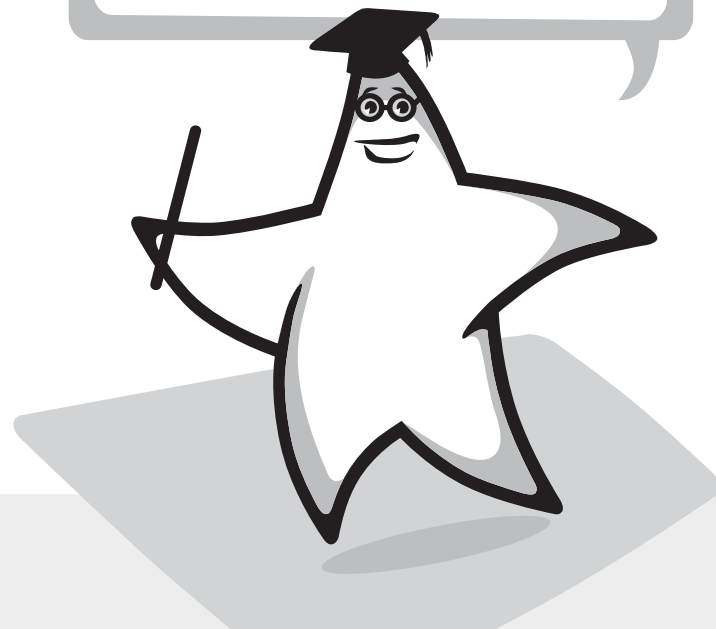
For a free programme guide giving details of exactly when and where on your radio you can tune in to Learning English radio programmes in your area...

Email – Send a blank email to eltradio@bbc.co.uk for an automated email response.

Log on – Log on to www.bbcworldservice.com where you will also find a wealth of background information on BBC World Service.

Write – Write to us at Learning English, BBC World Service, Bush House, London, UK.

On the final page you will find a glossary explaining some of the words and phrases in the booklet. Words in the glossary are underlined.



1 Making the most of the cover

How do you choose what you are going to read? Do you think a lot before making your choice, or do you simply pick up a book or magazine by chance? In this section, we look at how thinking about what you are going to read before you begin can make the process of reading easier.

The BBC World Service programme **The Reading Group** discusses how you can get the most out of any novel, story or play you read. In the following extract, Gillian Lazar, a language and literature expert, gives advice on how best to prepare for reading.

Before you read the extract Look at a novel or short story which you haven't yet read. You might borrow one from a friend or browse in a bookshop or in a library. How much can you predict about the story before you open the book?

Reading a novel is like being a detective. Like a detective, the reader gathers clues – only the clues the reader looks for are words to help him understand a story. And readers, just like detectives, are shaped by the culture or society in which they live. So how can we read books from other cultures more effectively? One way is to prepare ourselves a little before we start reading. We might ask ourselves, for example, who the writer is or in what circumstances the text was written. The style of the cover can often give clues to the type of text inside. For classic novels, literary encyclopaedias may provide some helpful background. For more modern novels, newspaper reviews can provide us with clues. And don't forget the 'blurb' – that is the information on the back of the book itself, which gives clues to the content of the novel. From this background information, we can begin to make predictions about the book so we can actively engage in interpreting its cultural meanings while we read.

1. According to Gillian, why are readers like detectives?
2. Gillian gives 4 ways to find clues about the content of a novel or story. What are they?

So how can you best prepare yourself to read a novel or story written in English? Here are some tips to help you.

Look at the title and the blurb What kind of story is it? Based on the title and the blurb, think about the type of vocabulary you expect to find in the story. By predicting vocabulary before you start to read, you can make the process of reading easier.

What do you know about the author? Have you read anything by this author before? What type of writing is she or he best known for? Knowing something about the author can also help you make predictions about the content of the novel or story. For example, Agatha Christie is a famous British author who wrote detective stories set in England in the 1920s and 1930s. Therefore, we can expect the stories to a) be mysterious and b) present a picture of English life at that time. Before you start the book, think: 'What do I know about English life in the 1920s and 1930s?'

What have you heard about the book? Have you read a review or a summary? Do you have a friend who has read it? Finding out someone else's opinion about the novel or story will help you decide if you want to read it – and to work out *why* you want to read it.

TASK You can choose to do this *either* as a reading task *or* as a listening task.

Reading Select a book which you think looks interesting. Read the blurb and predict what you expect the story to be about. Remember to think about the following headings:

- Author
- Time and place
- Type of story
- Vocabulary I expect to find

Make some notes about your predictions before you start reading.

Listening Look at your BBC World Service programme schedule to find a series in which stories or novels are read on air. If possible, record the programme and listen to the introduction. How much can you predict about the story from the information given by the presenter at the beginning of the programme?

② Getting started

For learners of English, the thought of reading an entire novel written in English can be quite nerve-wracking. The book may seem very long, and the prospect of spending hours trying to read and understand the story can seem very off-putting. However, there are strategies which you can develop to help make the process of reading both simpler and more enjoyable.

In this extract from **The Reading Group**, Gillian gives some advice to novice readers.

Before you read How long does it take you to read a story or novel in your own language? Think about something you read recently. Did you find it easy or difficult to read? How often did you stop to think about the words which the writer used to describe the characters and events?

There are some simple guidelines for learners when they first approach reading stories and novels in English. First of all, choose a book which is relatively easy to understand. Pleasure in understanding helps confidence, along with the way we find ourselves acquiring new words. But you must remember that you need to make some decisions about these new words. Which words are really important for understanding the book? Which can we safely ignore? Good readers in both a first and second language don't bother to find out the meaning of every single word. They are selective, focusing on words which seem important for understanding the gist or key ideas in a story or novel. And when good readers decide they DO need to understand a word, they use a number of helpful strategies. They may use the context to find the meaning of a word. For example, 'The sky was azure and the sun shone brightly'. If I don't know that 'azure' is a shade of blue, the rest of the description would help me work it out. Good readers also use the structure of a word to help them guess the meaning. For example, a word may have a prefix like 'un', as in 'uncomfortable' or a suffix like 'ful' as in 'helpful'. Being able to break words down like this can help the reader guess the meaning without having to stop reading to consult their dictionary.

1. Why is it important for new readers to choose a book which is relatively easy to understand?
2. What 3 strategies does Gillian suggest for dealing with unfamiliar words?

So how can you begin to become an efficient reader and to enjoy literature written in English? Here are some tips to help you.

Choose something which is easy to read If you are just beginning to read novels or stories in English, try to choose stories which you are already familiar with. For example, you may have read the book in your own language, or seen a film of the story. Also, avoid novels which are very long. Being able to finish the novel is one way to build confidence. Look for abridged English novels in your local library or bookshop.

Don't focus on every word Try to relax as you read, and understand the main ideas. Don't worry about minor details.

Guess the meaning of unfamiliar words If a word or sentence seems important, re-read it and actively try to guess the meaning, using the methods Gillian describes.

Make a note of important words If an unfamiliar word appears more than once, it is probably important or useful. If you need to look it up in your dictionary, remember to make a note of the meaning – otherwise you will forget it and have to look it up again next time!

TASK

Every year, BBC World Service broadcasts short stories from around the world. *The Essay*, on the next page, is one of those stories. Written by Deepti Nalavade from India, it was highly commended in the Commonwealth Short Story Competition, run by the Commonwealth Broadcasting Association. You can hear it broadcast on the BBC World Service programme, **Fishing For Jasmine**.

1. Read the first paragraph. Before you continue, try to predict what will happen next.
2. As you read the rest of the story, try to follow Gillian's advice on dealing with unfamiliar words.
3. When you have finished reading, try to summarise the story in your own words in no more than 4 sentences.

The essay

Mr Nair had done it again. He had torn the essay that Ravi was writing and had growled, "You'd better do some work, instead of writing all this silly stuff." It wasn't fair. Ravi had already completed the given work at Mr Nair's tailoring shop. He was an eleven-year-old orphan and was living with his father's sister, Sheila, and her family. He was indeed lucky to be living with such a loving family, except that they weren't well off and so Ravi tried to help by working at the tailoring shop. But Mr Nair made him work too hard and that hardly left any spare time for Ravi to study. Mr Nair was a good tailor, but he wasn't that good as a person. His mood swings would put a pendulum to shame. He made Ravi work whenever he wished. He had been in a very angry mood that day and had torn Ravi's essay. (People often pour out their anger on children.)

That afternoon, when Ravi came home, Aunt Sheila guessed something was wrong from his crestfallen face. When she asked what the matter was, Ravi told her everything. This wasn't the first time that such a thing had happened. She did not say anything, but sat silently for a while, lost in her own thoughts. Suddenly, she got up. "Come with me," she said, without looking back, and walked out of the house. Ravi ran after her. "Where?", he asked, but she did not answer.

Ravi did not repeat his question, but kept walking. The sky was clouded. He felt suffocated, as if something was crushing him and it wasn't only because of the hot and humid air.

He was surprised to see her enter Mr Nair's shop. She stood unnoticed in a corner of the shop. The customers were engrossed in watching the cricket match between India and South Africa on the small television set in the shop. Aunt Sheila gently touched a pink dress that was hanging near her, as if she was admiring it, and took a fold of it in her hands. "Look! Sachin's going to hit a four", someone cried. Everyone watched with bated breath.

Suddenly, a loud ripping sound ran through the silence of the shop. For a moment, Sachin's four was forgotten, as all eyes turned to Aunt Sheila. She had torn a large part of the dress. Mr Nair gave a look of astonishment, before it dissolved into a look of anger. Before he could say anything, she began to speak in a strangely calm voice. "You tore the essay that my nephew was writing. Do you know how hard he worked on it? The dress that I tore," she said, pointing to it, "was stitched by you. You won't understand someone else's efforts until your own have been treated in such a way." Then she placed some money in front of him. "This money is for what I did to the dress. But I doubt that you can make up for what you did to Ravi's work, to his confidence," she said, and stepped out of the shop with the same kind of calmness.

Without waiting to look at anyone, Ravi followed her outside. She looked at him, smiled faintly, and said, "Let's go home, so that you can write that essay again." Ravi nodded. It began to drizzle as they walked back home, hand in hand. He smiled to himself as he watched the loose end of her light green sari fluttering in the breeze, and listened to the familiar tinkling sound of her bangles.

3 Following the plot

When we are choosing a book, most of us want to know something about the plot – that is, the way the story unfolds through the different events and actions. However, it can be difficult to follow the plot of a story, particularly if the events are not described in chronological order.

In the extract from **The Reading Group** below, Gillian Lazar gives readers some advice on how to follow the plot of a novel or short story.

Before you read the extract Imagine you have to describe to a friend the plot of a story you have read recently. Try to summarise the story in six sentences, highlighting the most important events.

When you are reading a novel, you often ask yourself two questions – ‘What happened?’ and ‘Why?’ But both of these questions may be difficult to answer. For example, the sequence of events may not be told in the order in which it happened. Writers may be in the middle of one set of events when they suddenly provide a flashback to another. There are some strategies which readers can use to help themselves answer these questions. Firstly, a good reader makes predictions about what is going to happen. We start by making predictions from the title – then modify these predictions as we go on. Asking yourself ‘What is going to happen next?’ as you read will help you answer the question ‘What happened?’ when you finish. Also, look out for certain linguistic clues – words and phrases like ‘the following day’, ‘next’ and ‘three weeks before’ can help us reconstruct what happened. Finally, it can be useful to mark and label events on a horizontal line, a time line. The events may be introduced in random order, but a time line can help you identify the sequence of events, and answer the question ‘What happened?’

1. Why is the question ‘What happened?’ sometimes difficult for the reader to answer?
2. What 3 things does Gillian advise readers to do to help them follow the plot of a story?

While you are reading a short story or novel, try to ensure you follow the plot. Here are some tips to help you.

Think about the plot after you close the book We usually read novels over a period of days or even weeks. For example, you may like to read before you go to sleep at night. If you do, take a few minutes to piece together the plot before you go to sleep. Think about the question ‘What do I know so far?’

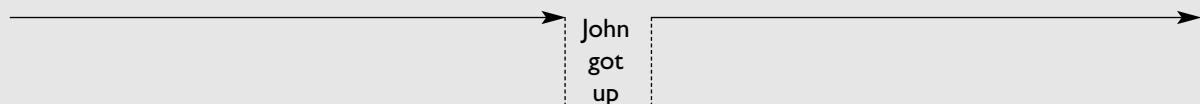
Make predictions before you start reading Each evening, before you open your book, remind yourself of what has happened so far in the story. Then think ‘What do I think will happen next?’ Remember, preparation for reading is an important step towards understanding what we read.

Look out for clues to the sequence of events As Gillian says in the extract above, writers usually use clear words and phrases to help the reader work out the sequence of events. Look out for ‘sequencing’ words such as ‘next’, ‘suddenly’ and ‘previously’.

Make a timeline Making a note of the main events in sequence will help you follow the plot. It can help you see where two actions happen at the same time, and where there are gaps in your knowledge.

TASK

This task will help you practise making timelines of events. Read the passage below and write down the actions in the sequence in which they happened. Start with ‘John got up...’



John got up, feeling a little nervous. The meeting was scheduled for two o'clock that day, and he had to read the report to make sure he was fully prepared. The job had seemed so easy when he accepted it, but he had soon discovered that his boss expected him to work day and night, and to be prepared for anything. He began to feel more worried – this meeting was going to be the most important of his working life so far. He made a cup of coffee, and started reading.

④ Finding the right perspective

We all know that accounts of events can change, depending on who is telling the story. Two children who quarrel over a toy will probably tell very different tales when asked who started the fight. In literature, too, we find that writers can tell their stories in many different ways, and give many different perspectives to the same tale.

This extract from **The Reading Group** looks at how readers can recognise which point of view is being represented at different stages in a novel.

Before you read the extract Think about a novel or story you have read recently. Was it a *first-person account*, where one of the characters in the novel told the story directly to the reader, using words like 'I' and 'me'? Or was it a *third-person narrative*, where someone described the actions of all the characters in the story, using words like 'he' and 'she'?

As readers, we are drawn into the story being told, but we know that the story is shaped by its teller – the narrator. How does the narrator describe and interpret the events in the story? What is his or her point of view? And how can we, the readers, evaluate that point of view to find out how true or valid it is? First, we need to identify what kind of narrator is telling the story. In novels with a third-person narrator, the narrator seems to be outside the actions in the story. He or she may have unrestricted knowledge of all the characters and events in the novel and may help us to see the connections between them. However, although this third-person narrative can seem very objective, we need to ask ourselves what we know about the narrator's attitude to the different characters. Is the narrator encouraging us to laugh at a particular character, or to sympathise with another? If so, why? The narrator's point of view is sometimes easier to identify in first-person narratives. In these, the story is told by one of the characters in that story – from the inside, if you like. In these stories, however, we must remember that we are seeing things from the perspective of one person in the story, and we are likely to believe the narrator's version of events. However, how would events differ if another character told the story?

1. Why is it important for readers to recognise the narrator's point of view when reading a story or novel?
2. What are the main differences between first-person narratives and third-person narratives?

How does the narrator influence your reading of the story? Here are some points to consider while you read.

First-person narratives When you begin to read, identify which character is 'I'. What is the narrator's relationship to the other main characters? How does the narrator see the world? For example, if the narrator is a child, he or she may not be able to understand many of the actions of the adults in the story. As the reader, you will have to interpret those actions for yourself.

Third-person narratives How does the narrator feel about the various characters? For example, does the narrator use positive or negative language when describing individual characters? Think about each character. Remember that your opinion of the character is based on what the narrator has told you. Do you trust the narrator's descriptions?

Re-read the story to look for clues about the narrator We often miss clues because we do not question what the narrator has told us. This is especially important if you are reading a mystery story. Don't forget that the narrator in one of Agatha Christie's detective novels is finally revealed to be a murderer, and the clues to the mystery are given in his version of events.

TASK

Think about a story or novel you have read recently and try to answer the following questions.

1. What type of narrative is it?
2. If it is a first-person narrative ...
 - What is the relationship of the narrator to the other main characters?
 - Can you tell the story from the perspective of one of the other main characters?
3. If it is a third-person narrative ...
 - How does the narrator feel about each of the main characters? For example, does the narrator present one of the characters in a very sympathetic way?
 - Go back to the story or novel. Try to identify some of the language which the narrator uses to create the impressions which you have been given.

5 Getting into the atmosphere

When you read a novel or story in English, what do you remember most? For the majority of learners of English, it is likely to be the main events or actions of the story. However, by focusing on *what* happens, you can often miss a lot about *how* it happens.

In this extract from **The Reading Group**, Gillian Lazar talks about the importance of recognising the atmosphere, attitudes and deeper meanings which writers try to create.

Before you read the extract Think about a novel or story you have read recently and which you enjoyed. How would you describe the story to a friend? Try to avoid talking about the actions or events of the story. Instead, try to explain what it was which made you enjoy reading it.

*When we read a novel, we start with the facts. Who are the characters? Where do they live? What do they do? However, once we know the answers to these questions, we also start to ask questions about the deeper meanings of the story. How are the lives of the characters affected by the events of the story? What do certain things symbolise? Asking these questions can help us to interpret the story. Another aid to this interpretation is to look for groups of words which recur throughout the novel or story. For example, in *The Great Gatsby*, by F. Scott Fitzgerald, the writer describes a bright, glamorous world, but uses words such as 'dust', 'ash' and 'smoke' repeatedly to show that this world is, in fact, a world of moral decay. Try to be aware of any groups of words which recur throughout the chapters of a novel. Ask yourself 'Do these words contrast with other groups of words in the text? Do the words have any symbolic significance which can help me to understand the writer's message?'*

1. Gillian gives two pieces of general advice to help readers understand the deeper meanings in a story or novel. What are they?
2. In *The Great Gatsby* what does the repetition of the words 'dust', 'ash' and 'smoke' symbolise?

So, how can you teach yourself to recognise the underlying meanings in stories and novels? Here are some ideas to help you.

Read the story or novel more than once The first reading will let you understand the surface of the story. It will help you answer questions such as 'Who is this character?' and 'What happened next?' A second reading will let you focus on any deeper meanings, such as 'Why do the characters react in this way to each other?'

Make a note of recurring groups of words Gillian's example shows how groups of words which seem to contrast with the main descriptions in the story can show the way to deeper meanings hidden in the text. Try to be aware of words which recur in descriptions, particularly if they seem in contrast with the text in general.

Discuss the story with a friend This is one of the best ways to explore the deeper meanings contained in a story or novel. When different readers notice different things, you can begin to explore what might be hidden under the surface of the story.

TASK

Go back to a novel or story which you have already read. Before you re-read it, ask yourself these questions.

- What do I remember about the story? How did it make me feel?
- Which characters were most interesting?
- What did I think of the writer when I read the book the first time?
- What would I like to know about the story after a second reading?

These questions will help you to prepare yourself to re-read the book and be more aware of the atmosphere, attitudes and underlying meanings. As you read, follow Gillian's advice (above). When you have finished reading, ask yourself 'What do I know or understand better now?'

6 Talking about reading

Writers often talk of communicating with their readers through their stories and novels. Readers, too, like to communicate about the things which they have read. This section shows you how you can use your reading to improve your opportunities to practise your spoken English.

In this extract from **The Reading Group**, Gillian explains how people all over the UK meet to discuss their favourite books.

Before you read the extract Imagine you are going to tell a group of your friends about your favourite book. What would you tell them? Try to write a paragraph, giving the most important information.

It has often been said that reading a book is like having a conversation. And it seems that many people want to continue that conversation once they have read the book. Reading groups are one way of doing so. Typically, a reading group consists of six to twelve members who meet regularly to discuss a book they've all read. Reading groups take place in private homes, in libraries and schools, and in chatrooms on the internet. Reading groups read contemporary novels or the classics – and they may even specialise in the type of books they read, such as science fiction or poetry or the novels of Charles Dickens. It has been estimated that more than fifty thousand people in the UK belong to a reading group, and that more than five million Americans are members of a group. That's a lot of readers, and a lot of talk about books! So why is there such enthusiasm for reading – and talking about reading? Reading groups enable people to share stories, and to see how other people's responses to a story differ from their own. And from this sharing of stories, people form common bonds of friendship and community.

1. In Gillian's opinion, why are reading groups popular?
2. Name 4 places where reading groups often meet.

Would you like to start an English reading group? Here are some tips for making your group successful.

Start with a small group Try to gather a few motivated friends together for your first few meetings. This will help you decide what kinds of books you'd like to read, how often you'd like to meet, and how long you would like to spend on each meeting.

Choose your reading together Remember that a reading group will only be successful if everyone is motivated to read the same thing. This could be a short story, or, if you are at school, a book which everyone has to read for an examination. Don't forget that you could choose a book which isn't written in English – but that you could discuss it in English.

Start with a list of 'prompts' to make sure you have enough ideas It is sometimes difficult to know where to start when discussing a story or novel. Before the meeting, make a list of questions which will bring everyone into the discussion. These questions should allow the group members to share their opinions of what they have read, rather than ask them to retell the story. Examples of good prompt questions are 'Who is your favourite character, and why?', 'What is your favourite scene in the book?', 'How does this compare with last week's story/ with the author's previous novels?'

Don't overload the readers Remember that people read at different speeds, and it is important that everyone has enough time to read the novel or story which you plan to discuss. For example, if the group is reading a novel, you might decide to discuss it in stages, looking at a few chapters in each meeting instead of focusing on the whole book.

TASK

Start your own small reading group. Ask one or two friends if they would like to meet together. Choose a book or story which you can all access easily (for example, you could all listen to a BBC World Service literature programme together). When you have read or listened to the story, each person should make a list of the things they liked or disliked and a list of questions they may have about the story. Start your meeting by asking everyone to share their likes and dislikes – in English.

7 Writing your own stories

For many people, the pleasure of literature lies not only in reading but also in writing short stories or novels. If you are one of those people, and you would like to write short stories or novels in English, the BBC World Service series **Fishing For Jasmine** can give you some of the help you need.

In the following extract, novelist and teacher Leone Ross discusses the short story *The Essay* (see page 3) and gives some tips to help you start writing.

Before you read the extract Re-read *The Essay*. Remember that this story was highly commended in an international short-story competition. What makes it so successful? Compare your ideas with Leone's, below.

The Essay is quite a simple story, with a very traditional format. You can see that the writer uses the beginning of the story to orient us and let us know what the situation is, the middle of the story is the conflict and the end of the story is for resolution – a very traditional shape for a short story. The author has told us that she got her inspiration from her surroundings, and her observation of people and of atmosphere comes out very clearly in her writing. The story is fictional but, nonetheless, she has based her characters and her sense of place on things she knows well. She also creates tension very well. The aunt doesn't march into the shop and curse at the owner – instead her initial movements are quiet and gentle, confounding our expectations, but readying us for the inevitable storm. The tension is actually with the cricket match as she fingers the clothing. The author unfolds the story calmly and this is a very important lesson for new writers to learn. It's very important for new writers to avoid overwriting – this happens when the writer cannot merely let the character bleed – they must gush ruby red gobbets onto the floor. Too often, new writers tell the reader too much, or make their descriptions too extreme. This doesn't leave anything to the reader's imagination. The Essay, on the other hand, is a good example of simple, clear, effective prose that says what it means and means what it says.

1. There are three clear stages in a traditional short story. What are they?
2. Leone identifies 3 qualities which make *The Essay* a particularly successful story. What are they?

If you would like to write your own short stories, here are some tips to help you.

Begin with what you know The best writers manage to tell us a lot about characters and places. Before you start writing, take time to think about the setting and people in your story. You might want to base some characters on people or places you know. What aspects of these people or places would readers find interesting?

Plan your plot Try to follow the story shape that Leone describes above. What is the starting point for your story? What is the 'conflict'? How are you going to resolve it?

Let the readers use their imagination When you are writing, try to avoid the temptation to describe events in too much detail – remember that the reader needs enough information to understand the story, but enough freedom to use his or her imagination. Remember Leone's advice – keep your prose clear and simple.

Draft and redraft You may find that your planned story changes when you start to write it. Don't worry – many writers say that their characters take on a life of their own once the story has begun. However, remember to take time to read and write second or third drafts of your story. This will help you to ensure that, while the story is developing, it is still following the advice which Leone gave.

TASK Write your own short story.

1. Think about an event which happened to you or to a friend, or own which you have read about. Take this as the basis for your story. Divide it into the three stages which Leone described.
2. Next, think about the location and the characters in the story. How are you going to describe them? Remember, you need to avoid overwriting.
3. Write your first draft, then leave it for a few days. Now re-read it and consider where you might need to make changes.
4. After you've written a second draft, you might like to get someone else's opinion. Why not ask a friend or your teacher what they think?
5. When you are satisfied with your story, why not submit it to a short-story writing competition?

Answer key

1 Making the most of the cover

1. Readers and detectives both look for clues to help solve mysteries. The reader looks for clues to help him find out as much as possible about the story he is reading.
2. Find out something about the writer. Find out when, where and why the novel or story was written. Read encyclopaedias or reviews to find out about the writer or the story. Read the book cover to find out as much as possible about the story.

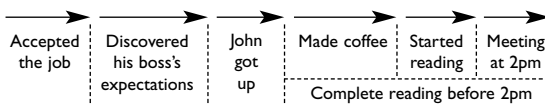
2 Getting started

1. Reading something that is easy to understand can make the reading process more enjoyable and build your confidence.
2. Decide if the word is important to your overall understanding of the story. If it isn't ignore it. Try to guess the meaning of the word from the context of the sentence. Try to break down the word by looking for prefixes and suffixes which can help you guess the meaning.

3 Following the plot

1. The writer may not describe the events of the story in sequence. He or she might describe one event, then flash back to another.
2. Make predictions about the story as you read. Look out for words or phrases which give clues to the sequence of events. Draw a timeline, showing the chronological sequence of events in the story.

Timeline



4 Finding the right perspective

1. Identifying the narrator's perspective will help the reader to evaluate if what is being said is true or valid.

First-person narratives	Third-person narratives
the narrator is inside the action therefore doesn't know what all the characters are doing	the narrator has an overview of all the characters and events
the narration can be very subjective - other characters might see events differently	the narration can be seen as more objective BUT the narrator might influence the readers through his or her attitude to the characters

5 Getting into the atmosphere

1. Gillian advises readers to ask themselves questions about the characters and their actions. She also recommends looking for groups of words which appear regularly throughout the novel because they can be used to symbolise deeper thoughts and ideas.
2. 'Dust', 'ash' and 'smoke' contrast with the brightness of the world Fitzgerald writes about. He uses these words to show that, at its centre, this world is corrupt.

6 Talking about reading

1. People in reading groups can share their stories and their opinions about the books they have read. This sharing of ideas allows them to form friendships and a sense of community.
2. Reading groups meet in members' homes, in schools, in libraries and in internet chatrooms.

7 Writing your own short stories

1. Stage 1 introduces us to the situation. Stage 2 introduces some element of conflict. Stage 3 resolves the conflict.
2. She has based the characters and atmosphere on things she knows well. She introduces the tension in the story calmly and effectively. She avoids 'overwriting'.

Glossary

Introduction

to enhance (verb)

to improve something. We often talk about enhancing skills or enhancing our appearance.

an abridged novel or story (adjective)

verb = to abridge a story

a novel or story which has been shortened, often for publication in a magazine or broadcast on the radio.

Making the most of the cover

to browse (verb) /braʒl/

when we browse in a shop, we spend time simply looking at the things for sale. Usually, we don't intend to buy anything.

the blurb (noun)

the information about a book and its writer given on the back cover of the book.

Getting started

nerve-wracking (adjective)

a nerve-wracking task is one which you must do – but which makes you very nervous when you think of it.

off-putting (adjective)

verb = to put someone off something

A difficult novel can put you off trying to read English literature.

if an aspect of a task is off-putting, it discourages you from attempting to try it.

novice (noun)

if someone is a novice, they are new to the task or job. We can also use this as an adjective, e.g. a novice writer.

Following the plot

the plot (noun)

the events in a story or novel, and how they relate to each other. When we cannot understand how a story progresses, we say we can't 'follow the plot'.

chronological (adjective)

if actions are described in chronological order, it means that they follow each other in time, beginning with the first action.

a flashback (noun)

a writer uses flashbacks to show events which happened prior to those which he describes in the main part of the plot.

to modify something (verb)

to make changes to something

Finding the right perspective

to quarrel over something (verb)

to fight or argue about something unimportant. We often describe the arguments which children have as quarrels.

narrative (noun)

the narrative is the story, as told by one person or character – the narrator.

perspective (noun)

point of view

Getting into the atmosphere

to recur (verb)

to happen repeatedly

moral decay

when something decays, it goes bad. Moral decay is when people become corrupt, dishonest or bad in other ways.

symbolic (adjective)

Something is symbolic when it is used to represent something else. So, 'dust' is symbolic of moral decay in *The Great Gatsby*.

Talking about reading

an internet chatroom (noun)

a chatroom allows a group of people to 'meet' on the internet and to 'talk' to each other by sending messages via their computers.

a prompt (noun)

verb = to prompt (someone to do something)

something we use to remind us what we must do or say. For example, if you are making a presentation at work, you may use notes written on cards as prompts to remind you of what you need to say.

Writing your own short stories

to curse (verb)

to use bad or rude language