

Author of Tomorrow Award

How to Write an Adventure Story

The Author of Tomorrow award is an annual competition designed to find the adventure writers of the future. It is open to young people aged 21 and under who have written a short adventure story in English, with cash prizes and digital publication to be won.

What Is an Adventure?

What makes a story an adventure? Does it have to be set in a jungle or on a mountain? Can everyday life be an adventure?

Put simply, an adventure is a journey with a challenge. It doesn't have to involve pirates, dragons or extreme sports (although it can!). An adventure could happen on a camping trip, during a power cut, on the way home from school, in space... the sky is the limit!

What matters is that something happens that pushes your character out of their comfort zone. Adventure is about facing the unknown, taking a chance, making a brave choice and changing in some way.

The Challenge

Every adventure needs a problem. What goes wrong? What is at stake? What happens if the worst happens?

Maybe your character gets lost or has to rescue someone. Perhaps they uncover a secret or are forced to make a difficult decision. Without a challenge, there is no adventure.

With a short story, it's exciting to start as close to the action as possible to really hook your reader (not to mention saving on your word count!). Instead of telling us everything that happened before the adventure begins ('Jack woke up, had breakfast and went to school before heading out on the boat. '), throw us straight into the moment where something changes ('The boat rocked violently. Jack hadn't expected the sea to turn this rough.')

Readers don't always need the calm before the storm - it's the storm that's exciting!



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Create a Character

- What is your character's name? How old are they? What are they good at? What are they afraid of? What are they trying to achieve? You don't need to tell us all of these things, but it will help you imagine how your character will act.

- Characters don't need to be perfect. In fact, it's often their fears or weaknesses that make the adventure interesting and make readers care about what happens to them. With all good stories, and especially with adventure stories, readers should feel totally invested in the outcome.

When describing your characters, try weaving details into the action. Instead of, 'Sanjay had brown eyes.', why not try, 'Sanjay's brown eyes sparkled with excitement.' Instead of, 'Sarah had long hair.', you could try, 'Sarah's long hair snagged in the branches as she ran.' Incorporating physical details within the action can help your reader better imagine your characters.

Choose the Setting

Will your adventure happen at home? Will it happen in a place you have visited? In your local park? Somewhere completely imagined?

The setting shapes the story. Choose a place that fits the challenge, but also a place that excites you! Think about the mood of the story. A storm feels different at sea than it does in a city. Getting lost feels different in a supermarket than in a forest.

With a tight word count, it's important to think carefully about how you might bring your setting to life. Familiar places (a classroom, for example) may need just a few strong details. Unfamiliar places (a Moroccan souk in Marrakech, for example) may need a little more description to help your reader imagine them clearly.

Descriptive Writing

Descriptive writing helps your reader feel like they are right there alongside the characters!

What can you see? What can you hear? What can you smell? What can you feel?

Think about showing the reader rather than telling them. Instead of writing, 'it was scary', try, 'The trees creaked above us and something moved in the darkness.'



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Sensory details can also make your adventure come alive. Have a go at incorporating them into your writing to build tension and fully immerse the reader. Rather than, 'Vinnie watched the fire burn on, unable to move.', try, 'Smoke stung Vinnie's eyes and the air tasted bitter on his tongue. Flames crackled to his left, and heat pressed against his skin as ash drifted down like black snow.'

Structuring Your Story

Every story needs a beginning, middle and end - even a short story.

Beginning/Trigger



The character and their world are introduced. Something happens or is already happening - the adventure begins.

Middle/Rising tension



The challenge gets bigger. Things go wrong. New problems might appear. The character has to make brave choices.

End/Resolution



The main problem is faced. The challenge is overcome and resolved (or not). Something has changed. The adventure concludes.

Try not to end your story on a cliffhanger. Whilst you don't always need to tie everything up neatly in a bow, it's important to leave your reader with a satisfying climax to your story.

Editing Your Story

Writing is the first step. Editing makes it better.

After you finish writing, take a break from your story. When you come back to it, try reading it aloud. Does it sound right? Does it have a clear beginning, middle and end? Does it slow or sag in any places? Are there plot holes?

Editing doesn't mean changing everything. It means making your ideas clearer and stronger.

It's always worth doing one final proofread. This can be to sweep up any typos, but can also mean spotting (and replacing) repeated words or swapping in more interesting and descriptive words.

For example, 'Jsmín felt really sacred and really excited.' becomes, 'Jasmin felt petrified - but exhilarated.'

You could also ask a friend or family member to read your story and ask them for feedback. Did the story hook them? Did the plot make sense to them? Did the characters feel authentic?



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Things to Remember

- > Every adventure needs a problem to solve.
- > All stories must have a beginning, middle and end.
- > Start as close to the action as possible.
- > Show us what happens - don't just tell us.
- > Use your senses to bring scenes to life.

Top Tips

- > Don't be afraid of big ideas.
- > Trust your imagination.
- > Write first. Edit later.
- > Be bold. Be imaginative. Have fun!

More Information and Help

If you would like to enter your story to the Author of Tomorrow award, make sure to read 'What We're Looking For' and the award's Terms & Conditions before you send us your story. You must enter the category for the age you are on the date of submission. Submissions are open from 9th January to 19th April 2026.

The categories are:

- 11 and Under | Up to 500 words | Prize: £100, plus £150 book tokens for your school
- 12-15 years | 1,000 - 2,000 words | Prize: £250, plus £150 book tokens for your school
- 16-21 years | 1,500 - 3,000 words | Prize: £1,000

Ten stories will be shortlisted and digitally published within an anthology.

You can read previous anthologies and find more information on our website:



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Website



Anthologies

If you have any questions, email Charlotte, our Prize Manager: charlotte@wilbur-niso-smithfoundation.org.

