

1. Vonnegut's rules for short stories

In *Bagombo Snuff Box*, a collection of Kurt Vonnegut's short stories published in periodicals between 1950 and 1963, he shares these eight "rules" for writing short fiction.

1. Use the time of a total stranger in such a way that he or she will not feel the time was wasted.
2. Give the reader at least one character he or she can root for.
3. Every character should want something, even if it is only a glass of water.
4. Every sentence must do one of two things — reveal character or advance the action.
5. Start as close to the end as possible.
6. Be a Sadist. No matter how sweet and innocent your leading characters, make awful things happen to them – in order that the reader may see what they are made of.
7. Write to please just one person. If you open a window and make love to the world, so to speak, your story will get pneumonia.
8. Give your readers as much information as possible as soon as possible. To hell with suspense. Readers should have such complete understanding of what is going on, where and why, that they could finish the story themselves, should cockroaches eat the last few pages.

--from "Kurt Vonnegut's 8 Rules For Writing A Short Story," by Dawn Field
(the link to this is on my website)

2. AI Overview

To judge a short story's quality, consider elements like compelling characters, a clear plot with a satisfying resolution, engaging writing style, and a strong theme or message that resonates with the reader.

Here's a more detailed breakdown:

1. Character Development and Engagement:

- **Relatable Characters:** Do the characters feel real and believable, even if they are fictional?
- **Strong Motivations:** Are the characters' actions driven by understandable motivations, and do they evolve throughout the story?
- **Emotional Connection:** Does the story evoke an emotional response in the reader?

2. Plot and Structure:

- **Clear Focus:**

Does the story have a central conflict or point, and does it stay focused on that point?

- **Compelling Plot:**

Is the plot engaging and suspenseful, with twists and turns that keep the reader interested?

- **Satisfying Resolution:**

Does the ending feel natural and satisfying, or does it leave the reader feeling unsatisfied?

3. Writing Style and Voice:

- **Engaging Language:** Is the language vivid and descriptive, creating a strong sense of place and atmosphere?
- **Strong Voice:** Does the story have a distinct voice that makes it memorable?
- **Pacing:** Is the story paced well, with enough detail to engage the reader without dragging on?

4. Theme and Message:

- **Meaningful Theme:** Does the story explore a relevant or thought-provoking theme?
- **Effective Message:** Does the story deliver its message effectively and subtly, rather than in a heavy-handed way?

5. Other Factors:

- **Originality:** Is the story unique and fresh, or does it feel like a rehash of other stories?
- **Emotional Impact:** Does the story leave a lasting impression on the reader?
- What makes a short story *good*? : r/writing - Reddit

Generative AI is experimental.

3. A Guide to Critiquing a Story: Seven Vital Elements Every Story Must Have

September 27, 2017/[18 Comments](#)/in [Writer Articles](#)/by [Joni Labaqui](#)

Frequently authors ask if I have a “form” that I used to help me critique a story. Given the large number of things that I look at in a story, any form that I had would simply be too long to be workable. Yet it makes sense to try to codify the critiquing process.

There are of course people who don’t believe that art can or should be measured. They might say, “Sure, this author uses the passive voice so much that his tale flows slower than cold tar, but his stunning insights are unsurpassed in literature.” They’d be right. Yet if you’ve ever had to judge stories professionally, you soon find that you have to devise some logic for deciding how to gauge the relative merits of tales, and I’ve been judging stories for contests and classes for some twenty years.

So I’m going to create a form that I might use to judge a story:

Story Critique Form

1. Originality. On a scale of 1 to 10, how original was this story? A 1 means that the story is cliché while a 10 means that it has at least a couple of ideas that I haven't encountered before. _____

2. Setting. On a scale of 1 to 10, how well was the setting developed? A 1 indicates that the setting was poorly developed. This means that it is almost completely disappeared from the story, or that I felt confused as to where and when the tale took place in one or more scenes. Of course, the author should involve all of the senses in describing his or her setting. A 10 means that not only is the setting well-developed, but it informs every aspect of the story—from character development to tone and narrative style. In a story that rates a 10, the setting itself is a powerful draw for the story, and the author succeeded in transporting me into the tale. _____

3. Characterization. On a scale of 1 to 10, how well-drawn are the characters in the story? Good characters should convince us that they grew up in the world or setting that we've placed them in. They should have complex motives and be imbued with conflicting attitudes about life, ethics, politics, and so on. The characters should have friends, enemies, acquaintances, secrets, desires and fears. The character should have a physical body, with a physical history. The character should have a family, of course, and some type of history, along with a place in society. In short, with a poorly drawn character, we know virtually nothing about him by the end of the story. With a well-drawn character, we feel as if we know him intimately by the end of the story. _____

4. Conflict and Plot. On a scale of 1 to 10, how interesting are the conflicts? Since the characters, along with their motives and abilities really lead to a plot, then one must also consider the twists and turns of the plot. How inventive are they? How exciting? How engrossing? _____

5. Emotional/intellectual payoff. On a scale of 1 to 10, how well did this story arouse powerful emotions? If it did arouse powerful emotions, were they the proper emotions for the intended audience (as gauged by the age and sex of the protagonists)? Remember that the author shouldn't be hitting the same emotional beats over and over again. Instead, the author should be creating an emotional symphony, where counter-beats help raise the emotional payoff. _____

6. Theme. On a scale of 1 to 10, how well did this story speak to the reader? Does it raise interesting questions about life and provide profound insights? A rating of "1" means that I don't really see either one. A rating of "10" means that the author astounded me. _____

7. Treatment. On a scale of 1 to 10, how masterfully was the tale written on a line-by-line basis? A poor story, a tale that earns a 1, might be difficult to read simply because of something like “pronoun reference problems,” or it may be marred by typos and grammatical problems. A tale worthy of a 10 will be written not only in language that is beautiful and evocative, but it will also move with effortless pacing. Too often, authors who write beautifully work too hard to impress the reader and end up cluttering the tale with too many metaphors or overwrought pacing. In doing so, they struggle to draw attention to themselves rather than tell a story.