

The BIG Potential in Writing Short

Step One: Believe that God can work through every word you write.

Short writing has a permanent place in the life of a writer: bios, blurbs, endorsements, reviews, blogs, articles, devotionals, scenes within scenes, marketing, website copy, ads, thank you notes, query letters, cover letters, status updates, reels, photo captions, and taglines. **Surrender ALL your writing to God and watch what He will do.** The short writes in your life don't have to be wasted space or throwaway words. They can minister. They can testify. They can inspire. Every word is an opportunity.

Consider the ministry of these short writes:

- The 48-word blurb for *The Chosen: The Chosen* is a groundbreaking historical drama based on the life of Jesus, seen through the eyes of those who knew him. Set against the backdrop of Jewish oppression in first century Israel, the seven-season show shares an authentic and intimate look at Jesus' revolutionary life and teachings.
- Gari Meacham's 19-word endorsement: With insight like fresh linen, Lucinda graciously invites us to live the Word of God, not merely read it.
- Tim Keller's 18-word FB status update: Suffering awakens us out of our haunted sleep of spiritual self-sufficiency into a serious search for the divine.
- Priscilla Shirer's 17-word tagline: Teaching the uncompromised truth of God's Word so that others might know Him and experience His power.
- Eugene Peterson's 7-word book title: *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction*. That's a sermon in a title.
- Karen Porter's 5-word tagline: Laughter is just the beginning.

The Gettysburg Address consists of 272 words. The Preamble to the Constitution contains 52 words. The Lord's Prayer is 66 words long. Psalm 23 is only 57 Hebrew words. The last and most memorable paragraph of Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" speech is about 167 words long. His entire speech is under 1500 words. It takes very few words to change history, to change lives, to change minds, to change hearts. God can use every word you write.

Bible: Matthew 12:36-37 ESV: "I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak, for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned." (Even tweets, texts, and status updates)

Story:

Action: You represent the Living Word. Make every word matter.

Step Two: Read and study short writing. Identify and then emulate the decisions writers of short pieces make. Examples:

Edges by Steve Parolini

I can't abide hope.

Hope is too bright a thing. It blinds me. It is too loud for my ears and too hot to hold in my hands.

I can only grasp at the *edges* of hope, the teases of it. Slivers of light peeking through closed blinds, whispered words, soft things.

Sometimes I find an inkling of hope in a song that I pretend was written just for me. I find it in the hesitation, in the ache of the unresolved chord, in the spaces between the notes.

Sometimes I see a glimmer of hope in the sad smile of a coffee shop stranger who looks up from her novel to catch my eye before returning to her imaginary world. She is lost in its story, its safe space. And now I am there, too.

Sometimes I find edges in a sleeping dream, where I am better looking and ageless and money doesn't matter and someone who exists only in that liminal space talks to me like she's my best friend – the friend who shares laughter and tears, snark and sincerity, every word without judgment. The friend who holds my hand when we walk in reverent silence along abandoned streets or hike mountain trails to cloud-shrouded peaks where we await the gentle burn of the rising sun.

Sometimes I catch a whiff of hope in a smell. Vanilla is the empress of hopeful scents. Freshly-baked bread is a princess. And then there's that remembered perfume, a singular scent that defies romance novel definition while unmasking kissing-distance secrets.

Sometimes hope leaks from loss. A double take at a stranger who looks so much like my years-gone son. Is it you, Scot? Do you see me? Can you feel the love that stretches beyond infinity, weaving through memories of what was and what might have been?

And now I've gone and done it. I've put too many words to a thing that transcends language. I've given it a shape and that shape is too big.

Too loud.

Too hot.

I will close the blinds. I will sit in silence on the couch and listen to Barber's *Adagio*.

The edges are enough. (360 words)

Move: Word choice. Storytelling. Building reveal. Spare, relatable details.

Fourth of July

My childhood July fourths weren't red, white, and blue but green and white—grass and sandals, watermelon and white gloves, lawn chair wicking, sizzlers and sidewalks.

There was no excitement in our Independence Day celebrations. The only firework I could count on was the firecracker scolding I caught from my grandmother every time my flag touched the sidewalk. I could reliably set her off simply by dangling the tip of the corner over a blade of grass or by violating one of the other hundred parade rules she enforced with religious fervor.

Stand for the flag. Salute the soldiers. Clap for the band. It was not so much a celebration as it was a civics lesson and I hated lessons of any kind. Not like my straight-A older sister whose flag never touched the ground and who always clapped at all the right moments.

I watched other dads sweat over hissing grills, spatulas in one hand and beers in the other teaching their sons about the five-second rule and how dirt just adds to the taste of the dogs. My dad was a flash of white glove and gold accents as his car passed by, us on the sidewalk waving our flags and trying to tell if his wave for us was any different than the wave he gave to the rest of the crowd. (225 words)

Move: Memory from concrete nouns.

(Hiss and sizzle of sparklers, Front lawns, Porches, Folding lawn chairs, Sidewalks and drainage pipes, Flags, Flag rules, Sitting on the curb, Parade etiquette, White sandals, Moms in mini-skirts and white, eyelet cropped tops, Waiting, Watching down the street, Dad waving from his white chief car, white gloves, white dress hat, Green watermelon rind, Seed spitting fights, Black seeds, pink watermelon flesh, Great-grandma scolding)

Parable of the Lost Sheep:

“Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Doesn't he leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.' I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent. (Luke 15:4-7 Story-66 words, Lesson: 31 words).

Move: Use the known to introduce the unknown.

Bible: 1 Corinthians 2:4-5 NIV: “My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit’s power, so that your faith might not rest on human wisdom, but on God’s power.”

Story:

Action: Remember the loaves and fishes – rely on God, not on the length of your writes.

Step Three: Write a single message to a specific audience with clear intention. Then choose a few original, precise words.

Packing a Punch

What am I trying to say?	Message
Why am I writing these words?	Intent
To whom am I writing?	Reader
How do I want my reader to feel?	Reaction
What do I want my reader to do or think?	Outcome
What are the fewest, best words to accomplish this?	Reflect, Reduce, Revise

Pattern for Short Writes

Hook (Title and First Line) Write an engaging opening and title.

Story Even a 150-word devotional can tell a short story.

Main Point Clearly state your message.

Supporting Evidence Could be an example, statistic, Scripture, experience, etc.

Shorter Story or Application Bookend with a story that shows the message applied

Takeaway What is the thought, call to action, or transformation for the reader?

How to Write an Engaging Hook: Tips and Examples

Here are ten tips for writing effective hooks:

1. State a startling fact or a statistic
2. Share inspiring quotations
3. Add a question hook
4. Tell a story
5. Make a statement
6. Start with a metaphor
7. Don’t hesitate to contradict

8. Use humor
9. Connect emotionally to the reader
10. Don't forget about the title

<https://socialbee.com/blog/how-to-write-a-good-hook/>

George Orwell: 6 Questions/6 Rules

George Orwell has earned the right to be called one of the finer writers in the English language through such novels as *1984*, *Animal Farm*, and *Down and Out in Paris and London*, and essays like "Shooting an Elephant." Orwell excoriated totalitarian governments in his work, but he was just as passionate about good writing.

Thus, you may want to hear some of Orwell's writing tips. A scrupulous writer, in every sentence that he writes, will ask himself at least four questions, thus:

1. What am I trying to say?
2. What words will express it?
3. What image or idiom will make it clearer?
4. Is this image fresh enough to have an effect?

And he will probably ask himself two more:

1. Could I put it more shortly?
2. Have I said anything that is avoidably ugly?

One can often be in doubt about the effect of a word or a phrase, and one needs rules that one can rely on when instinct fails.

I think the following rules will cover most cases:

1. Never use a metaphor, simile, or other figure of speech which you are used to seeing in print.
2. Never use a long word where a short one will do.
3. If it is possible to cut a word out, always cut it out.
4. Never use the passive where you can use the active.
5. Never use a foreign phrase, a scientific word, or a jargon word if you can think of an everyday English equivalent.
6. Break any of these rules sooner than say anything outright barbarous.

From Orwell's essay "Politics and the English Language."

Crafting Sentences

1. Remove uncertain language. Phrases like “I believe,” “I think,” “seems to be.” Strong writing is authoritative—not authoritarian—but written with confidence you know your subject.
2. Avoid repetitive words or phrases. Don’t repeat words in close vicinity (intentionality).
3. Vary your sentence length and style. Use sentence length to convey mood and tone.
4. Eliminate filler words: Search your document for “there,” “here,” and “it” to find redundant words and phrases. For example: *It’s beneficial to deepen your spiritual life through reading the Bible daily. (12)* The sentence formation weakens the writing with unnecessary words that lack focus. This is more effective: *Deepen your spiritual life through daily Bible reading. (8)* *Daily Bible reading deepens you spiritually. (6)*
5. Using versions of the verb “to be” can weaken the words that follow. Replace “am,” “is,” “are,” “was,” “were,” “been,” and “being” with stronger alternatives. For example: Weak sentence: *They were not enjoying the process of learning algebra. (9)* Strong sentence: *They hated the process of learning algebra. (7)* Stronger sentence: *Algebra lessons repulsed them. (4)*
6. Weak adjectives also spoil your writing. When describing nouns and pronouns, use more powerful adjectives and avoid the words “really” or “very.” Weak sentence: *He was really scared of public speaking. (7)* Strong sentence: *He was terrified of public speaking. (6)* Stronger sentence: *Public speaking terrified him. (4)*
7. Strong verbs. Best nouns. Begin and end strong. Vary pacing. Eliminate cliches.

Bible: 1 Corinthians 2:9 ESV: “What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him.”

Story:

Action: Open your heart to God’s plan for all your words.

[How to Write Short \(Word Craft for Fast Times\) by Roy Peter Clark](#)

[Zen in the Art of Writing, Ray Bradbury](#)