

Getting started

1.

Take the first line from an existing short story and use it to start a new piece of writing.

Short stories have to grab the reader's attention from the beginning and so often start with something intriguing and punchy.

Try one of these opening lines from stories shortlisted for the BBC National Short Story Award with Cambridge University and see where they take you (ideally without reading the rest of the story first!).

“

There's a stand-off in the front yard.”

(In the Car With the Rain Coming Down, Jan Carson, shortlist 2020)

“

When he was a baby, Ghillie's mother was mostly an orangutan.”

(Ghillie's Mum, Lynda Clark, shortlist 2019)

“

Mr Ingram and his invisible daughter Miss Ingram live close by.”

(The Invisible, Jo Lloyd, winner, 2019)

3.

Use a picture or photo to inspire you.

Scour some magazines, or open a book of photography at random to find an intriguing picture. Try a black-and-white image, an illustration, a vintage photograph, or a painting (it's easier when they include people). Look at your chosen image as you answer the following questions:

What has just happened?

What happens in the moment after this?

What are the people's names?

What do they want?

What do they fear?

What are they thinking and feeling in the moment of the picture?

What can you smell, taste and hear?

What is to the right and left of the picture?

4.

Start with an object.



Choose a personal belonging – a handbag, key, wallet, jumper or piece of jewellery – and describe it in vivid detail. Include its colour, shape, smell, and any interesting or unusual features.

Now explain who it belongs to. Why is the item important to your character? What has happened to it – has it been lost? Has it been left at the scene of the crime? Was it a gift from someone they care about? Keep going to see where your object takes you.



2.

Use an existing song title as the title and/or first line for your story and let it inspire you.

Song titles can be hugely evocative and set a mood without you even listening to the song itself! You might already have one you like, or try one of the following:

All Along the Watchtower
Jimi Hendrix

No Body, No Crime
Taylor Swift

Since I've Been Loving You
Led Zeppelin

I Constantly Thank God for Esteban
Panic! At the Disco

One Last Look Around the House Before We Go
Kate Bush



Young Writers' Award

with Cambridge University

For more ideas and resources for writing short stories and to find out about the BBC Young Writers' Award with Cambridge University, visit:

www.bbc.co.uk/ywa