



1,000 Words to Gold – The Scholastic Flash Fiction Playbook

Step-by-step craft, real award-level analysis, and workshop assignments for grades 9 to 12.

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Each part teaches the skill, shows how winning writers make their choices, and ends with workshop assignments. Coaching notes and model responses are at the back.

06.1 How Flash Fiction Works

Flash Fiction is a complete story in 1,000 words or fewer. Learn what makes a very short story whole, how winners spend a tiny word budget, and why a flash piece is built differently from a short story that has simply been cut down.

Why This Matters

The Flash Fiction category of the Scholastic Art & Writing Awards asks for a complete story, not an excerpt, with a maximum of 1,000 words. Scholastic publishes three judging criteria for all categories, originality, technical skill, and the emergence of a personal voice or vision, and it publishes no further rubric and no tier percentages. This guide is independent coaching, not affiliated with or endorsed by Scholastic, and anything beyond those three criteria is our reading of published winners.

Students lose points in flash in two opposite ways. Some write a short story's first third and stop at 1,000 words, which is an excerpt in disguise. Others cram a whole plot into 1,000 words by summarizing, so nothing is felt. A grade 9-12 writer is expected to show that a small piece can be whole: a clear person, a pressure, a turn, and an ending that lands after the last word. The final work must be entirely your own idea and creation.

Core Ideas

Flash fiction works by **selection**. You do not tell less of the story; you tell fewer parts of it and trust the reader to supply the rest. The best way to think about it is as a single event or moment lit very brightly, with the past and future implied. Every word has to do two jobs: carry the surface action and imply something beneath it.

What Makes Flash Whole

One central person, one central pressure.

A turn: something changes, or a character realizes or refuses something.

An ending that completes an action or leaves an image that answers the opening.

A form chosen for a reason (letter, list, one scene, numbered attempts).

No excerpts: someone who has read nothing else must feel the story is finished.

The key difference from a longer story is the **word budget**. In a 3,000-word short story you might spend 400 words establishing a place. In flash, you spend two exact details. You may open mid-scene, skip transitions, imply backstory in a single object, and end earlier than a longer story would. Think of a short story as a house tour and flash fiction as a photograph taken at the one moment the lights change.

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Short story (1,000 to 3,000 words)	Flash fiction (up to 1,000 words)
Several scenes with room for a complication	One to three moments, or one scene
Backstory can be dramatized in flashback	Backstory is an object, a line, or a single sentence
Ending can follow a resolution scene	Ending lands on an image or action, often before resolution
Characters can develop across scenes	Characters reveal themselves in a single pressure
Mistakes in pacing can be recovered	Every sentence is visible; a flat sentence costs more

The Compression Budget

Decide the two or three moments the story cannot lose.

Spend most words on those moments; summarize the rest in a sentence or less.

Count words per section as you plan, not after you draft.

If a sentence can be cut without changing the reader's understanding, cut it.

Case Studies

These studies use publicly readable flash pieces whose schools or the Alliance report a tier. Reminders: the notes come from summarized readings of each page, strongest on structure and weaker on exact word choice; tiers are school self-reports unless noted; word counts are estimates; and five of these seven pieces come from one private school's blog, which is one school's culture and not a random sample. No story text is reproduced.

CASE STUDY 1: STOLEN HEARTS (NATIONAL GOLD MEDAL, 2017; PER A SCHOOL BLOG)

Flash fiction, roughly 850 words, epistolary horror. The school page notes it began as a bonus class exercise.

SOLUTION

Shape. A dying narrator writes a letter to a named recipient, asking that the story be passed down and mentioning a box that should be opened. In a few lines the reader has an addressee, a deadline, a story to be told, and an object with a secret: four hooks in a form that usually has room for one.

Development. Frame letter, then flashback of courtship and jealousy, then the killing, then a return to the present. The scene and summary budget is unequal on purpose: the first meeting and the murder are dramatized, while the middle of the relationship is summarized.

Diction and devices. Romantic language and clinical language collide, and the narrator seems not to hear the difference. The heart in the title turns from feeling to organ. Foreshadowing and dramatic irony build dread.

Effect. The last move is an instruction to open the box, so the final image is never shown and the reader supplies it. The note that this was a bonus exercise suggests, as inference, that the form choice, not extended polish, did the lifting.

CASE STUDY 2: ARE RABBITS' FEET REALLY LUCKY? (NATIONAL GOLD MEDAL, 2014; PER A SCHOOL BLOG)

Flash fiction, roughly 1,000 words, first person retrospective.

SOLUTION

Shape. A younger sibling's memory of an older brother's cruelty, resolved by the narrator's silence at a family dinner. The opening states the narrator's age and family context in one breath.

Development. Three movements: the brother explains trapping, the narrator finds what happened in the woods, the family eats dinner. The woods scene is the only fully dramatized middle; the dinner is short and mostly reflective.

Syntax and diction. The trapping instructions are written like a procedural manual, so the syntax itself is cold. Tender and violent language come from the same mouth, so the brother is not a simple villain. A cutting motif travels from a knife-safety lesson to the dinner table.

Effect. The story closes on an ordinary action, eating, set against what was witnessed and hidden. The narrator's complicity is the point, and the story refuses to release the reader through a confession.

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CASE STUDY 3: SKYE (GOLD KEY, 2019; PER A SCHOOL BLOG)

Flash fiction, roughly 490 words, second person, present tense, told in nine numbered attempts.

SOLUTION

Shape. The same encounter replays nine times as a narrator arrives at a field expecting to find a motionless young woman. Each attempt is a tiny loop.

Development. The numbering is the structure and carries the grief process without naming it. The sequence moves from dread to acceptance, and the final attempt reverses the earlier dread as the narrator lies beside her and finds consolation in a cloud.

Syntax and devices. Short declarative sentences with parallel openings, anaphora, and extended metaphors such as fear as chains. Green, gold, and blue anchor the setting.

Effect. Repetition performs obsession, and the one change in the last loop performs acceptance. The research file's coach note: weaker versions repeat a loop without turning it; here every attempt shifts the narrator's stance. The figure's angelic traits are never confirmed.

Step-by-Step

- 1 Pick a single moment** Choose one event, one pressure, or one decision. Write it in one sentence without naming the theme.
- 2 Choose the form** Decide whether the story is a single scene, a letter, a numbered sequence, a list, or a frame. Write what the form does for the ending.
- 3 Plan the budget** Write your target word counts for three parts, for example 200, 500, and 200. Mark where the story is dramatized and where it is summarized.
- 4 Plant one object** Choose a physical thing that will carry weight at the end. Place it in the first quarter.
- 5 Draft fast** Write the whole story in one sitting without counting words, then count and cut.
- 6 Cut for the reader** Remove the first paragraph and see whether the story improves. Remove sentences that explain feelings the reader already has.
- 7 Test completeness** Give the story to someone who has read nothing else. Ask: does this feel finished or like the start of something?

BEFORE AND AFTER: OPENING IN THE MIDDLE

WEAK (coach sample):

My name is Lena and I am sixteen. This is a story about the summer my grandmother got sick and how it changed our family forever.

SOLUTION

STRONG (coach sample):

Grandma had been counting the pills into the egg carton since Tuesday. Today she got the Sundays wrong, and nobody said anything.

What changed. The weak version introduces the narrator and announces a theme. The strong version opens inside the event, uses a specific object (pills in an egg carton), implies the illness without naming it, and ends on a silence that suggests the family's strain.

BEFORE AND AFTER: SUMMARY BECOMES ONE IMAGE

WEAK (coach sample):

For years Dad worked long hours at the plant and we hardly ever saw him, and he missed many of my games and concerts, and I was sad about it.

SOLUTION

STRONG (coach sample):

Dad's work boots sat by the door like an unanswered question. Every game I looked for them in the bleachers.

What changed. A paragraph of summary becomes two sentences built on an object and an action. The sadness is implied by looking for boots that are not there.

Tier Check

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Coach’s inference from published winners, not a Scholastic rubric. Scholastic publishes no tier percentages. The research sample is small, largely from one school, and shows winners only, so the right-hand column reflects common weaker-draft patterns, not observed pieces.

Gold Medal level	Silver Medal / Gold Key level	Honorable Mention / unrecognized
Form carries meaning and sets up the ending (frame, letter, numbered loops)	Strong form, sometimes needing more support	Straight account of events
Unequal budget: words spent on two or three moments	Mostly well spent, some even stretches	Every moment gets equal space, or the plot is rushed
Ending withholds or redirects	Memorable closing image	Explains the lesson or ends because the words ran out
Complete piece	Complete but slightly open	Reads like an excerpt

Common traps

1. Submitting the first third of a longer story. 2. Cramming a plot into summary. 3. Opening with the narrator's name and age. 4. A form that is decoration, such as a loop with no change between loops.

Coach's Playbook

One moment, one pressure. A form with a reason. A word budget by section. One planted object. A cold-reader test for completeness. A hard maximum of 1,000 words.

Do This Tonight

In 15 minutes, write a complete story in exactly three paragraphs: a moment, a turn, an image. Do not exceed 250 words. Then circle the sentence you would cut first.

Practice

WORKSHOP How Flash Fiction Works

Write by hand or on a keyboard. Aim for a full draft, then revise once.

1. Write one sentence naming a single moment, pressure, or decision for a flash story without stating the theme.
2. List three possible forms for that story (letter, numbered attempts, single scene, list, frame). Pick one and say what it does for the ending.
3. Plan a word budget for three sections that totals no more than 1,000 words. Mark which are scenes and which are summary.
4. Choose one physical object to plant in the first quarter and write its first appearance in one sentence.
5. Draft a 400-word complete story using your moment and form.
6. Rewrite this opening so it starts in the middle: 'My name is Sam and I am going to tell you about the day my parents split up.'
7. Turn this summary into two sentences built around an object: 'Our family was poor, and we often went without things.'
8. Cut your draft by 20 percent without losing the turn. List what you removed.
9. Give your draft to a cold reader. Ask whether it feels finished. Record their answer and one change you will make.
10. Compare Case Studies 1 and 3 in four sentences: what form did each use and how did it shape the ending?

06.2 Compression: Openings, Images, and Implication

In 1,000 words or fewer, each sentence must do two jobs. Learn how to open without warming up, choose images that carry history, and trust implication so the reader feels more than you wrote.

Why This Matters

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Scholastic's published criteria for the Flash Fiction category, as for every writing category, are originality, technical skill, and the emergence of a personal voice or vision. Compression is technical skill made visible. In a piece capped at 1,000 words, a juror can see in the first five lines whether you know how to choose. Scholastic publishes no further rubric, so this section draws on published winners and coach inference.

Students lose points through over-explaining. They state the feeling after showing it, introduce a character with a paragraph of biography, or open with weather and waking up. Each of these costs 50 to 100 words that a flash story cannot spare. A grade 9-12 writer is expected to leave something unsaid on purpose, and to know what.

Core Ideas

Compression works through three tools. **Openings** that begin in motion. **Images** that carry more than their surface. **Implication**, in which the reader infers what the text never states. Practice each separately and then blend them.

Opening Moves for Flash

Start with an action, a situation already under pressure, or a voice with a clear stake.

Cut the first paragraph and see if the story begins on the second.

Give the reader a person, a place, and a problem inside the first 100 words.

Avoid waking up, weather, and the narrator's name and age.

Every opening hook should be paid off, even if the payoff is a refusal.

Images in flash must be specific and few. A good image carries history: a shoebox of letters, a figurine, a bowl that is empty at the end, a stain on a paper. It should appear early, plainly, and return changed. Choose images from the senses your character relies on. For a character who cannot see, sound, touch, and temperature carry the weight.

Implication is the discipline of leaving the emotional sentence unwritten. If the reader can feel grief from a laid table with one place unset, do not add that she missed him. Dialogue is part of this: characters rarely say what they feel, and their actions interrupt their sentences. Subtext is not vagueness; it is precision about surface action and trust about meaning.

Implication Check

Circle every sentence that names an emotion. Can an action or object replace it?

Does each image earn its place by doing a second job?

Do characters speak around what matters?

Is there one thing the story never explains?

Would a reader who skipped your last sentence still feel the ending?

Move	Cost in words	What it buys
Open in motion	Saves 50 to 100 words of setup	Immediate pressure
Use one object as history	One sentence	A past the reader assembles
Interrupt dialogue with action	Few words	Subtext and rhythm
Imply instead of explain	Often zero	The reader's participation
Skip a transition	Zero	Pace

Case Studies

These studies use publicly readable flash pieces whose schools or the Alliance report a tier. The notes come from summarized readings and are weaker on exact word choice, so any claim about a particular line should be checked on the live page. Tiers are mostly school self-reports. Where the research file labels its reading thin, we say so. No story text is reproduced.

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CASE STUDY 1: AGAIN (SILVER MEDAL, 2012; PER THE ALLIANCE'S OWN NEWSROOM, NATIONAL LEVEL INFERRED FROM THAT CONTEXT)

Flash fiction, domestic subtext. Length not estimated in the research file. Caution: this analysis rests on one reading pass and is thinner than the others; syntax, diction, and point of view were not described, so none are claimed here.

SOLUTION

Opening. The story begins with a discovered enlistment notice and a stain on the paper that the narrator reads as blood. The central conflict is on the table before the scene begins, in one image.

Compression. One restaurant meal is the skeleton. Eating shrimp, offering chowder, and drinking water become tense beats. Memories of a beach and a rooftop are threaded through the meal, so the distance between the couple's past and present is felt without a separate flashback block.

Images and implication. The sea once sang and now no longer does: this contrast is the emotional arc and is never explained. Spilled salt, tears, and scraping chair legs are physical. Dialogue is short and interrupted by action.

Effect. The narrator's solitary movement upward ends the story, and the husband's choice stays unresolved. Nobody says what they feel; eating and silence carry it.

CASE STUDY 2: OTHER GODS (NATIONAL SILVER MEDAL, 2019; PER A SCHOOL BLOG)

Flash fiction, uncanny, roughly 900 to 1,000 words, close third person, past tense.

SOLUTION

Opening. The story announces that today is the protagonist's day of death and then drops into her routine. That one forward-looking line puts dread over every domestic detail, an extremely cheap compression move.

Images. The protagonist is a blind widow, so air, breath, warmth and cold, sound, food, crumbling plaster, and a small handmade figure carry the senses. Seeing has a double meaning.

Implication. An uncanny encounter is never confirmed as real or as a memory she invented. Foreshadowing arrives through wind, shivering, and an emptied bowl, never through explanation.

Effect. A shift to a younger neighbor who discovers the body gives an outside view of a death known only from inside. The last image of the body and moving curtains leaves a sense of presence. Mirrored gestures across the two parts make the ending feel built.

CASE STUDY 3: SOSTENUTO (GOLD KEY; YEAR NOT STATED ON THE PAGE; PER A SCHOOL BLOG)

Flash fiction, roughly 440 words, close third filtered through a companion. Caveat: the research file notes the composer is unnamed on one reading and identified as Chopin on another, so treat the identification as uncertain.

SOLUTION

Opening. In medias res: a sick, immobile composer in an armchair with a nervous companion watching. No backstory is needed to understand the pressure.

Compression. A single continuous scene in about sixteen short paragraphs. Backstory is a brief summary. The narrator never enters the composer's mind, so genius stays opaque and costs no words of explanation.

Images and devices. Rain, clouds, glass, and ceiling panels set against physical frailty. Rain becomes applause in a metaphor. Repeated sentence openers create a heavy rhythm that matches the mood.

Effect. The story ends as the composer goes to the piano and starts to play, so the reader supplies the music. The coach note from the research file: this ending is understated and, for some readers, may leave too little of a landing. That is a judgment call you should make about your own endings.

Step-by-Step

- 1 Write the long version first** Draft your moment at any length. You cannot compress what does not exist.
- 2 Find the real first line** Underline the first sentence where something is happening. Delete everything before it.
- 3 List your images** Write every image and object in the draft. Keep the three that carry history. Cut or merge the rest.
- 4 Mark every named emotion** Highlight each sentence that names a feeling. For at least half, replace the sentence with an action or an object.

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- 5 Interrupt your dialogue** Add a physical action inside each exchange. Cut any line that restates what the action shows.
- 6 Count and cut** Count words. Remove adjectives, doubled verbs, and sentences that restate. Keep the weird, exact details.
- 7 Read aloud for rhythm** Make sure short sentences land at turns and repeated openers are deliberate.

BEFORE AND AFTER: NAMING VERSUS IMPLYING

WEAK (coach sample):

I was so nervous about meeting my dad for the first time in years. My stomach was in knots and I felt scared and hopeful at the same time.

SOLUTION

STRONG (coach sample):

I had picked the booth with two exits. When the door chimed I put my phone face down, then face up, then in my pocket.

What changed. Two named feelings disappear. A booth with two exits and a phone moved three times show nervousness and the wish to escape. The reader assembles the fear, which feels stronger than being told.

BEFORE AND AFTER: AN IMAGE THAT CARRIES HISTORY

WEAK (coach sample):

After Grandpa died, the house felt empty, and I remembered how he used to sit in his chair all the time and tell stories.

SOLUTION

STRONG (coach sample):

The recliner still faced the window. Nobody had sat in it, but somebody had left the lamp on.

What changed. The weak version tells us about emptiness and memory. The strong version places two objects, a chair and a lamp, and an unexplained detail (the lamp). The family's refusal to let go is implied.

Tier Check

Coach's inference from published winners, not a Scholastic rubric. Scholastic publishes no tier percentages. The sample is small, mostly from one school's blog, and shows winners only, so the right-hand column describes typical weaker drafts, not observed pieces.

Gold Medal level	Silver Medal / Gold Key level	Honorable Mention / unrecognized
Opening plants dread or stakes in a line or two	Strong opening image or voice	Warm-up paragraph or announcement
A few images carry history and return changed	Vivid images, some decorative	Many images at equal weight
Implication does the emotional work; emotions are rarely named	Mixed showing and telling	Feelings are explained after being shown
One element is left unconfirmed on purpose	Some mystery	Everything explained, or the confusion is accidental

Common traps

1. A first paragraph that is only setup. 2. Naming the emotion right after showing it. 3. Ten images, none of them returning. 4. Mystery that is just confusion, as opposed to a question the story deliberately leaves open.

Coach's Playbook

Underline the real first line. Keep three history-carrying images. Replace half your named emotions with action or objects. Interrupt dialogue with action. Leave one thing unexplained on purpose.

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Do This Tonight

In 15 minutes, take the first paragraph of any draft and rewrite it in 40 words or fewer, starting in the middle of an action, with one object and no named emotion.

Practice

WORKSHOP Compression: Openings, Images, and Implication

Write by hand or on a keyboard. Aim for a full draft, then revise once.

1. Take a flash draft and underline the first sentence where something is happening. Write what you would delete above it.
2. Write five different 40-word openings for the same moment, each starting in a different action.
3. List every image in a draft. Mark the three that carry history and explain what history each carries.
4. Highlight every sentence that names an emotion. Replace five of them with an action or object.
5. Rewrite this dialogue so each line is interrupted by a physical action: 'I don't want to talk about it.' 'You have to.'
6. Write a 100-word scene in which a character receives bad news and never says the words.
7. Choose one thing in your story to leave unexplained on purpose. Write one sentence explaining why the reader benefits.
8. Take a 200-word paragraph of summary and compress it into two sentences built on one object.
9. Compare the openings of Case Studies 2 and 3 in four sentences: how does each plant stakes quickly?
10. Cut one finished draft by 25 percent. List what you removed and what you kept.

06.3 Structure Inside 1,000 Words

A very short story still needs a shape. Learn the structures that fit under 1,000 words, how to budget scene against summary, and how to choose a form that earns its place instead of decorating the page.

Why This Matters

Scholastic judges Flash Fiction, a complete story of up to 1,000 words, against the same published criteria as every writing category: originality, technical skill, and the emergence of a personal voice or vision. Structure is where technical skill and originality meet. Scholastic publishes no further rubric and no tier percentages, so what follows is drawn from published winners and labeled as coach inference where it goes beyond them.

Students lose points in two structural ways. They write a straight chronological account in which every moment gets equal space, so no moment matters more than another. Or they choose an interesting form, such as a dream, a list, or a loop, but the form does nothing the content could not do. Winning flash tends to tie a structural idea to the specific effect of its ending.

Core Ideas

Under 1,000 words, you generally have room for one of these shapes: a **single scene** from start to finish; a **frame** in which a present moment wraps a past one; a **sequence** of numbered or labeled units; a **two-part mirror** in which the second half echoes the first from a new angle; or a **document form** such as a letter. Each has strengths and costs, and each depends on a decision about what to dramatize and what to summarize.

Shape	Strength	Cost
Single scene	Immediacy, unity of time and place	Backstory must be implied
Frame (letter or present around past)	Lets a short piece cover a lot of time	Frame can be decoration if it never changes
Numbered or labeled sequence	Shows change through repetition	Variation must be progressive, not cosmetic
Two-part mirror	Gives a short story a built ending	Needs a clear change between halves
Document or letter	Voice and addressee are built in	Can sound artificial if the voice drifts

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The Scene and Summary Budget

Dramatize two or three moments: the meeting, the turn, the choice.

Summarize the rest in a sentence or a paragraph, never in equal weight.

In a 1,000-word piece, a dramatized scene is often 150 to 400 words.

Summary should move fast and tilt toward the dramatized moments.

Placement of the turn matters. Many strong flash pieces turn at about two-thirds of the way through and use the remaining third to land. If your turn happens in the last two lines, check that the reader has been prepared. If your turn happens at the midpoint and the second half repeats it, compress. Think of the story as a ramp: a line of rising pressure, a break, and a short landing.

Form Needs a Second Purpose

Ask: what does this form do that plain narration could not?

Loops and sequences must change between units.

Frames must return changed by what the middle revealed.

Document forms must justify their reader and their moment.

If you cannot answer, use a single scene.

Case Studies

These studies use publicly readable flash pieces whose schools report a Scholastic tier. The notes come from summarized readings, strong on structure, weaker on exact wording; tiers are school self-reports; and most of the pieces come from one private school's blog. No story text is reproduced.

CASE STUDY 1: SKYE (GOLD KEY, 2019; PER A SCHOOL BLOG)

Flash fiction, roughly 490 words, second person, present tense, nine numbered attempts.

SOLUTION

Structure. Nine labeled attempts replay a core scene with variations. Each is a self-contained loop, and the sequence moves from failure to acceptance. The numbers do the structural work, and they carry the grief process without naming it.

Budget. Almost entirely scene, with little backstory. Because each unit is tiny, the form is efficient for flash.

Devices. Anaphora across attempt openings, extended metaphor, personification of sky and clouds, circular structure. The speculative element, an angelic figure, is never settled as literal or figurative.

Effect. The final attempt reverses the dread. The research file's inference: strong versions of this form change something each time; weaker versions repeat a loop without turning it. Test your own sequence by writing what shifts in each unit.

CASE STUDY 2: HERO TO THREE (NATIONAL SILVER MEDAL, 2017; PER A SCHOOL BLOG)

Flash fiction, roughly 800 words, close third person, past tense, three parts.

SOLUTION

Structure. A wide, almost chronicle-like view of a displaced community hiding in Kazakhstan, then a narrowing to a sick six-year-old. Three parts follow: the situation and the boy's questions, competing accounts (his mother's silence and his brother's invented heroic story told by candlelight), and a shoebox of letters.

Budget. Dialogue-driven scenes alternate with summary of background and the boy's reasoning. The letters are rendered through fragments and reported content, so the father stays largely offstage. The last section compresses into short declarative paragraphs.

Devices. A repeated negative construction marks the stages of the boy's disillusionment. A formal name for the father sets the official record against the myth. Dramatic irony: the reader senses the father's fate before the boy does.

Effect and a flaw. The ending is a short, resolute sentence in which the boy's tears and decision reverse his earlier refusal. The research file also notes some loose or irregular syntax that adds childlike immediacy but occasionally blurs meaning, a reminder that a Silver Medal piece is not flawless. History supplies the stakes at almost no cost in words.

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CASE STUDY 3: STOLEN HEARTS (NATIONAL GOLD MEDAL, 2017; PER A SCHOOL BLOG)

Flash fiction, roughly 850 words, epistolary frame.

SOLUTION

Structure. Frame letter, flashback of courtship and jealousy, the killing, then a return to the present to point at a box. The frame is what makes 850 words feel complete, because the ending is a handoff rather than a reveal narrated in full.

Budget. The first meeting is dramatized with dialogue and sensory detail. The relationship is summarized. The killing is slowed down and dramatized. This inversion, spending words on the two moments that matter, is the central compression decision.

Syntax. Long accumulating sentences carry the romance and the killing, short blunt sentences deliver turns, and parallel constructions give a ritual, methodical tone.

Effect. The reader is addressed as the heir of the confession and becomes complicit from the first line. The final image is withheld, which lets the story end after the last word.

Step-by-Step

- 1 Choose the moments** List the two or three moments that cannot be cut. Everything else is summary or implied.
- 2 Choose a shape** Pick single scene, frame, sequence, mirror, or document. Write what it does for the ending.
- 3 Place the turn** Mark where the turn falls. Aim for roughly two-thirds through, and leave space for a landing.
- 4 Assign word counts** Set a budget per section that sums to 1,000 or less. Give the most words to the turn.
- 5 Draft each section separately** Write each section in its own file, then assemble. Check transitions last.
- 6 Test the form** If you used a sequence or loop, write what changes in each unit. If nothing changes, rebuild.
- 7 Read the shape** Mark each paragraph as scene or summary. Look at the pattern. Is it uneven in the right places?

BEFORE AND AFTER: A LOOP THAT TURNS

WEAK (coach sample):

1. I waited at the bus stop. The bus did not come.
2. I waited at the bus stop again. The bus did not come.
3. I waited at the bus stop. The bus did not come.

SOLUTION

STRONG (coach sample):

1. I waited at the bus stop with her old umbrella. The bus did not come.
2. I waited without the umbrella. The bus did not come.
3. I waited with a second coat for the girl beside me. The bus came, and I let it go.

What changed. The weak loop repeats the same sentence with no change in the narrator. In the strong version each unit shifts a detail (umbrella, no umbrella, a second coat), the narrator's stance moves from clinging to releasing, and the last unit finally turns the pattern.

BEFORE AND AFTER: BUDGETING SCENE AND SUMMARY

WEAK (coach sample):

We met in September. We talked in October. We kissed in November. In December he told me he was leaving. I cried and said goodbye. In January I was fine.

SOLUTION

STRONG (coach sample):

We met, we talked, we kissed, and for three months it was easy, which is the only way I can describe the time.

In the doorway, with the engine running, he said he was leaving. I held the door against the cold until it hurt.

What changed. The weak version gives every month the same weight. The strong version summarizes three months in one sentence and gives a full beat to the doorway, where the turn happens. The reader feels the leaving, not the calendar.

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Gold Medal level	Silver Medal / Gold Key level	Honorable Mention / unrecognized
A structural idea ties directly to the ending effect	Strong form, ending sometimes less connected	Straight chronology
Unequal word budget on two or three moments	Mostly deliberate balance	Equal space for every moment
Loops, frames, and halves change between units	Variation present, sometimes cosmetic	Repetition without change
Turn is prepared and followed by a landing	Turn works, landing is quick	Turn comes in the last line without preparation

Common traps

1. Giving every month, scene, or paragraph equal weight. 2. A form picked for novelty. 3. A numbered loop whose items do not change. 4. A frame that returns exactly as it began, with no new meaning.

Coach's Playbook

Two or three moments chosen. One shape with a second purpose. The turn at about two-thirds, followed by a landing. A word budget by section. A what-changed line under each loop or unit.

Do This Tonight

In 15 minutes, take a draft or idea and label each paragraph scene or summary. Choose one summary stretch to shrink to a sentence and one summary stretch to expand into a scene.

Practice

WORKSHOP Structure Inside 1,000 Words

Write by hand or on a keyboard. Aim for a full draft, then revise once.

1. Choose a story idea and list the two or three moments that cannot be cut.
2. Pick one shape from the table and write one sentence on what it does for your ending.
3. Draft a word budget for three sections that totals no more than 1,000 words, with the most words on the turn.
4. Write the turn of your story as a 200 to 300 word scene.
5. Write the landing, the 100 to 150 words after the turn.
6. Write three numbered units of a sequence in which each unit changes one detail and the narrator's stance.
7. Rewrite a paragraph of equal-weight summary so one beat is a scene and the rest is a single sentence.
8. Label each paragraph of a draft as scene or summary. Write what pattern you see and what to change.
9. Read Case Study 2 again. In three sentences, explain how the history of the community raises the stakes without extra words.
10. Assemble a full draft and count words. Cut it to 1,000 or fewer without removing the turn.

06.4 Endings That Resonate, and the Final Cut

In flash fiction, the ending is where a tiny story becomes whole. Learn how winning pieces end on an act, an object, or a withheld image, then how to make the final cut to 1,000 words and prepare a clean, compliant entry.

Why This Matters

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A Flash Fiction entry must be a complete story of no more than 1,000 words, and Scholastic judges it on originality, technical skill, and the emergence of a personal voice or vision. It publishes no more detailed rubric and no tier percentages, so what follows about endings is drawn from published winners and labeled as coach inference. An ending in flash does more work than in a longer story because there is no room for a resolution scene: the last image has to carry the weight.

Students lose points through endings that explain the lesson, tie every thread, or stop because the word limit arrived. They also lose points in the final cut, when they trim the wrong things, such as the turn, and leave in warm-up sentences. A grade 9-12 writer should be able to cut a draft by a quarter and watch it improve. Finally, rule slips cost entries: a name in the manuscript, a story over 1,000 words, or an excerpt in place of a complete story.

Core Ideas

The research file draws a pattern we offer as coach inference, not a Scholastic statement: the national-level flash pieces studied tend to end on an act or an object and stay quiet about the lesson. Four endings from the case studies: a box handed to the reader, an ordinary dinner set against a hidden act, a body and moving curtains, and a boy's decision. Each leaves work for the reader, which is the point.

Four Kinds of Flash Endings

- THE HANDOFF: the story gives the reader an object or a task and stops before the reveal.
- THE ORDINARY ACTION: the story closes on a routine act that now carries what was hidden.
- THE LINGERING IMAGE: a final sensory image suggests a presence or a change.
- THE DECISION: a short, plain sentence shows the character choosing, with the cost felt but not explained.

What these endings avoid matters as much. They do not summarize the theme, they do not apologize for ambiguity, and they do not introduce a new fact in the final line unless it was planted. If you choose ambiguity, make sure it is a deliberate open question and not confusion. A quick test: can you say what the two possible readings are? If you can, the ambiguity is designed.

The Final Cut Checklist

- Cut the first paragraph and see if the story starts better.
- Cut every sentence that names a feeling the reader already has.
- Cut doubled adjectives, doubled verbs, and throat-clearing transitions.
- Protect the turn, the planted object, and the last image.
- Count words. Aim for a comfortable margin under 1,000 so late edits do not push you over.

Rule or step	What to do
Length	Complete story, maximum 1,000 words; not an excerpt
Identity	No name, school, or teacher anywhere in the manuscript
Format	Type or paste into the portal text box; judges see roughly what appears in the box, including line breaks
Originality	Entirely your own idea and creation; list influences in Work Sources
AI	A final work that is itself AI-generated is ineligible; disclose any permitted use
Edits	You may edit until your regional deadline; deadlines vary by region

Case Studies

These studies use publicly readable flash pieces whose schools or the Alliance report a tier. Notes come from summarized readings and are strong on endings and structure. Tiers are mostly school self-reports. No story text is reproduced.

CASE STUDY 1: ARE RABBITS' FEET REALLY LUCKY? (NATIONAL GOLD MEDAL, 2014; PER A SCHOOL BLOG)

Flash fiction, roughly 1,000 words, first person retrospective.

SOLUTION

The ending. The story closes on an ordinary action, eating dinner, set against what the narrator witnessed and chose to hide. It is ambiguous and unresolved, and the narrator's complicity is the point.

How it earns it. A cutting motif travels from an early knife-safety lesson to the woods to the dinner plate, so the final knife and fork carry meaning the reader has assembled. A rhetorical question earlier hands the moral problem to the reader.

Coach inference. A weaker version would likely let the brother be a plain villain, explain the narrator's feelings, or resolve with a confession to the parents. The winning move is refusing that release.

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CASE STUDY 2: OTHER GODS (NATIONAL SILVER MEDAL, 2019; PER A SCHOOL BLOG)

Flash fiction, roughly 900 to 1,000 words, uncanny.

SOLUTION

The ending. Open and uncanny: the last image of the body and faint movement of the curtains leaves a sense of presence. The supernatural thread is never confirmed.

How it earns it. The opening told the reader she would die, so dread builds before anything frightening happens. A shift of point of view to a younger neighbor gives an outside view of a death known only from inside, and mirrored gestures echo the opening.

Coach inference. A lower version would explain the encounter or end at the death with a moral, and would probably skip the point of view handoff.

CASE STUDY 3: SOSTENUTO (GOLD KEY; YEAR NOT STATED; PER A SCHOOL BLOG)

Flash fiction, roughly 440 words, one continuous scene. Caveat: identification of the composer is uncertain across readings.

SOLUTION

The ending. Understated: the composer goes to the piano and starts to play. His illness is not resolved. Creative action is the closing image, and the reader supplies the music.

How it earns it. The scene rises from stillness through tension to a quiet turn. The companion's outside view keeps the composer's mind closed, so no explanation is possible or needed.

Coach inference and caution. The research file notes this subtle ending can leave a reader without a landing; it is one of the few points that distinguishes this Gold Key from the national-level group. When you end at a threshold, make sure the preceding image gives the reader something to stand on.

CASE STUDY 4: HERO TO THREE (NATIONAL SILVER MEDAL, 2017; PER A SCHOOL BLOG)

Flash fiction, roughly 800 words.

SOLUTION

The ending. A short, resolute sentence: the boy's tears and his decision reverse his earlier refusal, and the father's heroism shifts from myth to earned personal meaning.

How it earns it. A repeated negative construction marked stages of his disillusionment, so the final reversal lands. The title word is tested and redefined across the story.

Coach inference. A weaker draft might add a paragraph explaining what a hero is. This one lets objects and a child's reasoning carry the thesis. The research file also notes some blurred syntax in this Silver Medal piece, which shows that copyediting still matters at every tier.

Step-by-Step

- 1 Draft three last lines** Write a handoff, an ordinary action, and a lingering image for your story. Choose the one that answers the opening.
- 2 Delete the explanation** Remove any sentence after the last image that states what the story means.
- 3 Check the plants** Confirm every object or fact in the final lines appears earlier in the draft.
- 4 Define your ambiguity** If the ending is open, write the two readings in two sentences. If you cannot, close the story further.
- 5 Make the cut in order** First remove warm-up and explanation, then doubled language, then secondary details. Protect the turn.
- 6 Proofread from the bottom** Read the story paragraph by paragraph from the end to the beginning to catch typos.
- 7 Run the portal test** Paste into a plain text box, check line breaks, confirm word count, and remove any identifying information.

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BEFORE AND AFTER: FROM LESSON TO IMAGE

WEAK (coach sample):
I put the key under the mat and walked away. I knew I would never come back, and that sometimes leaving is the bravest thing you can do.

SOLUTION
STRONG (coach sample):
I put the key under the mat, straightened the mat, and walked to the corner before I remembered I had left the porch light on. What changed. The weak ending narrates a lesson. The strong ending uses three small actions (the key, the straightening, the porch light) to show care and hesitation. The reader decides whether she goes back.

BEFORE AND AFTER: THE FINAL CUT

WEAK (coach sample, 55 words):
It was a very cold, gray, and quiet morning when Mina finally decided that today was the day she would tell her father the truth, because she had been thinking about it for such a long time and could not keep it inside any longer.

SOLUTION
STRONG (coach sample, 17 words):
Mina waited until her father had both hands in the dishwasher. 'I didn't take the money,' she said. 'Kofi did.'
What changed. The cut removes weather, a stated decision, a stated history, and a stated feeling. What remains is a moment, a placed action (his hands are busy), and a line of dialogue with stakes. Compression here raised tension and saved nearly forty words.

Tier Check

Coach's inference from published winners, not a Scholastic rubric. Scholastic publishes no tier percentages. The research sample is small, mostly from one school, and shows winners only, so the right-hand column describes typical weaker drafts, not observed pieces.

Gold Medal level	Silver Medal / Gold Key level	Honorable Mention / unrecognized
Ending withholds or redirects and stays quiet about the lesson	Strong closing image, sometimes a loose landing	Ending explains, reconciles, or moralizes
Last image prepared by earlier motifs and plants	Image mostly prepared	New information appears in the final lines
Cut to the essential; every sentence earns its place	Mostly tight	Warm-up and explanation left in
Clean copy and compliant entry	Mostly clean	Typos, rule slips, or over the limit

Common traps

1. Stopping at 1,000 words because the limit arrived. 2. Explaining the lesson after the last image. 3. Cutting the turn to save space. 4. Leaving a name, school, or teacher in the manuscript.

Coach's Playbook

Three candidate last lines. Explanation deleted. Plants confirmed. Ambiguity defined. Cut in order: warm-up, explanation, doubles, details. Plain-text paste test.

Do This Tonight

In 15 minutes, delete the last paragraph of a draft. Write three new last lines (handoff, ordinary action, image), read them aloud, and mark the one that answers your opening.

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Practice

WORKSHOP Endings That Resonate, and the Final Cut

Write by hand or on a keyboard. Aim for a full draft, then revise once.

1. Write three different last lines for one story: a handoff, an ordinary action, and a lingering image.
2. Choose one and write what the ending costs the character in one sentence.
3. Delete everything after your last strong image. Write what you removed and why it was not needed.
4. List every object or fact in your final lines and find where each first appears. Add a plant where one is missing.
5. If your ending is ambiguous, write the two readings in two sentences. If you cannot, revise the ending.
6. Rewrite this ending so it shows instead of tells: 'He realized that his father had loved him all along.'
7. Cut a 300-word passage to 200 words by removing warm-up, explanation, and doubled language. List each cut type.
8. Paste a draft into a plain text file, check line breaks, and confirm the word count is 1,000 or fewer.
9. Remove all identifying information from a draft, including any header, and note where you checked.
10. Compare Case Studies 1 and 3 in four sentences: how does each ending use an ordinary or quiet action, and which leaves more for the reader to supply?

06.5 Bonus Lab: Annotated Draft Clinic for Flash Fiction

Read a complete original coach story in three parts, see how each part develops, is organized, and is worded, then run your own draft through a six-pass revision plan.

Why This Matters

Flash fiction hides its machinery. A good 900-word story reads as if it simply happened, yet each sentence was chosen to do two jobs at once. This lab opens the machine. You will read one complete original story, split into three parts, and see how it develops, how it is organized, how the sentences are built, which words carry weight, and which devices shape the ending. Then you will run your own draft through six revision passes.

The story below is **Coach's sample (original, not a Scholastic winner)**. It has not been judged, and it is shorter than the 1,000 word maximum so the analysis fits beside it. Scholastic publishes three judging criteria for every category, originality, technical skill, and the emergence of a personal voice or vision, and no further rubric, so what follows is a coach's reading. Study the method and do not borrow the subject, images, or phrasing: your final entry must be entirely your own.

The Clinic Sample

Title: **Lost and Found, Second Floor**. Setup: a girl works the after-school lost-and-found table at her school and, one afternoon, an unclaimed object turns up that she recognizes.

PART 1: THE OPENING (COACH'S SAMPLE, ORIGINAL, NOT A SCHOLASTIC WINNER)

The lost-and-found table is a folding table with one bad leg, and I am the one who props it up with a library book every day at 3:15. Mr. Okafor calls it service hours. I call it the only room where nobody asks me anything. Sweatshirts go on the left. Water bottles on the right. Everything else in a bin marked MISC, which is where the world's small sorrows go: one glove, a retainer in a napkin, a key on a ribbon.

On Tuesday, in the MISC bin, there is a blue lunch bag with a name on the strap in marker, and the name is my brother's.

SOLUTION

Development: the story begins mid-routine, not with backstory, and it establishes the narrator's job, her mood (the only room where nobody asks me anything), and a world of ordinary objects in a handful of lines. The inciting moment arrives in the second paragraph, about 120 words in, as a single sentence that ends on the name. The reader has a person, a place, a pressure, and a question.

Organization and syntax: the first paragraph moves from the table to the narrator to the bins, narrowing toward the object. Sentence fragments in the sorting list (Sweatshirts go on the left.) imitate a task being done by habit. The last sentence of the part is the longest one, which slows the reader on purpose so the name hits.

Diction and devices: the library book propping the table is a small image of someone holding something up that is not working. The MISC bin gets the phrase small sorrows, the story's one overt lyrical move, placed early so the object can later carry the feeling without comment. Inference from reading published winners, not a Scholastic statement: strong flash tends to plant its central image in the first third.

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PART 2: THE MIDDLE (COACH'S SAMPLE, ORIGINAL, NOT A SCHOLASTIC WINNER)

I do not touch it. I move the glove, the retainer. I straighten the sweatshirts that do not need straightening. Then I unzip the bag with two fingers, the way you check a sleeping animal.

Inside: a sandwich cut into triangles. Our mother cuts triangles. Our mother has not cut anything in this house since March.

He is in seventh grade, downstairs, and he has been eating lunch in the nurse's office for six weeks. I know because the nurse told me, and because I did not tell anyone I knew. A boy walks past the table and asks if I have seen a calculator. I say no. I say it twice, like it is a different answer the second time.

The bag is heavy. The sandwich is a full day old. Whoever packed it packed it for someone who was not hungry yet.

SOLUTION

Development: the middle slows time. The narrator touches everything but the bag, and the delay is the tension. The reveal inside the bag is small (triangle sandwiches) and carries the family history through one habit and one fragment about the mother, never explained. Backstory arrives as an object and two short sentences, exactly the flash method.

Organization: the part runs delay, object, history, interruption, return. The boy asking about a calculator is a deliberate interruption that shows the narrator lying easily, which characterizes her without a paragraph of reflection. The six weeks and the narrator's silence give her a stake: she knew and said nothing.

Syntax and diction: very short sentences in the opening beats make the narrator feel careful and frightened. The simile the way you check a sleeping animal is gentle and precise, and it hints at how she regards her brother. Repetition of say no twice, like it is a different answer, is the part's key device, because it shows her understanding that a repeated lie is a form of asking.

Effect: the last two sentences move from the brother to the unknown packer, so the reader feels the sandwich was made by someone who did not know how bad things were. That is the emotional turn, and it comes from an image and not from a statement.

PART 3: THE ENDING (COACH'S SAMPLE, ORIGINAL, NOT A SCHOLASTIC WINNER)

At 3:40 I zip the bag and carry it down the stairs, past the trophy case, past the nurse's office with its blue door, which is closed. I stand in front of it with the lunch bag held in both hands like something I am returning to a river.

I do not knock yet. Through the door I can hear a chair scrape and the small plastic sound of a tray being set down.

I put the bag on the floor, and I sit down next to it, and I wait for him to come out hungry.

SOLUTION

Development: the narrator breaks her pattern by leaving the table, the story's physical act of change. The ending does not show the conversation. It shows her choosing to wait, so the arc is from hiding to staying, and the reader supplies what happens when he opens the door.

Organization and syntax: the part is built on the staircase route, a list of places passed with the repeated word past, then three short beats. The final sentence uses and to chain three actions in one breath, which feels like a decision being made in real time and lands on the word hungry.

Diction and devices: the river image gives the bag ceremony and loss without saying either. The sound detail, a chair scraping, a tray being set down, tells us he is inside without showing him. The ending answers the opening: the table she props up becomes the floor she sits on.

Effect: hungry is the story's last word and quietly reverses the day-old sandwich. Because the resolution is a waiting posture and not a speech, the piece ends on an image that continues after the last word, which is how judges often describe a flash ending that works.

What Changed From Draft to Draft

The first draft of this sample began with the narrator describing her whole day at school, 200 words before the lunch bag appeared. That draft told the reader she felt invisible. The revision cut the day, kept the table with the bad leg, and let the routine say it instead. The first ending also had the brother thank her and the mother arrive, which explained everything. The revision stopped one step earlier, at the waiting, so the reader finishes the scene.

Element	Weak first draft	Revised sample
Opening	A full day of school summarized	A routine in the middle of action
Central image	Several objects, none central	One lunch bag with a job in the ending
Backstory	Two paragraphs of explanation	One sentence and a sandwich
Feeling	Named (I felt guilty)	Shown through delay and repetition

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Element	Weak first draft	Revised sample
Ending	Reconciliation scene	A choice and a posture

Use the table as a diagnostic on your own story. Find the row where your piece sits in the left column and start your revision there, since a better ending cannot rescue an opening that is still explaining.

The Revision Pass Plan

Run the passes in order. Each pass has one job, and trying to do all six at once is why revision turns into rearranging commas.

- Pass 1: The whole** Write one sentence that states the person, the pressure, the turn, and the ending image. If any of the four is missing, fix the story before touching a sentence.
- Pass 2: The word budget** Mark each section with its word count. Make sure the most words fall on the two or three moments the story cannot lose, and cut summary that explains what a detail already shows.
- Pass 3: The opening** Cut everything before the first moment of action or tension. Check that the first 100 words give the reader a person, a place, and a question.
- Pass 4: The images** Circle every concrete image. Keep the strongest object and give it a job in the ending. Replace abstract words (sad, scared) with something seen, heard, or touched.
- Pass 5: The sentences** Read aloud and mark rhythm. Use short sentences for fear and speed, a longer one where you want the reader to slow down. Remove adverbs and stacked adjectives.
- Pass 6: The last line** Write three alternate final sentences. Choose the one that gives the reader an image, not an explanation, and check the title, the word count of 1,000 or fewer, and the formatting.

Annotated Draft Checklist

The story is complete, not an excerpt.
 The central pressure appears within the first 150 words.
 One concrete object carries the emotional weight.
 Backstory appears as an object, a line, or a single sentence.
 At least one scene slows time and the rest is compressed.
 The ending shows an action or image and does not state a lesson.
 The story is 1,000 words or fewer and entirely my own.

Coach's Warning

Do not reuse the sample's setting, object, or family situation. Judges read a great many stories about sad siblings; what lifts a piece is a situation only you could notice. Borrow the method: a routine opening, a delayed reveal through an object, and an ending that shows a choice.

Do This Tonight

Take your draft's last paragraph and write three different final sentences, one that states a feeling, one that shows an action, and one that shows an object. Read each aloud after the whole story. Pick the one that leaves the reader wondering what happens next. Fifteen minutes.

WORKSHOP Bonus Lab: Annotated Draft Clinic for Flash Fiction

Write by hand or on a keyboard. Aim for a full draft, then revise once.

- Write a 100-word opening that starts in the middle of a routine and ends on a sentence that introduces a problem. Underline that sentence.
- List five ordinary objects in a place you know well. Choose one and write two sentences that imply a family history without naming it.
- Take the sample's Part 2 and rewrite one paragraph from the brother's point of view in 80 words. Notice what you must cut or add.

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- Write a scene of 150 words in which a character delays doing something. Use at least three physical actions and no explanation of why.
- Find three abstract words in your draft (sad, afraid, lonely). Replace each with an image, a sound, or an action.
- Write a 60-word passage that uses repetition once on purpose, like the twice-said no, and explain in one sentence what the repetition reveals.
- Write the final paragraph of your story three ways: a statement, an action, and an object. Mark which gives the reader the most to carry out of the story.
- Count the words in each section of your draft. Rewrite your word budget so the two most important moments get at least half the total.
- Read your story to a friend, stop two sentences before the end, and ask them to predict the last line. Record their guess and revise if it is easier or harder than your actual ending.

Notes**Coaching Notes and Model Responses**

What a strong response to each assignment looks like, and why. Compare after you draft, not before.

06.1 How Flash Fiction Works**WORKSHOP · HOW FLASH FICTION WORKS**

- A good moment is narrow: 'a girl returns a jacket she has burned' rather than 'a girl learns about honesty.' If you wrote a theme, find the scene that would show it.
- Choose the form whose limits help. A letter forces a voice and addressee; numbered attempts force change between loops. If a form has no purpose, use one scene.
- Typical flash budgets give most words to the turn and the ending. If your plan spends 500 words on setup, cut the setup.
- The object should be ordinary on first appearance. Do not hint at its importance. Its later change is the payoff.
- A complete story needs a turn, even a small one. If your draft only describes a situation, add a decision or a refusal.
- Model: 'Mom had already taped my name over Dad's on the mailbox.' We are in the middle of the event and the reader infers the split.
- Model: 'We split the last orange four ways and saved the peel.' The scarcity is shown by a shared object and a careful habit.
- Cuts that help are usually explanations of feelings, doubled adjectives, and openings that warm up. If you cut the turn, restore it.
- A cold reader tells you if the story feels finished. Listen for 'I wanted to know what happened next,' which can mean you ended too early or created a good ambiguity; ask which.
- Case Study 1 uses a letter frame and withheld box, so the ending is a handoff; Case Study 3 uses numbered loops, so the ending is a change in the last loop. Both forms produce endings the reader completes.

06.2 Compression: Openings, Images, and Implication**WORKSHOP · COMPRESSION: OPENINGS, IMAGES, AND IMPLICATION**

- Often the real first line is the second or third paragraph. If you delete the warm-up and the story still makes sense, the deletion is correct.
- Strong openings share one trait: a person in motion with something at stake. Compare your five and choose the one that raises the most questions.
- History-carrying images tend to be objects people kept, repaired, or avoided. Decorative images like a pretty sunset usually cut cleanly.
- Replacement works when the new sentence shows what the character does. Check that you did not replace a named feeling with a more elaborate named feeling.
- Model: 'I don't want to talk about it.' She aligned the forks. 'You have to.' He took one fork out of line, then put it back.
- Model: she folds the letter twice, refills a glass that is already full, and asks about the bus schedule. The reader gets the news from displacement.
- Good unexplained elements are small and tied to character, such as why a stranger knows a name. A lack of resolution only works if the story is otherwise complete.
- Model: 'The kitchen smelled of his burnt toast for a week after he left, and nobody opened a window.' History, loss, and refusal compress into a single image.
- Case Study 2 announces the death in the opening and lets dread do the work; Case Study 3 starts mid-scene with a sick figure and a watcher. Both give a person, a situation, and a pressure within a few lines.
- Look at the cuts: if you removed description before action, you likely improved the story. If you cut the turn, restore it.

06.3 Structure Inside 1,000 Words

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WORKSHOP · STRUCTURE INSIDE 1,000 WORDS

1. A moment is something you can picture in a single image or exchange. If your list reads like an outline of a novel, narrow it to one event.
2. A good answer explains purpose: 'A frame lets the narrator hand the reader a box instead of narrating the last scene.' If you cannot answer, pick the single scene.
3. A typical split is 250 setup, 450 turn, 250 landing. If your setup is larger than your turn, shrink it.
4. The turn is where something changes: a choice, a refusal, a discovery. If nothing changes, add a decision.
5. The landing is short and often ends on an object or action. Resist adding a sentence that explains the turn.
6. Change one detail each time, such as an object, a time of day, or a choice. By the third unit, the narrator should be in a new place, even if the setting is identical.
7. Summarize with a long, quick sentence full of 'and' and then slow down at the beat. The change in pace is the lesson.
8. You probably see many even paragraphs. Pick one summary paragraph to shrink and one scene to expand.
9. Historical detail does the work of backstory in a phrase. A hidden community, an official notice, or a shoebox of letters implies stakes without a scene to explain them.
10. When cutting, remove explanations and doubled description before touching the turn. If the story is still over, merge two moments or remove a minor character.

06.4 Endings That Resonate, and the Final Cut**WORKSHOP · ENDINGS THAT RESONATE, AND THE FINAL CUT**

1. The three should feel different in effect. A handoff gives an object, an ordinary action closes on routine, and an image closes on a sense. Pick the one that answers the opening.
2. Cost is concrete: a friendship, a belief, a place in the family. If you wrote 'nothing,' the ending may be a rescue.
3. Many endings improve by stopping one sentence earlier. If you removed a paragraph of reflection, leave it removed.
4. A missing plant is the most common ending flaw. Add a quiet earlier mention of the final object without hinting at its importance.
5. A designed ambiguity has clear alternatives: either she goes back or she doesn't; either the voice was real or remembered. If you can't name them, the ambiguity is confusion.
6. Model: 'His coat was still on the hook, and the pockets still held the peppermints he never ate.' The love is shown by what was kept.
7. Cuts usually fall into three categories: warm-up (weather, waking), explanation (naming feelings), doubles (two adjectives). If your cuts were all one kind, check the others.
8. Judges see roughly what appears in the box, including line breaks and spacing. A plain text paste shows what they see. Keep a margin under the limit.
9. Check the title, headers, first line, and any signature. The rules forbid identifying information anywhere in the manuscript, and the work must be your own.
10. Case Study 1 ends on dinner and Case Study 3 on a pianist starting to play. Both end on an action. The first sets a quiet act against a hidden one, while the second ends at a threshold and leaves the music to the reader.

06.5 Bonus Lab: Annotated Draft Clinic for Flash Fiction**WORKSHOP · BONUS LAB: ANNOTATED DRAFT CLINIC FOR FLASH FICTION**

1. A strong opening shows a habit (a job, a ritual, a chore) and then lets something break it. If your problem sentence arrives after 150 words, cut the setup. The routine should reveal character, not only furnish a room.
2. Objects imply history when they are slightly wrong for their place: a coat too big, a calendar stuck on a month. Model: The calendar on the fridge still says March. Nobody has turned the page. Two sentences, no explanation.
3. Changing the point of view shows how much of the sample depends on the narrator's guilt. In the brother's version you lose the delay and gain a different tension. Expect to cut interior reflection and keep the object.
4. Delay works when each action is specific and slightly evasive: straightening things, checking a phone, washing an already clean cup. The reader should sense the avoidance before you ever name it.
5. A replacement might be: afraid becomes she kept her thumbnail pressed into her palm until it left a moon. Choose images that are particular to your character, not stock gestures like trembling hands.
6. Repetition can show doubt, a lie, a ritual, or insistence. Model: I say fine. I say fine again, quieter, as if it were a different word. It reveals the speaker does not believe herself.
7. The action version usually wins because it ends in motion. The statement version tends to explain and the object version works best if the object appeared earlier. Whichever you choose, make sure it echoes the opening.
8. A common budget is roughly 150 words for the opening, 500 for the central scene, 150 for the turn, and the rest for the ending. If your biggest section is summary, convert part of it to scene and cut elsewhere.
9. If your friend guesses the last line easily, the ending may be too explicit or too predictable; add an unexpected image. If they cannot guess at all, check that earlier details set up the ending fairly.

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