

## Setting

Setting, quite simply, is the story's time and place. While setting includes simple attributes such as climate or wall décor, it can also include complex dimensions such as the historical moment the story occupies or its **social context**. Because particular places and times have their own personality or emotional essence, setting is also one of the primary ways that a fiction writer establishes **mood**. Typically, short stories occur in limited locations and time frames. Even in short stories, however, readers should become sensitive to subtle shifts in setting. Setting is often developed with narrative description, but it may also be shown with action, dialogue, or a character's thoughts.

The setting should put a backbone into the story. The setting can bring unity to a story with many sub-plots, viewpoints or themes. A physical description of the familiar backdrop of setting will reassure the reader there is one constant in the book.

The setting can advance the plot. By focusing on changes in the setting, the plot can move forward. For instance, a tornado blows down the heroine's house, forcing her to move in with her brother and his roommate--the man she's never stopped loving.

Setting can enhance tension by darkening the mood of the story (it was a dark and stormy night), introducing a threatening element (oh no, the stairs to the basement have just collapsed), creating a mystery (is the house really haunted?), overturning previous character expectations (she wasn't the typical southern belle) or demanding immediate action on the part of a character (there's a mud slide on the way, we'd better get off this hill).

Setting can affect character. Where we live, shapes who we are. Different areas of the country have different dialects, viewpoints and expectations. Different countries and time periods even more so. The reader expects a certain type of character within that setting. Even if the author goes against type and creates a character opposite of what is usually found there, the difference itself characterizes. Why is that person different than everyone else in a particular setting? There must be a reason, and that reason should be a prime focus in your characterization. The setting can affect a change upon a character.

Setting can help shape your story idea. Many writers start with a setting they like and advance from there.

Setting can help advance the themes of a novel.

The setting should enhance, not inhabit, a story. The setting should be chosen for a reason and expanded upon for a reason. If done right, setting can be a valuable asset to a novel and not just a place where the characters dwell.