

DSDT

Final Assignment

Crafting an Engaging... ...and Unforgettable Story.

Learning Objective

For this assignment, you're being challenged to write a short story that's both fun and impressive, somewhere between 2,500 and 3,000 words. Think of it as your chance to show off your skills in descriptive writing, building memorable characters, experimenting with unconventional storytelling, and keeping readers hooked with engaging narrative techniques. Oh, and don't forget to sprinkle in some analytical thinking, develop a unique voice that's unmistakably yours, and end with a cliffhanger that leaves readers desperate for more.

To make this less overwhelming, I've broken your final story assignment into five clear phases. Each phase zooms in on a specific part of the story-making process, with suggested word counts to keep you on track toward the 2,500–3,000 word goal. It's basically like having a roadmap for your story, so you know exactly where you're going without getting lost in the creative wilderness.

Think of it as building your story piece by piece: characters first, then setting, plot twists, voice, and finally, that jaw-dropping ending. Follow the phases, have some fun, and by the end, you'll have a story that not only meets the requirements but also shows off your flair as a writer.

Learning Outcome

This final assignment is your chance to really play with storytelling, think of it as a “creative sandbox” where you can mix descriptive writing, unusual story structures, and techniques that keep readers glued to the page.

By the end of it, you'll show that you can take all these elements, vivid descriptions, unconventional narrative forms, and engaging storytelling, and weave them into a story that's completely your own. This isn't just about following the rules; it's about pushing the boundaries of what a story *can* be, experimenting with form, and finding your unique voice as a writer.

The goal is to grow your skills while having fun, exploring new ways to tell a story, surprising your readers, and maybe even surprising yourself in the process. So grab your ideas, let your creativity run wild, and most importantly, enjoy the ride while crafting a story that's truly yours.

Assignment Guidelines

1. Environment Description & Writing Descriptively (500–700 words)

Phase 1: Environment Description & Writing Descriptively (500–700 words)

Kick off your story by *dropping your reader right into your world*. Your job here is to make the setting come alive, let them see it, hear it, smell it, and even feel it. Whether your story unfolds in a chaotic city, an eerie wasteland, or a magical realm where dragons might casually stop for coffee, your goal is total immersion.

Ask yourself:

- What does this place look, smell, and sound like? (Is that alleyway full of neon signs and dripping rain, or a quiet forest with the smell of pine and moss?)
- How does the environment shape the mood of the story or affect your character's actions and emotions?
- Are there symbolic details in your setting that hint at bigger themes in your story?

Here's an example to spark your imagination:

"The rain danced upon the weary, rusted rooftops, its steady beat lost in the wailing wind. Flickering neon signs splashed erratic bursts of blue and red across the narrow alley, shimmering on the rain-slicked ground. The air was thick with the smell of wet pavement and something faintly rotten, long forgotten."

See how the reader *feels* the scene? That's what you're going for. Take your time here, this is where your story starts breathing. Make your setting so vivid that readers could close their eyes and *be there*.

2. Developing Unique Characters (600–800 words)

Time to bring your story to life with characters who don't feel like they were copied from a "How to Write a Hero/Villain/Mentor" template. Your goal here is to create at least one main character who's fresh, quirky, and memorable, someone who surprises the reader and sticks in their mind long after they've finished the story.

Forget the cookie-cutter "fearless warrior," "wise old mentor," or "charming con artist." Instead, think about contradictions, odd habits, or unexpected traits that make your characters *real people* rather than cardboard cutouts.

Some examples to get your imagination rolling:

- Your "warrior" could be a battle-hardened pacifist who *hates violence* but keeps getting dragged into fights.
- Your mentor could be a sarcastic teenager with encyclopedic knowledge but zero patience for teaching anyone.
- Your trickster might be socially awkward, constantly tripping over their words, but somehow a genius at deception.

Ask yourself questions like:

- What makes your character unique, quirks, habits, fears, or obsessions?
- How do they interact with the environment around them?
- What internal conflicts push them into action (or hold them back)?
- How has their past shaped who they are today?

Here's an example of a character who breaks the mold:

"Sylas had a peculiar habit of counting the cracks in every sidewalk he walked on. It wasn't superstition, just a way to keep the voices in his head occupied. His fingers twitched slightly as he pulled his coat tighter, shielding himself from the world's expectations. He never spoke above a whisper, yet his presence carried a weight that pressed into every room he entered."

Notice how quirks, small habits, and internal struggles make Sylas feel real and intriguing. That's exactly the kind of depth you want for your character, someone readers can imagine meeting, rooting for, or maybe even secretly fearing.

3. Unconventional Storytelling (500–700 words)

Now it's time to get a little experimental. This phase is all about breaking the "straight line" rule and telling your story in a way that keeps readers on their toes. Think of it as shaking up the narrative puzzle, you can play with time, perspective, and what the reader *thinks* they know.

Instead of a boring chronological tale, beginning, middle, end, try one of these approaches:

- **Non-linear storytelling:** Jump around in time. Start with the climax, flash back to earlier events, then leap forward again. This can build suspense and make your story feel like a rollercoaster rather than a gentle stroll.
- **Multiple perspectives:** Instead of sticking to one character, switch viewpoints. This can give readers a richer, sometimes conflicting, understanding of what's really going on. Imagine a story where the “hero” in one chapter is the “villain” in the next.
- **Unreliable narrator:** Your narrator might exaggerate, lie, or simply not understand what's happening, leaving the reader guessing. It's a great way to inject mystery, tension, or even humor.

Ask yourself questions like:

- Would bouncing between characters' perspectives make my story stronger or more intriguing?
- Can I strategically withhold information and reveal it later for maximum impact?
- Would a fragmented or dreamlike structure match the theme or mood I'm aiming for?

Here's a simple example: start your story with the ending, maybe a shocking twist or dramatic event, and then work backward, slowly piecing together the chain of events that led there. It's like showing the punchline first, then letting the readers figure out the joke along the way.

The point of this phase is to make your story feel fresh and unpredictable. Don't be afraid to bend the rules, unconventional storytelling is your chance to surprise your readers, make them think, and immerse them in your narrative in a totally new way.

4. Engaging Storytelling & Finding a Voice (700–900 words)

Now we're getting into the heart of your story: *your narrative voice*. Think of this as the personality of your story, the way it talks, the way it thinks, the way it makes readers feel. A strong voice pulls readers in, keeps them hooked, and makes them care about your characters and events. It's what turns a bunch of words into a story that sticks.

Your narrative voice should match the **tone** (the mood of your story) and support the **theme** (the big ideas you want to explore). Tone could be serious, dark, funny, playful, or even sarcastic. Theme could be love, justice, growth, freedom, or anything else that runs through your story like an invisible thread.

Here's how to make your voice work:

1. Match the tone:

- Dark or tragic story? Your voice might be reflective, somber, or even a little haunting.
- Light or comedic story? Let your voice be witty, playful, or sarcastic.

2. Support the theme:

- If your story explores personal growth, let the narrator show evolving insight or self-awareness.

- If it's about justice or revenge, your voice might be sharp, determined, or morally questioning.

3. Draw readers in:

- Relatable thoughts, clever phrasing, or an engaging personality in your narration can make readers *feel* like they're part of the story.
- Use your voice to create an emotional and intellectual connection, the kind of connection that makes readers pause, nod, or even laugh out loud.

Ask yourself questions like:

- Is my voice poetic, blunt, humorous, or lyrical?
- Am I balancing dialogue, action, and description in a way that keeps the story moving?
- How does my character's perspective shape how the story is told?

Here's an example of a strong narrative voice in action:

"They never told me that guilt had a taste. But I could feel it now, bitter, like burnt sugar and something darker, something that clung to my tongue even as I swallowed. And yet, I smiled. Because in this city, remorse was a luxury few could afford."

Notice how the words instantly create mood, hint at backstory, and give the narrator personality, all while keeping readers hooked. That's exactly what you want your narrative voice to do.

In short, your narrative voice is your story's personality. Make it strong, make it consistent, and make it memorable, it's the thing that will keep readers turning pages, long after they've met your characters.

5. Adding a Cliffhanger (200–400 words)

Time to leave your readers hanging, in the best way possible. A cliffhanger is all about ending your story on a moment of suspense that makes readers *desperately* want to know what happens next. Instead of neatly tying up every plot thread like a boring gift ribbon, you leave something unresolved, mysterious, or downright shocking. That lingering tension is what keeps your story alive in readers' minds long after the last word.

Here are a few ways to nail a cliffhanger:

- **A surprising choice:** Your character makes a decision that raises new questions. Maybe they step down a dark, unfamiliar path or do something with unexpected consequences.
- **An unsolved mystery:** Drop a secret hint but don't fully reveal it. Let the reader stew over what it might mean.
- **A twist ending:** Flip everything your reader thought they knew upside down. Suddenly, nothing feels certain, and they can't stop thinking about it.

Ask yourself:

- What conflict or question can I leave hanging?
- Is my protagonist about to discover something shocking?
- Can the last line hit like a punch, twist, or eerie moment that sticks?

Example of a strong cliffhanger:

"The lock clicked open, the door creaking as it swung inward. A rush of cold air greeted him, but it wasn't the draft that made his breath hitch, it was the unmistakable sound of someone breathing in the darkness beyond."

Notice how it leaves questions: Who's there? What happens next? Readers can't help but imagine the possibilities. That's the magic of a cliffhanger, it makes your story linger in the mind, sparks curiosity, and sometimes even sets the stage for a sequel or continuation.

In short: don't wrap everything up neatly. Let a little chaos, mystery, or suspense slip in at the end. Your readers will thank you by staying up late thinking about your story, and that's exactly the reaction you want.

Submission Requirements:

Alright, here's the official "rules of the game" section, but don't worry, it's not as scary as it sounds.

What to submit:

- **Word count:** 2,500–3,000 words, enough to tell a full story, but not so much that you can't see the end.
- **Format:** Typed, double-spaced, 12-point font. Times New Roman or Arial work fine, no fancy fonts needed unless your story is about a magical typeface that talks back.
- **File type:** Word document or PDF. Keep it simple and accessible.
- **Due date:** May 1st, 2025, by 8 PM. Set reminders, alarms, or sticky notes on the fridge, just don't miss it.

How your story will be graded:

1. **Descriptive Writing (20%)** – Can readers *see, hear, and feel* your world? Are the settings vivid enough that they might start imagining themselves living there?
2. **Character Development (20%)** – Are your characters fresh, quirky, and memorable? Do they feel like real people rather than stereotypes or cardboard cutouts?
3. **Unconventional Storytelling (20%)** – Did you take risks with structure, perspective, or narration? Does your story feel creative and dynamic rather than just predictable?

4. **Engagement & Voice (20%)** – Is your story compelling from start to finish? Does your narrative voice shine, pulling readers in emotionally and intellectually?
5. **Cliffhanger (20%)** – Does your ending leave readers on the edge of their seat, craving more? Is it a twist, a question, or a suspenseful moment they won't forget?

Think of these criteria as your guideposts rather than a scary checklist. Nail them, and you'll not only meet the assignment requirements but also create a story that sticks in readers' minds. And remember, have fun with it. This is your chance to play, experiment, and show off your storytelling skills!

Project Summary and Roadmap

Final Short Story Assignment: Your Creative Roadmap

Congratulations! You're about to embark on a storytelling adventure. This assignment is your chance to experiment, play with narrative, and show off your skills. You'll write a **short story between 2,500–3,000 words** that combines descriptive writing, unique characters, unconventional structure, engaging voice, and a cliffhanger ending. Think of it as a creative sandbox, rules exist, but the fun is in bending and exploring them.

To help you navigate this, we've broken the process into **five phases**, plus submission guidelines. Follow them, have fun, and let your imagination run wild.

Phase 1: Environment Description & Writing Descriptively (500–700 words)

Start your story by *plopping your reader right into your world*. Your job here is to make the setting come alive, let them see it, hear it, smell it, and feel it. Whether it's a chaotic city, a quiet forest, a dystopian wasteland, or a magical kingdom, your world should feel immersive and alive.

Ask yourself:

- What does the place look, smell, and sound like?
- How does it affect the mood or your character?
- Are there symbolic details that hint at the story's bigger themes?

Example:

"The rain danced upon the weary, rusted rooftops, its steady beat lost in the wailing wind. Flickering neon signs splashed erratic bursts of blue and red across the narrow alley, shimmering on the rain-slicked ground. The air was thick with the smell of wet pavement and something faintly rotten, long forgotten."

Tip: Make your readers *feel* the setting, don't just describe it.

Phase 2: Developing Unique Characters (600–800 words)

Bring your story to life with characters who are fresh, quirky, and memorable. Forget the cookie-cutter “hero,” “villain,” or “mentor.” Instead, focus on contradictions, habits, or unexpected traits that make your characters feel real.

Ideas to get started:

- A battle-hardened pacifist forced into conflict.
- A sarcastic teenage mentor with encyclopedic knowledge but zero patience.
- A socially awkward trickster who’s a genius at deception.

Questions to ask yourself:

- What makes this character unique?
- How do they interact with the environment?
- What internal conflicts drive them?
- How has their past shaped their present?

Example:

"Sylas had a peculiar habit of counting the cracks in every sidewalk he walked on. It wasn't superstition, just a way to keep the voices in his head occupied. His fingers twitched slightly as he pulled his coat tighter, shielding himself from the world's expectations. He never spoke above a whisper, yet his presence carried a weight that pressed into every room he entered."

Phase 3: Unconventional Storytelling (500–700 words)

Now it's time to experiment. Break the “straight line” rule and tell your story in a way that surprises readers. Play with time, perspective, and what the reader thinks they know.

Techniques to try:

- **Non-linear storytelling:** Jump around in time. Start with the climax and flash back to earlier events.
- **Multiple perspectives:** Switch viewpoints to give a richer or conflicting understanding.
- **Unreliable narrator:** Have your narrator exaggerate, lie, or misunderstand events to keep readers guessing.

Questions to ask yourself:

- Would shifting perspectives make my story stronger?
- Can I withhold information for strategic reveals?
- Would a fragmented or dreamlike structure enhance the theme?

Example:

A story that begins with the ending, a shocking twist, then slowly pieces together what led there. It's like showing the punchline first, then letting readers figure out the joke.

Phase 4: Engaging Storytelling & Finding Your Voice (700–900 words)

Your narrative voice is the *personality* of your story. It's how your story talks, thinks, and makes readers feel. A strong voice keeps readers hooked and makes your story memorable.

How to craft it:

1. **Match the tone:** Dark story? Somber, reflective voice. Light or funny? Witty, playful voice.
2. **Support the theme:** If your story explores personal growth, show evolving insight. If it's about justice, use sharp, determined narration.
3. **Draw readers in:** Use relatable thoughts, clever phrasing, or engaging personality to keep them emotionally and intellectually involved.

Questions to ask yourself:

- Is my voice poetic, blunt, humorous, or lyrical?
- Am I balancing dialogue, action, and description effectively?
- How does the character's perspective shape the storytelling?

Example:

"They never told me that guilt had a taste. But I could feel it now, bitter, like burnt sugar and something darker, something that clung to my tongue even as I swallowed. And yet, I smiled. Because in this city, remorse was a luxury few could afford."

Phase 5: Adding a Cliffhanger (200–400 words)

Leave your readers hanging, in the *best* way. A cliffhanger creates suspense, makes readers curious, and keeps your story alive in their minds long after the last word.

Ways to do it:

- **A surprising choice:** Your character makes a decision that raises new questions.
- **An unsolved mystery:** Hint at a secret without fully revealing it.
- **A twist ending:** Flip everything the reader thought they knew.

Questions to ask yourself:

- What conflict or question can I leave unresolved?
- Will the protagonist discover something shocking at the end?

- Can the last line hit like a punch, twist, or eerie moment?

Example:

"The lock clicked open, the door creaking as it swung inward. A rush of cold air greeted him, but it wasn't the draft that made his breath hitch, it was the unmistakable sound of someone breathing in the darkness beyond."

Submission Requirements

- **Word count:** 2,500–3,000 words
- **Format:** Typed, double-spaced, 12-point font (Times New Roman or Arial)
- **File type:** Word document or PDF
- **Due date:** (See assigned date on Steam)

Evaluation Criteria:

Category	Weight	What to Aim For
Descriptive Writing	20%	Immersive, vivid settings that readers can feel.
Character Development	20%	Unique, engaging characters with depth and quirks.
Unconventional Storytelling	20%	Creative structure or perspective that adds impact.
Engagement & Voice	20%	Strong narrative voice that keeps readers hooked.
Cliffhanger	20%	Ending that leaves a lasting impression and curiosity.

Think of this as your roadmap to success. Nail these elements, and you'll have a story that's not only complete but also captivating and unforgettable. And remember, have fun! This is your chance to experiment, surprise, and show off your storytelling chops.