

# Historical Fiction Writing

See rubric on page 2 for rating levels.

**Format:** Final draft stories must be typed, double-spaced, in size 12 Times New Roman font and with standard margins of 1" around.

**Typical Length:** Level 5 stories are never less than 3 pages in length.

**Starting Off:** Start with a character that has a significant dilemma in an historical period. Explain to yourself the cause of the dilemma, how the character tries to resolve it, and whether or not the resolution is successful. Develop the character's own personal history that led to the dilemma. Once this skeleton is devised, you can add the necessary descriptive writing to fill in plot, setting, and character.

**Write Several Drafts:** Writers do not sit down, write a story from beginning to end, then send it for publishing. Writing needs to be written in several drafts, perhaps sharing with friends to see what they think, before a final work is submitted. Writing is rewriting! In most cases, a preliminary draft will need to be submitted as part of the assignment.

**Dramatic tension:** The story needs to possess a **strong** dramatic tension that keeps reader interested -- it should be grounded in a significant problem that needs to be addressed and gets reader involved. **For the sake of this assignment, the main story needs to take place within 24 hour period of the character's life.** This does not preclude flashbacks and background information. In fact, background and description may well take up 1/2 of your story! But the main story and climax must happen within 24 hours.



**Clarity:** The work has to have a clarity that leaves **no** surface questions (i.e. "What happened in this part?") in reader's mind. The story needs to be set in a rich background of historical setting. Historical setting should not be forced or contrived, but should be a natural part of the story. (For example, having your character meet Abraham Lincoln just to include some history is a weak trait of a story.)

**Conventions of English:** Your story should contain **almost** no errors in grammar, usage, or mechanics (unless used for artistic purposes). **HAVING MANY ERRORS IN ENGLISH WILL RESULT IN A WHOLE STEP LOWER RATING WITHIN A GRADE.** (For example, a level 5 story would score only 94 if it was seriously flawed in only English grammar, spelling, and usage). Perhaps your friendly neighborhood English teacher would have time to review your work before submission.

**Characters:** The main characters are **fully developed** with much descriptive detail. The reader has a **vivid** image of the characters. This is the part that goes wrong in most adolescent stories. Spend some time on your character. Develop his or her personality, history, likes and dislikes, problems and successes. All writers struggle with character development.

**Ideas and Content:** The work should bring the time & place character lived alive; vividly describes her/his experiences and values; refers to relevant, historically accurate details.

**Organization:** Work has a strong lead, a developed middle, and a satisfying ending, all in an order that makes sense, flows, and hangs together.



# Historical Fiction Writing

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

|   |  |     |
|---|--|-----|
| 5 | <p><b>Dramatic tension:</b> Possesses a <b>strong</b> dramatic tension that keeps reader interested -- grounded in a significant problem that needs to be addressed and gets reader involved.</p> <p><b>Clarity:</b> Work has a clarity that leaves <b>no</b> surface questions (i.e. "What happened in this part?") in reader's mind.</p> <p><b>Conventions of English:</b> Contains <b>almost</b> no errors in grammar, usage, or mechanics (unless used for artistic purposes). <b>HAVING MANY ERRORS IN ENGLISH WILL RESULT IN A WHOLE STEP LOWER RATING WITHIN A GRADE.</b> (For example, a level 5 story would score only 94 if it was seriously flawed in only English grammar, spelling, and usage).</p> <p><b>Characters:</b> The main characters are <b>fully developed</b> with much descriptive detail. The reader has a <b>vivid</b> image of the characters.</p> <p><b>Ideas and Content:</b> Work brings the time &amp; place character lived alive; vividly describes her/his experiences and values; refers to relevant, historically accurate details.</p> <p><b>Organization:</b> Work has a strong lead, a developed middle, and a satisfying ending, all in an order that makes sense, flows, and hangs together.</p> | 100 |
| 4 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The work possesses some dramatic tension and attempts to keep the reader interested. The problem to be addressed is clear to the reader.</li> <li>The work is clear, but needed more editing.</li> <li>The characters are developed, but may seem somewhat two-dimensional or stereotypical.</li> <li>There is a strong sense of history in the work, but the characters actions in this world seem only marginally involved.</li> <li>Works in this category may read more like an essay, designed to convey information, than a story, designed to help the reader experience something.</li> <li>The organization, word choice, and conventions of English conform to a level 5 evaluation.</li> </ul>   | 94  |
| 3 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The work possesses some dramatic tension and attempts to keep the reader interested. The problem to be addressed is clear to the reader.</li> <li>The work is clear, but needed more editing.</li> <li>The characters are developed, but may seem somewhat two-dimensional or stereotypical.</li> <li>There is a strong sense of history in the work, but the characters actions in this world seem only marginally involved.</li> <li>Works in this category may read more like an essay, designed to convey information, than a story, designed to help the reader experience something.</li> <li>The organization, word choice, and conventions of English conform to a level 5 evaluation.</li> </ul>   | 85  |
| 2 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The work is a good story outline, but is far too short for what the author seems to be trying to accomplish.</li> <li>There is a definite beginning, middle, and end, but some elements do not fit well.</li> <li>Inclusion of historical elements seems "forced" or "contrived". There may be some anachronisms.</li> <li>Characters are not developed. They exist, perhaps in name only, but we don't know enough about them to understand their motivations and place in time.</li> <li>There is very little descriptive writing.</li> <li>There may be serious problems with English language writing conventions.</li> </ul>   | 78  |
| 1 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The work is a good story outline, but is far too short for what the author seems to be trying to accomplish.</li> <li>There is a definite beginning, middle, and end, but some elements do not fit well.</li> <li>Inclusion of historical elements seems "forced" or "contrived". There may be some anachronisms.</li> <li>Characters are not developed. They exist, perhaps in name only, but we don't know enough about them to understand their motivations and place in time.</li> <li>There is very little descriptive writing.</li> <li>There may be serious problems with English language writing conventions.</li> </ul>   | 71  |
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| 2 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The work has a beginning, middle, and end.</li> <li>The work is very short, possible only 10-20 lines long.</li> <li>There is no character development, no dramatic tension or "hook" to interest the reader, and little historical setting or data.</li> <li>Only a limited vocabulary is used. There is no description and no effort to use higher level vocabulary.</li> </ul>   | 58  |
| 1 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Possesses a <b>no</b> dramatic tension that keeps reader interested</li> <li>Work <b>lacks</b> a clarity and leaves <b>many</b> surface questions (i.e. "What happened in this part?") in reader's mind.</li> <li>Contains <b>possibly many</b> no errors in grammar, usage, or mechanics</li> <li>The main characters are <b>undeveloped</b>.</li> <li>Work does <b>not</b> bring the time &amp; place character lived alive; <b>nor</b> vividly describes her/his experiences and values; refers to <b>very limited</b> relevant, historically accurate details.</li> <li>Work's organization may make it hard to follow.</li> <li>This may be only a summary of historical event, not really a work of fiction.</li> </ul>   | 0   |