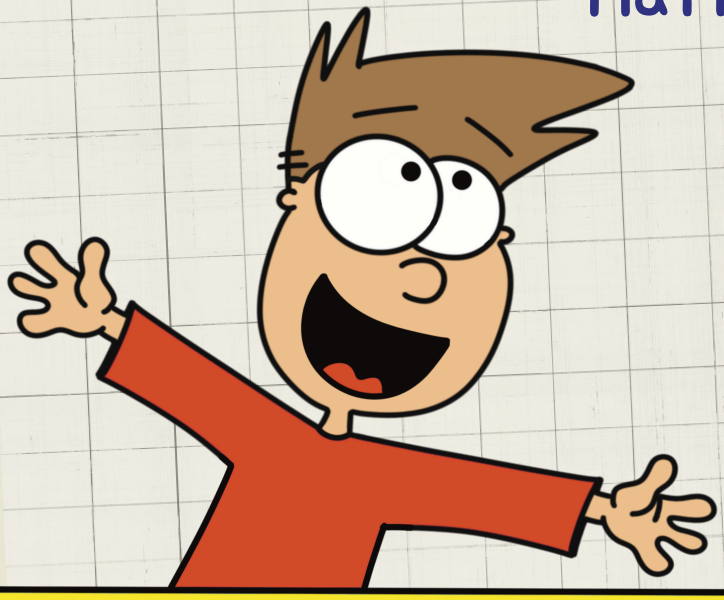
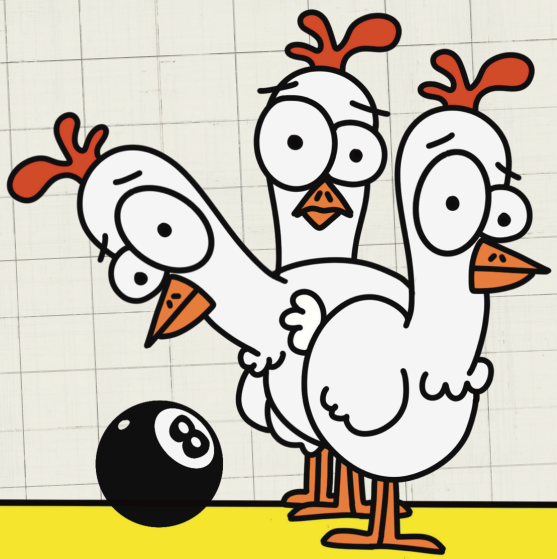


SHORT STORY

FOCUSED WRITING

From New York Times Bestselling author
Matt Eicheldinger





CHARACTER

- Add a line that shows how your character feels without saying the feeling.
- Pause your story to describe what your character is wearing and why it matters.
- Give your character a habit or quirk (e.g., tapping their pencil, biting their nails).
- Describe your character's facial expression during a key moment.
- Show your character making a mistake—and how they react to it.
- Add a moment where your character lies (even if it's just a little white lie).
- Let your character have a strong opinion about something.
- Make your character want something, even if it's small.

SETTING

- Pause the action to describe where your character is. Use all five senses.
- Add one unusual or unexpected detail about the setting.
- Change the weather to reflect the mood of your story.
- Show how the setting creates a problem or challenge for the character.
- Describe how the setting has changed from the beginning of the story.
- Create a scene in a place your character has never been before.
- Make the setting feel alive—like it's part of the story.
- Add a sound or smell that triggers a memory.
- Describe the setting from two different points of view.
- Zoom in on one small object in the setting and describe it closely.

PLOT / PACING

- Add a small conflict that makes things worse before they get better.
- Cut one unnecessary paragraph and tighten the pacing.
- Think about the middle—does it slow down too much? Add tension!
- Add a twist that your character didn't expect.
- Let your character fail at something before they succeed.
- Add a ticking clock—something that must be done before time runs out.
- Start a scene in the middle of an argument or problem.
- Create a "fake-out" moment that surprises the reader.
- Add a flashback that reveals something important.
- Make something your character planned go wrong.

DIALOGUE

- Add a short conversation that reveals how two characters feel about each other.
- Use body language or actions during a conversation (not just talking heads).
- Have a character interrupt another while speaking.
- Let one character say something they don't mean—and hint at it in the narration.
- Write a conversation where something important is left unsaid.
- Make one character say something that shocks the other.
- Add a line that shows tension without shouting or yelling.
- Let a character talk too much when they're nervous.
- Use sarcasm or exaggeration in a line of dialogue.
- Add a disagreement that feels real—not just dramatic.
- Include a secret being whispered, overheard, or misunderstood.
- Show how someone's tone can completely change the meaning of a line.
- Write a single line of dialogue that completely changes the direction of the story.

INNER THOUGHTS

- Add a sentence showing what your character is thinking but not saying.
- Find a place where your character should have some internal dialogue.
- Let your character change their mind about something.
- Include a moment where the character reflects on a memory.
- Add a line where your character doubts themselves.
- Show your character mentally preparing for something scary or hard.
- Write the moment your character realizes they were wrong.
- Let your character imagine the worst-case scenario.
- Add a funny or sarcastic thought your character has.
- Include a wish or hope your character never says out loud.
- Show a quiet thought that's more powerful than any action.
- Let your character regret something they said or did.
- Write a moment where the character's thoughts clash with their actions.

EMOTION / TONE

- Describe an emotional moment without using the emotion's name (e.g., "sad").
- Use a metaphor or simile to show how your character feels.
- Let the reader feel your character's stress or excitement physically (sweaty hands, racing heart).
- Add a sentence with a strong tone (funny, sarcastic, tense, etc.).
- Use a moment of silence in your story—what does it mean?
- Let a character smile while feeling completely different inside.
- Add a moment where emotions boil over (crying, yelling, freezing up).
- Use contrast—describe something happy in a sad moment or vice versa.
- Show how one emotion turns into another (e.g., fear to relief).
- Add a moment where the character hides how they really feel.
- Create a scene where the tone changes suddenly.
- Describe a setting or object in a way that shows emotion.
- Let your story slow down for one beat of deep feeling.

DETAILS / WORD CHOICE

- Replace three boring verbs with more vivid ones.
- Replace the word “said” with descriptive words
- Add a small object that represents something bigger (a symbol).
- Make your opening sentence more interesting—start with a sound, action, or question.
- Replace a chunk of exposition with a detail that shows instead of tells.
- Write one sentence that’s meant to stick in the reader’s mind.
- Use repetition of a word or phrase for emphasis.
- Add one sentence that uses alliteration or interesting rhythm.
- Cut one wordy sentence and rewrite it to be punchier.
- Describe something strangely—use a comparison the reader won’t expect.
- Highlight an object or detail that shows up again later.
- Include a sound or smell to bring a scene to life.
- Pick one overused word in your story and replace it with something better.
- End a paragraph with a powerful or surprising word.

Be sure to check out some of
Matt Eicheldinger's popular and bestselling books!
Purchase wherever books are sold!

For author visit information, see 'Appearances'
tab at www.matteicheldinger.com

socials @matteicheldinger

