

A Short Introduction

WHAT'S USUALLY UNDER 1,500 WORDS, feels like a short story, and is read all over?

Flash fiction.

Several decades ago, flash fiction pieces were known as short-shorts, sometimes confused with an item of clothing that came to mid-thigh or higher. More recently, flash fiction, once used to label anything even briefer than a short-short, has become the catchall term for any minuscule narrative. The results can be provocative, amusing, hard-hitting, or enigmatic. Does size matter? Paradoxically, leaving out material can make a piece of fiction feel more expansive. Good flash fiction often relies on the art of implication rather than statement, depending on suggestions that lead to a large, unspoken whole. This idea is what Robert Browning alludes to in his poem on the Renaissance painter Andrea del Sarto when he writes “less is more.” Flash fiction may also be compressed, and with pressure comes intensity, another reason that flash fiction has won so many fans. As one reader described it, “It’s like someone’s telling me an urgent message, and I’d better listen.” A good piece of flash fiction doesn’t just exist; it happens. It has, in the words of one fiction-workshop participant, “the immediacy of a newsfeed.”