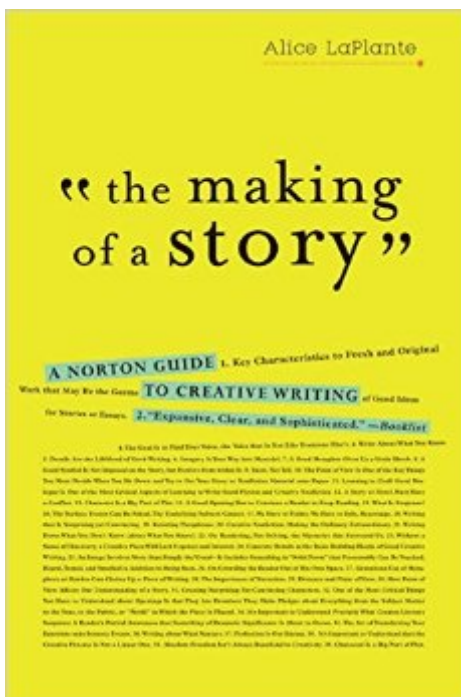


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# The Making Of A Story: A Norton Guide To Creative Writing



## Synopsis

A Los Angeles Times bestseller: wonderfully lucid and illuminating, Alice LaPlante's guide to writing fiction recalls Francine Prose's bestseller, *Reading Like a Writer* (Library Journal). *The Making of a Story* is a fresh and inspiring guide to the basics of creative writing—both fiction and creative nonfiction. Its hands-on, completely accessible approach walks writers through each stage of the creative process, from the initial triggering idea to the revision of the final manuscript. It is unique in combining the three main aspects of creative writing instruction: process (finding inspiration, getting ideas on the page), craft (specific techniques like characterization), and anthology (learning by reading masters of the form). Succinct, clear definitions of basic terms of fiction are accompanied by examples, including excerpts from masterpieces of short fiction and essays as well as contemporary novels. A special highlight is Alice LaPlante's systematic debunking of many of the so-called rules of creative writing. This book is perfect for writers working alone as well as for creative writing classes, both introductory and advanced.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Alice LaPlante's "The Making of a Story" is textbook-length (well over six hundred pages), and should appeal not only to serious writing students, but also to teachers and readers who would like more insight into how writers create. Creative writing is not for the faint-hearted; that is clear from the outset. It is easy to feel overwhelmed when staring at a blank page or screen, trying to come with original ideas and fresh ways to express them. LaPlante gently and slowly guides her readers

through the entire process from getting off the ground to putting the finishing touches on the final draft. LaPlante's scope is encyclopedic. She includes such topics as: making the ordinary extraordinary, employing imagery effectively, writing a good opening, developing plot and characters, choosing a point of view, writing believable dialogue, generating suspense, and revising one's work. She also discusses the strengths and limitations of writing workshops. The author emphasizes that there are no hard and fast rules; rather, she is passing on "conventions" that have worked for many but not all writers. How does this work differ from others of its type? "The Making of a Story" covers more territory than most writing handbooks. Part of the book's length results from the inclusion of quite a few full-length classic stories, such as Tim O'Brien's "The Things They Carried," John Cheever's "The Swimmer," James Baldwin's "Sonny's Blues," and a non-fiction piece, Barbara Ehrenreich's "Welcome to Cancerland." Each work is followed by thought questions such as "How do the opening paragraphs set the tone for the story?" and "Can you point to some sections of narration that are convincing because of their specificity?" There are also dozens of exercises sprinkled throughout the book.

I've been trying to get a handle on stories for years. Eight years. In that time I've read lots of writing guides: guides on fiction-writing, novel-writing, screenwriting, and myth structure. In my opinion, Alice LaPlante's "The Making of a Story" is the BEST BEST BEST. I'll be keeping it on the bookshelf near my desk, and it will be the first place I go to for guidance, reminders, examples, and encouragement. Before I get into the unique strengths of the book, here's a brief, incomplete description of its contents. It offers thorough discussions of the foundational elements of written stories: point of view, dialogue, characterization, scene vs. narrative, specificity, etc. You'll also find fantastic sections on the aspects of storytelling that are harder to define and exemplify. For example, the chapter titled "What's This Creative Work Really About?" discusses the idea of "truth" in fiction. The chapter entitled "The Shapely Story" provides the best answer I've ever seen to the question, "What is a story?" The book also contains excellent writing exercises. I find that some other books suggest rather prescriptive writing exercises, about a specific situation or set of characters. I love LaPlante's exercises because although they set you to the task of focusing on a specific point of craft, in terms of subject matter they are generally quite open-ended, so that the exercise is not just an exercise, but also potentially a journey into your own particular subject matter du jour. Finally, the book contains the entire text of many well-known stories and essays which give the reader/writer an idea of what's possible, what's been done, and what to shoot for.

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