

03. Key Features of Prose Fiction: Setting

Please note the differences between the types of prose fiction, which are all governed by length:

Novels: Multi-chapter narratives without any specific length requirements or restrictions.

Novellas: Multi-chapter narratives which are shorter than novels, typically averaging between 100 and 150 pages.

Short Stories: Very short narratives, typically not longer than one or two chapters.

Flash Fiction: Extremely short works of fiction that average around 100 words.

N.B.! As per your course requirements for this module, you will not be expected to analyse anything more than an extract from a novel, novella or short story.

N.N.B.!! Remember to focus your analyses on the passages presented to you **only!** Even if you are familiar with the novel the passage comes from, make sure that your work focuses only on the information in the passage, as that is what you are being tested on.

N.N.N.B.!!! **Setting** should be **discussed briefly** in your analysis, at best, as it largely provides **clues to theme**. However, you do need to be careful here, **as recurring elements** in the setting are often a “**motif**”, which is a technique that can be used to **reinforce a theme**. In short, while **setting** is **not crucial**, it is often **more important** than **plot**.

Setting:

Definition: The time and place (location and/or society) where the story occurs.

Often the context of a story is important in an analysis. The setting of a story helps to provide us with context.

Time:

When a story is set can obviously be very important, as societies tended to be very different historically to how they are today, in terms of both technology and outlook.

Sometimes texts are fragmented and jump between time periods which can span moments or centuries.

Time can be used to alter the way the reader perceives a story and can affect themes and plot development significantly. For example, **flashbacks** can be used to create exposition at any point in a narrative, by taking the reader back to the protagonist’s past, in order to highlight important moments of character development.

Location:

Within longer texts (Novels and Novellas) multiple locations can, and often are, used to help create a sense of “movement” in the narrative. Obviously, these locations are all relevant to the plot and the characters, but they can also be used to tell the reader something about the themes of a story.

Within shorter texts (Short Stories and Flash Fiction) often there is only a single setting used in the narrative. As the action normally occurs in a short space of time in the story, a single location is normally a sufficient backdrop for the action and it pays for these stories to be as contextually simple as possible, given their rather limited length.

How the author uses the setting will influence the understanding of a text quite a lot:

For example, a narrative which is set on a space station in the year 3004 would immediately be placed within the genre of science fiction, while a novel set within a world with unicorns and winged individuals would be considered fantasy.

Placing a text within a particular sub-genre (like science fiction or fantasy) will create certain expectations of how the text will develop.