

Tactics For the Short Story




The Opening Line






Hunter S. Thompson: Fear and Loathing In Las Vegas (1971)

We were somewhere around Barstow on the edge of the desert when the drugs began to take hold. I remember saying something like, "I feel a bit lightheaded; maybe you should drive..."





Newton Thornburg: Cutter and Bone (1976)

It wasn't the first time Richard Bone had shaved with a ladies razor, and he was sure it wouldn't be his last.





George Orwell: 1984 (1949)

It was a bright cold day in April, and
the clocks were striking thirteen.



Toni Morrison: Paradise (1998)

They shoot the white girl first.





Iain M. Banks: The Crow Road
(1992)

It was the day my grandmother
exploded.





Bill Fleck, “It’s Complicated”
(sample)

I was halfway through a blunt
when I decided to pop a cap in
my ex.



Dialogue



Bad (too much extraneous info):

Mary Ann picked up the phone. It was Doris.

"Hi, Mary Ann."

"Hi, Doris. I'm doing my math homework."

"I hate math."

"Me, too."

"Let's throw the teacher out of the window."

"He's too fat."

"Yeah, I know. His head would get stuck."

"I just don't get that class."

"Yeah. Who needs it?"

"Not me."

"For sure."

"Oh, by the way, I'm pregnant."

"Oh, my God! Does John know?"

"It isn't his."

"Oh my God!"



Better (gets right to the point):

Mary Ann picked up the phone. It was Doris. The two chatted about school a little, then Doris dropped the bomb:


"I'm pregnant."

"Oh my God," Mary Ann said. "Does John know?"

Doris paused. "It isn't his."

"Oh my God...."





That's good advice for short stories in general anyway: get to the point.

For Sale: Baby shoes. Never used.



--Short story written by Ernest Hemingway on a cocktail napkin to win a bet.

Okay, edit away...

