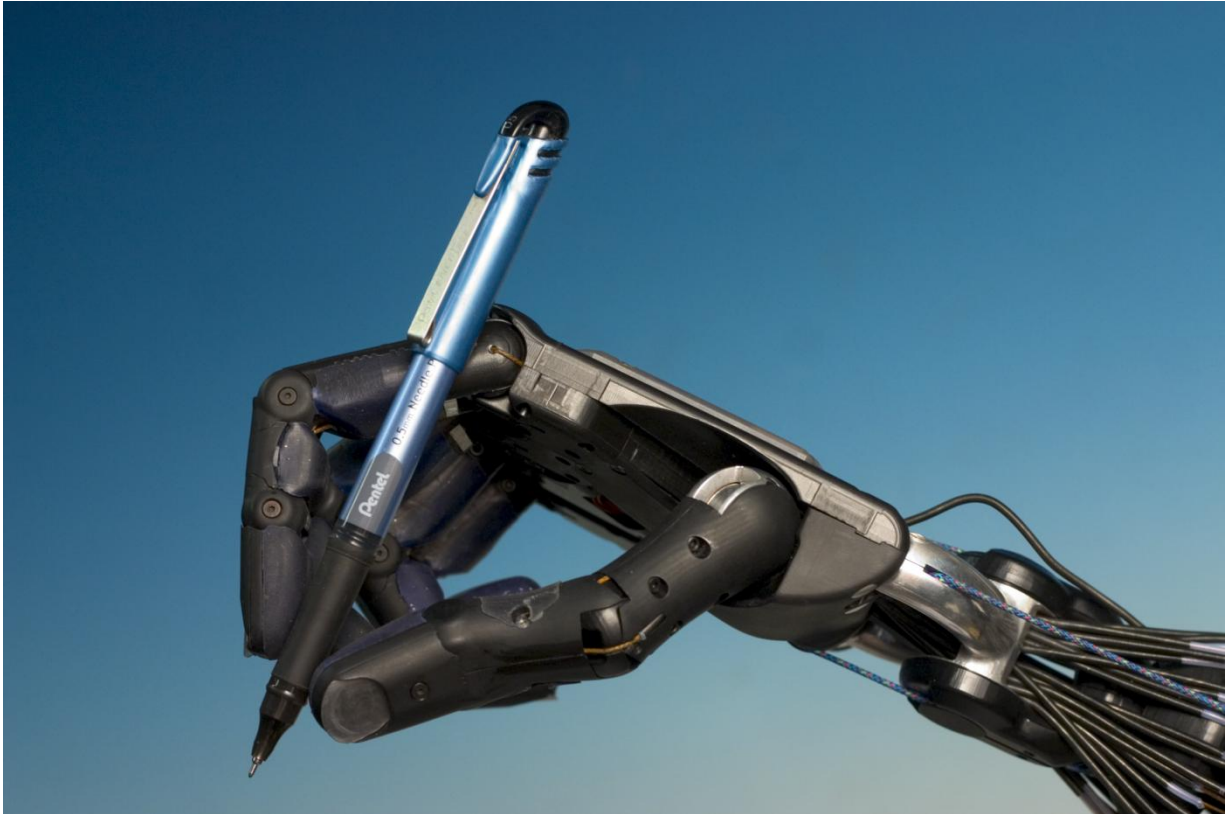


# How do I write an Evoverse story?

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*Hints, advice and guidance for writing FanFic*



COMPILED BY DAVEK

I've fancied writing some short stories for Evochron ever since I read the stories posted by Bossk, Schmulky, Nigel\_Strange and others. Their stories added depth to the Evoverse and helped greatly to increase the feeling of immersion in the game.

I compiled this guide to help me with my first faltering steps at writing FanFic. My two main problems are firstly thinking up a plotline and secondly not knowing how to write it as an interesting story - both pretty important issues for an aspiring author I'm sure you can agree. I bought a couple of books of scifi story "seeds" for inspiration.

I've made a couple of attempts at writing but neither is typical FanFic. Great fun to create though so I became keener to write some proper stories. My first attempt at a proper story was a small snapshot of an action from the History of Evochron. Not easy!

Then **Kikoni** posted the first part of his Writing Tips (included here) and got me enthused again. I Googled "writing tips" for "FanFic" and for "scifi" - there is so much of it that you could spend most of your free time reading it rather than writing!

There is one site that can't be recommended too highly - several hundred tips, each explained with examples and concise explanations. This is a must see!

<http://www.waynesthisandthat.com/writefanfic.htm>

Spend time browsing and then return to it for specifics. The hints sections on the site include formatting, writing (general and specific), punctuation, character, comic relief, emotions, common actions, different sounds, an activity-level ordered thesaurus(!), beats, a reading list and a bibliography. However it is a (long) series of short snippets and there are some fundamental rules that are the core to good writing so . . . .

Some advice and rules appear again and again on site after site. There is scifi specific advice, for example how to create alien characters. There are thousands of pages on the minutiae of punctuation, layout (when to add a blank line etc) and grammar. So I've extracted the main stuff and the specific stuff and changed it to be more Evoverse specific and set it out in (what I think are) logical and coherent sections. I've left out the thousands of pages on the minutiae of grammar and layout. This is intended to be a basic primer - easy to access and at only 25 pages not too expensive to print a hardcopy of.

On the big assumption that anybody will read it at all, I'm suspect that different people will read sections in different orders and have made them a self sufficient as possible. A few pieces of advice are so important that I've included them more than once - so that you are likely to see them wherever you start or dip in- and they aren't what you might expect them to be!



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## Who should I be writing for? - this may surprise you!

**It's okay to let people read your fan-fiction, even if you think it's bad.** Everyone else might think it's good, and any constructive criticism they give can help you with your writing.

**Enjoy yourself.** If you can't look forward to writing your story, then you shouldn't force yourself to write something you no longer like just to finish it. But it's always okay to feel a bit depressed about your story for a bit.

**Never give up.** Unless for some reason you no longer have interest in the subject you are writing about, or if you have been too busy, if you give up on your fan-fiction, you will be left with half of a good story, and if you decide to go back to it, say, a year later, your writing style probably would have changed somewhat, and you would have to rewrite your whole story if you wanted the style to be consistent.

**Do what you're good at,** it's a big universe. If you can't write action sequences, try interstellar political intrigue

**Don't get stressed out** when you have readers hounding your virtual door, demanding for updates. Remember, this is your story. Rome was not built in a day, and neither will your story happen in a week. Take the time you need, breathe, let it stew for a little, and go back to it with fresh eyes. Trust me, fresh eyes makes a hell of a difference when you're stuck on writer's block.

**Keep an open mind.** This is your story. You get to choose what happens. You're only borrowing the characters. Imagination is important.

**Above all, it's *your* story!**

**Don't let the fans predict or try to channel you into a way to write your story!** You had a thought in your head, so let it flow! Have fun with it! Enjoy it!

***Write for you!***

**Don't write for the fans/readers,** or you will lose sight of your original idea and there will be fans who don't like what you do. The readers are just *privileged* to see what's going on. That's it! Yes, reviews are nice, but you can't please everyone and their mother. So honestly forget them, especially those that flame, they're just idiots without manners.

**And most importantly, have fun with it!** If you're writing a story, and you're not having fun, then there is something wrong! If you can't entertain yourself, how can you possibly entertain other people with it?

## People hate my work - what can I do?

**Ignore people who are rude or mean.** Some of your audiences may decide to call you a "poser" or "nerdy" or trash your work completely. Take this all in graciously. What don't they like? Are they the only one who doesn't like it? Keep this in mind. Don't get discouraged! However, listen to logical criticisms.

**Not everybody is going to like your fan-fiction story.** Some people might hate it, but others will love it! You have to accept that people aren't always going to like what you do

**Don't take negative feedback as an insult.** Figure out what you're doing wrong and improve your writing, but keep in mind that not everyone will like your fan fiction, no matter how good it is.

**Don't change your writing for the critics who know nothing about writing.**

Yes. Write the way you write, the way the material and your own processes demand. Be who you are.

**Read the section immediately above!**

## I must be getting better - I've got Writers' Block!

When you get writer's block, don't give up on the story. Give it some time. If you give up, you'll regret it later.

If you ever freeze up and can't think of a single word to write you're suffering from writer's block. How you attack it depends on how you view yourself as a writer. If you write for just for the fun of it, the simplest solution do is stop. Put the story away for a day, or a year, until you want to write and new ideas start coming.

The best way to beat writer's block is to prevent it. Stop writing each day in the middle of a sentence. This accomplishes three things: it provides a leg up on the next day's work, it encourages new ideas as you think about how to finish the sentence, and it drives you crazy because you left something undone. The last point is the most effective. By the time you begin your next writing session your skin will be crawling with eagerness to finish that sentence.

If writer's block hits anyway, try writing something else for awhile. A variation on this is to write one-thousand made-up words or gibberish. Your subconscious will decide writing something real is preferable to such a tiresome task. Try writing something you'd never imagine like profanity or a sexually explicit scene. Shock treatments like this are effective but don't let copies of it get loose or you'll get talked about. If you can't face this, try writing something boring like a detailed description of changing a flat tire. Some other ideas are: write a detailed description of your last dream, the last time something angered you, or the revenge you'd like to inflict on the cause of that anger. Lastly, go someplace new or do something you've never done before. Exposing your subconscious to new experiences shocks it into being creative.

## Some "Laws" of writing a story

<http://io9.com/366707/8-unstoppable-rules-for-writing-killer-short-stories>

This summarises the basics very well; it has been edited to make it more relevant to FanFic and the Evoverse and a few "laws" from other sites have been added

### **Short stories have a limited number of words and that dictates how they should be written.**

In a novel, the author can take the time to develop plot, characters, background, and story. With short stories, space is limited. The author has to get the story rolling and can't take the time for scenic detours. So . . .

**World-building should be quick and merciless.** In a novel, you can spend ten pages explaining how the 29th Galactic Congress established a Peacekeeping Force to regulate the use of interstitial jumpgates, and this Peacekeeping Force evolved over the course of a century to include A.I.s in its command structure, etc. etc.

**In a short FanFic story, you really need to hang your scenery as fast as possible** - after all most of your readers know where they are; the really big plus about writing Evoverse FanFic is that Vice has already made up your world for you, along with its technology and basic history.

*If you are intending to write a series of stories based around an individual or a crew, then you can introduce background (the ships, the crew, the sort of people you are (bounty hunters, military, mercs etc), but bit at a time, when relevant and over several stories*

**Make us believe there's a world beyond your characters' surroundings.** Even though you can't spend tons of time on world-building, you have to include enough little touches to make us believe there's stuff we're not seeing. It's like the difference between the fake house-fronts in a cowboy movie and actual houses. We should glimpse little bits of your universe, that don't necessarily relate to your characters' obsessions. Trade stations are the homes of thousands of everyday people. Navy capital ships have crews of thousands! The Vonari are a race - they have lives and families and aims and aspirations and scaly skin!!

**Make your characters human. But not the Vonari!** Just like with world building, you can't necessarily devote pages to your characters' childhoods and what kind of underwear they wear under their boiler suits. But do try to spend a bit of time giving all of your characters some baggage, just enough to make them interesting. Most science fiction readers are interested in characters who solve problems and think positively, but that doesn't mean they can't have some damage.

**Dive right in — but don't sign-post your plot in big letters.** In today's fast-moving world, the first sentence of your short story should catch your reader's attention with the **unusual**, the **unexpected**, an **action**, or a **conflict**. Begin with tension and immediacy. The best short stories are ones which start in the thick of things, but still keep you guessing and let you get to know the characters before you fully comprehend the trouble they're in.

**Don't confuse your gimmick with your plot.** You may have a great idea for a piece of recovered Vonari technology. Maybe you have the most original basic premise ever — but that's **not** your plot. Your plot is how your new widget changes the people in your story, and how it affects their lives. Or what decisions your people make as a result of this new technological breakthrough.

**Don't fall into the character-based/plot-based dichotomy.** People, will try to categorize stories as based on either plot or character. This is a poisonous idea that will turn you into a cannibalistic freak wearing a belt made out of human spinal cords. There's no such thing as a character-based story or a plot-based story, because every story has both. Even the most incident-free Ploughshares romp or the most twisty thumpy space opera tale. If you start thinking that stories can be categorized into either pile, you'll end up writing either eventless character studies or plot-hammer symphonies starring one-dimensional nothings.

## OK, so how do I get started? - Steps in planning your story

**Think about what kind of story you want to write.** You might address issues of technology and its implications for society. Other stories use fantastic worlds (think uncharted systems) as a way to explore complex social issues. Other Sci-Fi stories have a horror emphasis, while others deal with militaristic action and space battles.

We've got access to four factions (Federation, Alliance, Rebels and Vonari). That means we've probably got lots of possible conflicts. Get into it. We've got lots of Clans. Clan wars don't happen often in the game but clans were set up in the game to justify group combat and campaigns! Write about them - you may even inspire people to go to war!!

The Vonari are a boo-hiss enemy - not much FanFic uses them on a grander scale - it's open territory!

**Sketch out the bare bones of your story.** Use the following questions to get you started:

What is your plot about?

What is your ending?

Who is your protagonist?

What does he want?

What happens to him?

What does his world look like?

What background information does the reader need to know for this story to make sense?

About how long should this story be?

Make some notes about what you want to write.

**Outlining or mapping the story can help clarify plot details and better organize the story.** This can help if you are having writer's block or are stuck at a plot point. If there are multiple actions taking place it helps to keep them synchronised

Write one liner Keystones under events. Start with the beginning, the end, and a few pieces of the stuff in the middle you want to mix in between. Then, refine it through revision after revision, altering and deleting Ideas/events as you keep on giving it a fresh look. Then, once you're finally satisfied with a good enough plotline to work with, start writing while using said "Timeline" as a guide only.

**Keep the number of characters to a minimum.** Too many characters will make the story too complex and the readers won't be able to tell them apart. If your ship has a big crew ie more than three, then introduce them over time, not all at once

*Three that belong together . . .*

**Succinctly described setting and make every word of the story count.** Don't add details to fluff up the story. Keep it simple and eliminate anything slowing down the story.

**Description should be limited in a short story.** You will start losing the audience's attention if you go into lengthy descriptions. This goes for character descriptions as well.

**Leave out the passages that readers love to skip. (Those would be the ones you worked hardest on).** Reader's have an in-born human ability to take a few details (picking the right details is your job!) and turn them into a complete picture. The more the reader puts in the greater the identification with the story.

**Focus on one or two ideas in a short story.** More than a couple of plot conflicts can make the story too muddled and confusing. Multi-story arcs need very careful planning. After the first introduction, future stories can be dedicated to moving the story arc forwards.

**Use one point of view throughout the story.** If you start off inside the character's head, stay there. The same is true if you use third-person point of view. Avoid speaking from multiple characters' points of view in short stories.

**Pick a tense** (typically past or present) and stick with it through the whole story.

**Have a strong Beginning and End for your plotline before you start writing**

**Hook the reader right from the start.** If you don't do that, the reader will just flip to something else. A strong beginning in a short story will make the readers want to know more.

**Don't start at the very beginning in a short story.** Get straight into the action. Background and pages of build up aren't necessary.

**End the story in a way that readers will remember.** It doesn't have to be a neatly-tied up happily ever after. But the readers should know what the point of the story was or they will be dissatisfied.

**Know what the point of the story is and direct the story to it by the end.** When the reader knows what the point is, that should be the conclusion.

**Establish the setting and the characters, and then move on to the problem.** The plot is what the readers will care about most.

**Dialogue and action will drive the story forward.** They will also keep the reader involved in what is going on.

**Trust the readers** to pick up on what's going on without unnecessary flourishes. Grab the readers' attention, get them to the point, and then finish it up.

*If your ambition is to write a linked series of short stories, say about the ongoing adventures of your ship and its crew you can afford more characters but don't put too much background about too many of them into your first (few) stories - if your first adventure is mainly a series of life histories, few will come back to read your second story!! **Firefly** left the background episode until later in the series when it used a series of flashbacks as Mel was slowly suffocating in **Serenity***



## How can I create believable human characters?

<http://www.waynesthisandthat.com/writefanfic.htm>

Your characters are as important to your story as your plotline. Nothing will put your readers off than 2D, cliched shallow characters.

I started collating and blending advice from lots of sites, but this site really does do it all. However it is set out in a series of points (almost 200!) so I've extracted some, grouped them and added relevant advice from other sites

### Five steps to create a character:

1. Decide the character's purpose.
2. Determine what main characteristics he needs to accomplish this purpose.
3. Add personal and external conflicts for depth.
4. Add attitudes and values.
5. Make up specific details to flesh out the character (write a biography).

**Write biographies.** Each character in your story needs a biography that defines who they are. Identify critical events in their lives and how these affected them. Define their ethnic, cultural, socio-economic status, and attitudes. Give them friends and prize possessions. Main characters should have biographies at least a thousand words long. Minor characters only need a couple of lines. Make up ten times more information than you'll use in the book. This makes your characters come alive in your mind and provides insights as to how they'll act in specific situations.

*DaveK: If this seems like really hard work, just remember that if **you** don't know your characters, your readers won't have a chance. If your characters are going to reappear in further stories the investment is well worth while. Don't fight for 1000 words - just get a good description down that will help you make your characters behave and respond consistently*

Remember that characters consist of three parts: **physical, psychological and sociological**. All of these effect each other. A character's antisocial behaviour may be the result of some physical flaw.

### Should I avoid "unsympathetic" hero characters?

It's certainly true that if you're going to have a main character who's a total bastard, you're going to have work harder to win over the reader - a likable character is just obviously easier for readers to get on board with. But at the same time, feeling constrained to make your protagonist - or all your major characters - as sympathetic as possible can put a straitjacket on your writing.

If you're stuck trying to create characters who will seem sympathetic to all your readers, no matter what cultural context or attitudes they bring to the story. And you're putting severe limits on what sort of actions your characters can take. The bottom line is that "sympathetic" isn't the same thing as "compelling" - a character can be unsympathetic but utterly fascinating and spellbinding. This is all in the execution - if you're going to go with a protagonist who's fundamentally unsympathetic or unrelatable to, you're going to have to do an amazing job of making the reader care about him or her in spite of everything. But it can be done!

Travis Bickle from **Taxi Driver** - Alex in **A Clockwork Orange** - Quasimodo - Tony Soprano - Riddick in **Pitch Black** - Macbeth - William Shakespeare

**Remember that a key element is character development**, even for the bad guys. It's easy to have people see the good guy and they grow and mature, but the bad guys, antagonist, need to evolve as well. What fun is the bad guy if he doesn't meet the challenges of the protagonists? Also, make your characters flawed. Humans have so many less than perfect traits, your readers will be able to associate with them better if they see the characters as less than perfect. When the time comes for your protagonist to have a 'choose certain one or two' and he chooses the wrong one, make it hurt. Make them bleed. Have them suffer a consequence because of their decision.

**Review Biographies Regularly.** Constant review of each character's biography keeps the details of their lives fresh in your mind. This enables you to write their actions and conversations spontaneously. *It also lets the biography grow with the characters adventures and experiences*

**Give Each Character His Own Voice.** You should be able hear a difference in the way each character talks. Techniques used to create unique voices are: have one character use a lot of contractions while another uses few; one talks in short, simple sentences and the other speaks in long, complex sentences; one character likes short words whereas the second prefers long ones.

*DaveK: Don't under any circumstances try to use "heavy accents" - they are very difficult to write in a way that is easy to read and get in the way of the flow of the story. Tell the reader what the accent is. The colonists still retained the strong Texan drawl that their forefathers had. Throw in a few regional phrases or words once in a while. That is more than enough to get the point across, but not so much that your reader will put the book down in frustration. Let the reader imagine the whole dialogue as accented.*

**Possessions Help Define Characters.** A person's ship, clothes, station accommodation, and friends define him. A well shined galley with the latest replicators and coffee gear implies a successful, fastidious personality. An old, rusted ship with scorch marks and pits inspires images of a slob or someone trapped in poverty. Mentioning a character's possessions enables you to describe him without explicitly stating what the reader can see for himself.

**Present Characters Slowly.** In the real world we get to know people slowly, bit by bit. Introduce characters the same way. Let the reader discover the character as your story unfolds. One effective way to disclose something about a character is have people talk about him before he makes his first appearance. This creates anticipation.

**Don't Use Stereotypes.** Stereotypes (the tough semi-legal mercenary with a soft spot for the underdog) and anti-stereotypes (a combat jockey who knits) are too predictable to be interesting characters. Another stereotype common to pulp science fiction is the bright young thing blasting into space.

**Give Heroes Faults And Villains Virtues.** It's hard for readers to identify with a perfect person so give your hero a forgivable or lovable fault. The flip side is also true. A villain is more believable if he has an endearing quality. This allows the reader to feel both satisfaction and sympathy when the villain is vanquished. One exception to this is the purely evil entity used in some horror stories.

**Make Villains Strong.** Villains must be powerful, implacable, and complex or they won't be sufficiently threatening to create suspense.

**Avoid Passive Main Characters.** Readers want to identify with strong personalities so your main characters need to be forceful enough to make things happen, not just react to events around them. They should reach decisions and express them in a few, short words. Good characters are alive with great passions and strong emotions and they act on these feelings.

**Avoid Selfish And Altruistic Heroes.** Heroes shouldn't act totally on their own behalves, unless they're the only ones threatened. It makes them look self-centred. They shouldn't act purely altruistically either. That makes him seem too good to be true. Both cases create characters the reader will not take to heart. Combining some of each of these characteristics will make your hero seem more real.

**Volunteer Or Draft Heroes.** If a character's going to do something brave that costs him significantly, have him volunteer so he appears noble. If he's going to profit from his actions have him be drafted or trapped into it to avoid making him appear self-serving.

**Use As Few Characters As Possible.** One of the hardest things readers have to do is to keep track of a story's characters. Use too many any you'll lose the reader. A story needs at least two main characters: a villain and a hero. It's a good idea to give the hero a second main character to act as a side kick so he can talk to someone. Add a sprinkling of minor characters to develop the story but keep the total head count down.

**Character Names.** Give each character a name that starts with a different letter of the alphabet. This helps the reader keep them separate. A useful technique for this is to write the alphabet vertically down a sheet of paper and create a last name starting with each letter. Repeat this process for first names. If you run out of letters you've got too many characters.

- Varying name lengths also helps the reader differentiate between characters.
- Use a variety of ethnicities but remember that ethnicity plays a big part in determining how a reader expects a character to act. Sticking too close to an ethnic stereotype can make a character dull. On the other hand, using a stereotypical type for a minor character can eliminate a lot of dull description.
- Gentle sounding first names make a character more sympathetic. Harsh last names make it easier for the reader to dislike a character. Long, complicated, or hyphenated names suggest intellectualism and self-importance. Short, one-syllable names like James Bond imply strength and virility.
- Make names look interesting. The easiest way to do this is to use an unusual spelling for a common name.
- Telephone books are an excellent source of names. Mix first and last names to avoid getting sued because you used someone's name for an pirate murderer. All of the above also applies to the names of things and places.

**Avoid Last Names Ending In "s."** The possessive, Jones' or Jones's, depending on which authority you follow, looks odd to many readers and can be confusing if you're talking about a possession of more than one Jones.

**Show Character's Inner Feelings.** Characters shouldn't just state what happened but also show how they felt about it.

**Make Characters Grow.** Real people evolve with time and so should main characters. Their experiences during your story will change them. Show these changes in your by having them act and think differently at the end of the story than they did in the beginning. If the story's is part of a series that continues with the same characters, update their biographies as the series progresses.

**Give Characters Unexpected Traits.** Characters are more interesting if they have an unexpected talent, such as a coward who's a crack shot with a revolver. Exaggerating a certain ability, physical characteristic, or habit is also effective.

**Keep Your Personality Out Of Your Character's.** Don't let your own personality take over the personality designed for a character. It's easy for this to happen while writing long passages of dialog. You get so engrossed in what's going on you're pulled into the action. Before long your character starts talking like you instead of himself. One exception is a character modelled after yourself.

**Give Characters Conflicting Emotions.** Inner turmoil makes characters more human and interesting.

**Villains Do What They Think Is Just.** When portraying the villain's point of view, make it clear he believes what he's going is right. This gives him conviction and credibility.

**Give Heroes Doubts.** Readers won't identify with a character who knows how and what to do in every circumstance. No one's that good. Giving your hero a few doubts makes him more appealing, believable and increases suspense.

**One Way To Portray An Aggressive Character.** You can show a character is aggressive by having him corner a timid character with an endless stream of yes or no questions. Fire them off faster than the cornered character can respond. Have the aggressive character cut the timid character off before he's completed his answer. Mercilessly repeat questions. Make the cornered character back up, stammer, fidget and look around for escape.

## How can I create believable alien characters?

<http://www.cthreepo.com/writing/laws/>

### The canon

Vice created one alien race in Evochron, the Vonari, but there have consistently been some strange sightings of "flying saucers" in some uncharted systems. There are hints in the Beacon Quest in Legends about an Elder Race. This gives us a route into new alien races. There are some things you need to think about before you introduce new alien races in FanFic.

Your readers (who are likely to be Evochron fans) won't meet them in the game . . . ever, so don't have them playing a major role in the Evoverse, for example in public politics or invading one of the charted systems. If your aliens land on the lawn of Sapphire Government Building in the main city, players will flock there to see them . . . and be unhappily disappointed!

For those of you who want to make the Vonari in your story fit the Evoverse canon, Vice modelled their appearance as looking something like a semi-nocturnal race; some humans who have seen them describe them as 'animal like', maybe feral canine in appearance, but more simply of a scary looking animal with some qualities of a 'bat-like' appearance that looks a little canine-like, but nothing very apparent in one direction or the other. Have a look at the **History of Evochron** - the Vonari wars and the Vonari attempts to invade or destroy the Earth to get an idea of their personality and philosophy.

The other information that will help you get a feel for their actions and motivation should be treated as **Top Secret** : There are rumours that the Vonari were actually in large part, human, the product of illegal genetic experiments gone wrong about 100 years earlier, effectively left for dead on their homeworld (now called Vonarion) after the science experiments finished and the research teams left.

The 'race' thrived on the world they were abandoned on and grew into a significant population within about 50 years, later integrating technology left behind into their own designs to form their own ships and weapons. Highly intelligent (engineered to be so, including remarkable hunting skills especially in the dark) gave them advances at a vastly accelerated rate. Vonari, not unnaturally, blame humans for their condition and are bent on revenge for what was done to them. Only the upper ranks of the Alliance military/leadership know the truth about both their origins and their intent. The average pilot, mercenary, and civilian does not.

The Vonari shun light, though can tolerate it, and are characterized by their dark grey skin, large ears, keen eyesight in the dark, and there are rumours (unsubstantiated) of the possession of limited telepathic abilities.

*To fit into Vice's vision, any use of the information about the **origins** of the Vonari should be in the form of rumours and ambiguous evidence. The same for any back story you discover concerning the "Ancients".*

## Other Evoverse aliens;

As has been already mentioned, there is a standard SciFi trope of the apparently long vanished "Ancients / Forerunners / Elders" etc - they left myths and artifacts and bits of technology behind. Most of the technology is well beyond our understanding though being either fully automated or employing decipherable control systems means that we can use it to some degree. Think Stargate. (There are rumours that the science team that "invented" Fulcrum Jump technology in 2178 effectively recreated the technology using information learned from an immeasurably old jumpgate found by a probe during a survey mission to Jupiter's moons half a century earlier.) The Beacon Quest in Evochron Legends suggest that such a race would not be out of place in the Evoverse

## Giving Something an Alien Name Doesn't Make it Alien.

Raktajino is coffee. By giving it a Klingon name it sort of appears alien, but everyone drinks it like coffee. It looks like coffee. It is coffee. Don't think that making cows into Dvigids and Horses into Pytkos and changing Texas to Onyx Prime that you are not writing a western. However, if you *want* to write a western in space (Joss Wheldon's Firefly works!) then go ahead - just don't be fooled in to thinking it's **not** a western in space.

An alien culture should not be full of aliases for things that belong in our time on earth – that's just lazy.

Damon Knight described this as "calling a rabbit a smeerp."

## Aliens Should be Alien

Aliens will not be like us. It is quite possible that any alien we meet will be humanoid with symmetric bodies, a head, arms, legs, hands, mouths and eyes that work similarly to their human equivalents. This is an efficient design for putting major sense organs near to the bio-computer and raising the distance sense organs high off the ground. It will be unlikely that they will work the same way, though. Sharks and Dolphins are similar looking, but very different creatures, so aliens may **look** like men in many ways but they won't actually be just funny looking humans.

## Corollary laws:

- You will never meet an alien who speaks English like a native - even if you have a Universal Translator
- Aliens that are just like us, but with little squiggles on their noses only appear in low budget TV shows.
- Aliens as far as they have personalities will be more likely to be aggressive and pushy. There are not likely to be kindly, friendly and caring aliens because they would not have the drive to explore space. (In this way, they will be much like us.) *DaveK: Unless they are an Elder race who have outgrown the childishness of younger races. They tend to build galaxy spanning gate systems and leave them for the rest of us to get into trouble using! Nor will they have big claws with just a few fingers - they would never have been able to develop sophisticated technology. It is unlikely they will be as aggressive to each other as the Klingons - few of the nerdy ones would have survived long enough to gain enough of an education to develop technology much beyond a club or a sharp stick*
- Real aliens don't act anything like you'd expect them to act. For instance, they will not be Nazis or American Indians.

The sci-fi and fantasy writer C. J. Cherryh has described the process she uses to create alien societies for her fiction as being akin to asking a series of questions, and letting the answers to these questions dictate various parameters of the alien culture. In her view, "culture is how biology responds [to its environment] and makes its living conditions better."

Some of the issues she considers critical to consider in detailing an intelligent alien race include:

- The physical environment in which the species lives
- The location and nature of the race's dwellings, including the spatial relationships between those dwellings
- The species' diet, method(s) of obtaining and consuming food, and cultural practices regarding the preparation of meals and eating (if any)
- Processes which the aliens use to share knowledge
- Customs and ideas regarding death, dying, the treatment of the race's dead, and the afterlife (if any)
- Metaphysical issues related to self-definition and the aliens' concept of the universe they inhabit

more parameters for an "Alien" race to further enhance their background;

- Interpretation of their culture by other inhabitants that come into contact with them.
- The manner they traverse from one location to another within their settled environment.
- The enemies they have encountered and how they have adapted to combat them.
- Their past history as masters or slaves, or if it was a culture in exile or expansion.
- An approximate evolution or adaptation to present and previous environments.
- Each environment is populated by predators, prey, scavengers, herbivores, and omnivores, to name but a few.

## Introducing characters effectively

**Never describe the physical appearance of a character with details that the reader will soon forget.** Don't describe what characters look like; it's far more important to describe what they do. Here's an example of character description:

*"Taurrie Vox comes out of the jump drive chamber, a compact man with hands too big for comfort. The guy behind him, about the size of a brick built warehouse but made of harder stuff, carries a 2 foot steel spanner. He's rolling the wide rack of his shoulders to loosen them up."*

**Groups need purpose.** Whether it's two little old ladies or an angry mob, every group that plays a significant role in a novel needs a purpose that brought them together, a conflict to keep them in tension, contrasting qualities, and the ability to affect each other. Without these attributes a group is a one dimensional entity that'll bore the reader.

## OK, I'm prepped - now how do I actually write it?

**Write the first draft of your story.** Refer to your plotline/timeline to keep everything together and avoid missing things out. Remember though it's only a guide! In the unlikely scenario that it comes out as a gorgeous, finely crafted work of art, congratulations! If it comes out the first time as little more than a description of events, that's fine too . . . remember to pace your story. Give your characters and readers time to think between heavy action scenes. And don't forget your subplots. It's easy to lose the smaller details in light of the bigger picture, but focusing on these briefly will give a depth to your story that readers will appreciate.

Don't forget the points in the planning stages, for example don't get tempted to add details to fluff up the story. Keep it simple and eliminate anything slowing down the story

**Go back and look at your story.** Does it make sense to someone who knows nothing about the world and the character but what you have told them? Picture the scene in your head, as though it were a film. If it looks good, then it works. Add any necessary details.

**Reread your story again.** Does it pull you in, or just blandly explain things to the reader? Rewrite it, following the rule "show, don't tell" for example, instead of saying "the captain was very stressed out and nervous because he did not know if the space ship had enough fuel for the return flight to Sapphire," you could say "the captain looked at the fuel gauge and felt beads of cold sweat form on his forehead, as a queasy rumbling churned the pit of his stomach."

**Edit your story one last time.** This time edit for spelling, grammar and word choice. Take out any redundant passages or unnecessary details that don't add to the story.

**Know the structure of a story.** Stories have a structure with an initial incident, or starting struggle, that escalates into a "dark moment" in which all seems lost for the main character, and then turns into a climax followed by a resolution.

**Make sure you know what all of your characters want.** Characters are driven by a goal, or want, and this should form the foundation of their behaviours. For instance, a character who wants to join the navy may actually want to win the love and admiration of a fellow being (his father for example), and the story plot will be driven by this double want.



## Kikoni's Technical Writing Tips

A friend of mine recently asked me to give him what would functionally be a list of tips for creative writing, or more specifically writing stories/FanFics.

While *The Legionnaire* is my first FanFic, it is not my first story. I often sit down with my laptop and just type out entire story arcs and/or create different universes and alternate realities. This is, indeed, more my style, but Fan Fiction has always been something I've read into (the good stuff, at least) and is something I've wanted to try my hand at.

Thus, with my experience being stated, let's continue with Kikoni's Writing Tips.

First off, we'll list a few things that are pet-peeves amongst viewers. These are things you should **not** do, under any circumstances, as it will annoy the reader and thus it may persuade him/her not to read.

### Text Blocking

I'll give you an example:

"How much fuel do you need to top her off, Rob?" asked Jimmy, a glint of humour in his wizened eyes. "Five gallons, Jim ol' boy." Came the reply from Rob, who cringed at the fact that he just answered Jimmy's question in the same paragraph.~

Here's the proper way to do this:

"How much fuel do you need to top her off, Rob?" Asked Jimmy, a glint of humour in his wizened eyes.

"Five gallons, Jim ol' boy." Came the reply from Rob, now much happier to be in his own paragraph.~

This is a common mistake many new and even experienced writers make, but one that is detrimental to the skim-reading habits of many a reader.

### Huge Paragraphs

This is another all-too-common problem in many fics. Often a writer does not hit the enter key enough and ends up with one massive paragraph.

I'll give you an example by taking three paragraphs from the prologue of *The Legionnaire* and cramming them together:

My mother and father were miners, putting bread on the table by way of a mining laser and tractor beam. For the most part, they made enough to keep us going rather strong -- that is, until my mother had taken ill with some unknown disease. My father worked both his and her shift from then on, spending even more money on medicine in hopes of curing her. We'd barely had enough to eat for a solid six months. Eventually, though, my mother passed; the disease having eaten her brain away. I still remember looking into her eyes the night before she died and telling her I loved her. I cried in my father's arms all night when she didn't remember who I was. My dad kept up with the double shifts to support us and, due to lacking someone to raise me in my mother's stead, we both pretty much lived and breathed mining. I was seven and I already knew how to fly the ship well enough to navigate home. My dad cruised forward on inertial thrusters towards the asteroid we were tasked with mining. This was to save fuel, as it was expensive and using the poorly optimized

Inertial Dampening System (IDS) was a very easy way to go bankrupt. Flying on inertial was more fun, anyways. It allowed one to strafe and make manoeuvres that wouldn't otherwise work. It took little more brain-space than IDS, making me wonder why they designed it in the first place. One day, I'd asked my father about it, eliciting a chuckle from him.~

Here's the correct way to do this:

My mother and father were miners, putting bread on the table by way of a mining laser and tractor-beam. For the most part, they made enough to keep us going rather strong -- that is, until my mother had taken ill with some unknown disease. My father worked both his and her shift from then on, spending even more money on medicine in hopes of curing her. We barely had enough to eat for a solid six months.

Eventually, though, my mother passed; the disease having eaten her brain away. I still remember looking into her eyes the night before she died and telling her I loved her. I cried in my father's arms all night when she didn't remember who I was. My dad kept up with the double shifts to support us and, due to lacking someone to raise me in my mother's stead, we both pretty much lived and breathed mining. I was seven and I already knew how to fly the ship well enough to navigate home.

My dad cruised forward on inertial thrusters towards the asteroid we were tasked with mining. This was to save fuel, as it was expensive and using the poorly optimized Inertial Dampening System (IDS) was a very easy way to go bankrupt. Flying on inertial was more fun, anyways. It allowed one to strafe and make manoeuvres that wouldn't otherwise work. It took little more brain-space than IDS, making me wonder why they designed it in the first place. One day, I'd asked my father about it, eliciting a chuckle from him.~

This is much easier to read and looks better, too!

So, in closing, don't be afraid to hit that enter key!

### **One Line Paragraphs**

In contrast to the last statement, one can, indeed, hit the enter key too much. From this bad habit springs forth the dreaded one line paragraphs.

I will once more make use of a paragraph from the prologue of "The Legionaire"

This is how *not* to do it:

We moved in mining range of the asteroid and my dad hit the toggle for the laser.

He spun his chair around, navigating with merely his elbow.

Antics like that used to scare me, but after a while I had learned to trust the man's skill behind the stick.

As our little Talon class ship cruised in a circle around the asteroid, mining as it went, my father grinned down at me buckled in on the bench on the wall adjacent to his captain's chair.

It was moments like these when he would tell me how much I looked like my mother. I had her dark brown, curly hair and her green eyes.~

Now let's see it done properly:

We moved in mining range of the asteroid and my dad hit the toggle for the laser. He spun his chair around, navigating with merely his elbow. Antics like that used to scare me, but after a while I had learned to trust the man's skill behind the stick. As our little Talon class ship cruised in a circle around the asteroid, mining as it went, my father grinned down at me buckled in on the bench on the wall adjacent to his captain's chair. It was moments like these when he would tell me how much I looked like my mother. I had her dark brown, curly hair and her green eyes.~

See the difference? Little things like these can add up to make a seriously big problem. So, while you shouldn't be afraid to hit that enter key, practice some self-control in doing so, also.

### **Persona Invasion**

This one is a bit tougher to explain. Sometimes a writer wants to put a piece of him/herself in the story they are plugging away at. This is not a bad idea in the slightest *if you do it right*.

One way to do this *wrong* is to put too much of yourself into the main character of the story you are writing. Doing this causes you to become self-aware and thus change elements of the story (sometimes in completely unexplainable ways) to suit your character. This is not a good way to go about it and leads to you randomly giving your character 1 billion credits or somehow having him promoted to Fleet Admiral of the Alliance Navy. Not to mention the fact that he will most likely be invincible and crush any foes in his path.

This is the risk every writer takes with Persona Invasion, and I do not recommend even pondering the introduction of a piece of your personality into your main character's persona until you have more experience in writing.

### **A Pointless Character**

Too often new writers introduce a seemingly bland character in order to have that same character do something that promotes a plot-twist or something along those lines, only to have that character disappear or be killed off soon after.

*This is very lazy work and should not be done.*

Each character you throw into a story should have some merit in and of themselves. They should have a personality, a backstory (whether you use it or not), and some form of purpose. There is only one way to do this correctly, and it should only be done, in my opinion, once per story.

For the sake of the story, you may, indeed, have a one-hit wonder type character. This character should come in at an emotional moment or when drama is needed and do something to promote the next plot-twist or story arc. This character should have something about him that is *memorable* and should disappear or be killed off in a *memorable* way.

This way it strikes emotion in the reader at what this character does or what happens to this character, rather than them merely not caring about this bland man you randomly introduced. It also makes the twist or arc *that much more powerful and interesting*.

## How can I write good dialogue?

Edited from: <http://www.writersstore.com/writing-great-dialogue/>

There is a myth that the ability to write great dialogue is a gift that can't be learned and can't be taught. You're born with it or you'll never have it.

One version of the myth goes something like this: you have to have an *ear* for dialogue in order to be able to reproduce *realistic, believable, crisp*, dialogue on the page.

Great dialogue does not come from having a good ear for dialogue. It does not come from having some innate *gift* or talent for writing dialogue. It comes from this: knowing your characters so well that you know what they will say and how they will say it when faced with specific people, situations or events. *Hence the reason for writing biographies for your main characters!*

This is critically important to understand. When a specific piece of dialogue is the only dialogue that could be spoken in a given situation by a given character to a given character, then that dialogue can seem brilliant, and it doesn't have to be eloquent dialogue, as long as it's the exactly right dialogue.

There is another factor in writing great dialogue. It's the understanding that there are four key components to any story, whether screenplay, novel, play, or short story: characters, situations, events, and dialogue.

Throughout a story, these four components will affect and effect and be affected and effected by each other. For example, a character creates a situation that causes him to create an event that leads him and others to be affected by that event, which leads the character to make a statement or revelation (dialogue) that itself causes a reaction (an event) that leads to yet another situation, the stakes rising, the jeopardy increasing, changes happening and leading to other changes and events and dialogue which affect characters who, well, you get the picture (no pun intended).

So what role does dialogue play in this? Well, essentially dialogue is just another event. It's caused by characters and in turn causes other events and affects other characters. It's something that happens, that takes place in space and time, and is both a result and cause, just like an event is.

When characters speak, they are doing something, performing an act.

## OK, OK, but how do *I* write great dialogue?

What happens when an event in a story occurs that has nothing to do with the rest of the story? It sticks out like a sore thumb. That's what happens with dialogue that has nothing to do with the rest of the story. In other words (pun intended), you have to make your dialogue relevant to the story. More than just this, however, is that you have to be aware of the cause and effect of that dialogue just as you are aware of the cause and effect of an incident.

So you want brilliant dialogue? Make it the only dialogue your character can possibly say given who he or she is, where he or she is, and to whom he or she is saying it. Then make sure you have all your ducks in a row - every event leading up to the dialogue should be believable and every event after the dialogue should be at least partly a result of that dialogue.

Finally, make us care about the character so that we've got a vested interest in what he or she is saying, and in the results of what he or she says.

## Yeah, OK, good - I know what great dialogue is now, but *how do I write it?*

[blog.nathanbransford.com/2010/09/seven-keys-to-writing-good-dialogue.html](http://blog.nathanbransford.com/2010/09/seven-keys-to-writing-good-dialogue.html)

### **Good dialogue is not weighed down by exposition - so avoid it!**

When the dialogue is carrying exposition and trying to tell the reader too much, characters end up saying a lot of very unnatural and unwieldy things. Exposition and dialogue only really mesh when one character genuinely doesn't know what the other character is telling them and it's natural for them to explain at the moment they're explaining it. Otherwise, if you're just trying to smush in info, your reader is going to spot it a mile away.

### **Good dialogue has a purpose and builds toward something**

A good conversation is an **escalation**. The dialogue is about *something* and builds toward *something*. If things stay even and neutral, the dialogue just feels empty. Characters in a story never just talk. There's always more to it.

**Zeke:** Wife and kids?

**Bob:** Naw.

**Zeke:** Ain't missing nothing.

**Bob:** You try them braking thrusters again?

**Zeke:** Been tryin'. No fuel left to burn.

**Bob:** You reckon you're going to heaven?

**Zeke:** Reckon if I am they'll have me flying a cargo tramp there, too.

**Bob:** Don't need no cargo moved in heaven. Everything runs on angel smiles and sunshine.

**Zeke:** Find out in a second here.

**Bob:** I told you to take it easy on them afterburners.

### **Good dialogue evokes the way people actually talk in real life without actually sounding precisely like the way people talk in real life.**

Leave out the boring parts. This goes doubly for dialogue: it's usually best to cut to the chase rather than spending time on the pleasantries that normal people use in everyday conversation.

In real life our conversations wander around all over the place, and a transcribed real life conversation is a meandering mess of free association and stutters.

**Them:** Hey.

**Us:** Hi.

**Them:** How are you?

**Us:** I'm good. How are you?

**Audience:** Unnngh. (falls unconscious)

It may be true to life, but it's incredibly boring, and all it tells us is that neither person is paying any attention. A guideline: If the audience can guess almost exactly what the next line will be, write something better. In a novel, a good conversation is focused and has a point.

### **Good dialogue sounds like conversation, but is not an exact reproduction of conversation.**

Remember that dialect, slang, and voice is used sparingly. Just a hint of flavour is enough. In particular, beware of slang - nothing dates as fast as slang.

**Good dialogue reveals personality, and characters only very rarely say precisely what they are thinking.**

Human beings are not very articulate creatures. Despite all the words at our disposal, words tend to fail us at key moments, and even when we know what we want to say we spend a whole lot of time trying to describe and articulate what we feel without being quite able to do it properly. We misunderstand, overemphasize, underemphasize, grasp at what we mean, and conversations go astray. So when two characters go back and forth explaining precisely what they are feeling or thinking to each other, it doesn't seem remotely real.

**Good dialogue is instead comprised of *attempts* at articulation.** There's a whole lot that is kept back, because we humans only rarely really truly put our true feelings out there. Characters who say exactly what they mean are generic. Characters who talk around their emotions and objectives are much more interesting.

**Good dialogue goes easy on the exclamations and exhortations.**

When a character overuses "Ughs" and "Blechs" they can easily sound petulant. When they overuse exclamations, they can exhaust the reader with their excitability. When they overuse verbal tics and crutches, they can drive the reader crazy.

Interjections and grunts are kind of like carpet cleaning concentrate. They must be diluted or you'll burn a hole in the floor.

**Good dialogue is boosted by dialogue tags, gestures, and action, so the reader can easily follow who is saying what.**

As long as you stick mainly "said" and "asked" your reader won't notice they're there, and they'll be way better able to track who is saying what; the reader's eye passes over it, just as it passes over the punctuation.

Don't *overdo* dialogue tags - look for ways to add meaningful gesture and action to back and forths. The key on the gesture and action is not to simply use it to break up the dialogue for pacing purposes, but to actually make it meaningful. Related therefore is **Never use an adverb to modify "said."** **The tone of the dialogue should be contained within the dialogue itself.**

Indeed. Simple to say, hard to master.

**Good dialogue is unexpected.**

There's nothing worse than reading a stretch of dialogue where the characters are saying precisely what we think they're going to say.

The best dialogue counters our expectations and surprises us.

**Never use a colon or semi-colon in dialogue.**

**The first trick is to read your dialogue out loud:**

- Characters should use each others' names very sparingly.
- Watch out for really big or archaic words, especially if you're not 100% sure what they mean.
- Try not to use awkward, formal phrasing unless you're doing it on purpose.
- And watch out for how long you let your characters speak—most of the time humans don't let each other go more than a clause or two before interrupting.

## Arghh - I can't get started! - Beginnings

The blank screen/page is daunting. You're probably thinking, "What the hell to I write on this thing?" Trust me when I say that your first draft is not going to be the thing you post. When you start, just write. It doesn't matter about the grammar, or where you start, just write. Keep going and don't look back. Don't stop, don't read it, and for the heaven's sake, *do not erase it!*

Get that idea out on the page, once you start writing things will get better. Most likely, you're going to end up killing the first page or two of your story anyway. Those first words are there just to get you to start writing, and to get comfortable with the story. Once you're in it, it's easier to get it out, and most likely won't sound like gibberish.

## Revising/rewriting

Should you rewrite? Yes!

A freshly completed draft of a story is like an unfinished road; it may pass through beautiful scenery but the ride is so rough you can't enjoy the trip. Rewriting smoothes the bumps out of a story just like a grader makes a road drivable.

And sometimes, the story just goes horribly wrong.

So rewrite scenes, remove scenes, add characters. The most common thing that goes wrong is that the story doesn't mesh together. Continuity and such. That character wasn't supposed to be there, the scene happened too quickly, some action in it took too long.

Rewrite. Especially if someone points it out. Then you have to rewrite. Your goal here is to put a reviewer out of employment, aye?

If you can't get your story "just right," don't torture yourself over it. Instead, set it aside and come back to it in a few months. You'll learn more as a writer by coming up with a few more first drafts in the meantime than by obsessing.

The good news is rewriting isn't the horror it's made out to be. It's easier and faster than writing and gives a feeling of polished accomplishment drafts can't provide. Here are some hints to make rewriting easy and productive. Some of these hints are hard to swallow when you've just started writing! They do make your stories better though, if it's the "delete entire chapters if they don't belong, keep them on file - they may make it into another story!"

- Don't try to write the perfect story
- Wait between rewrites
- Check grammar at night - rewrite in the morning
- Eliminate the irrelevant
- Follow your feelings for deleting
- Each crisis should accomplish something
- Read it out loud
- Don't try to fix everything in one rewrite
- Delete entire chapters if they don't belong

The following checklist can help you make certain you've checked your story for all the important issues.

- Have you proved your theme?
- Have you touched the reader's emotions?
- Is there conflict and is the reason for it believable?
- Do your characters grow?
- Are all the loose ends tied up?
- Have you engaged all the reader's senses?
- Did you use active instead of static descriptions?
- Did events grow out of each other?
- Is the climax satisfying?

## **OK - I fibbed a bit about missing out the punctuation, layout and grammar!**

Once again I have to say - look at <http://www.waynesthisandthat.com/writefanfic.htm> Excellent advice with explanations and examples. Some basic advice to get you started though . . .

- Write in paragraphs
- Spellcheck, grammar check
- Skip a line for emphasis. If you want to emphasise something really dramatic, skip a line and make the sentence really, really short.
- Skip a line between setting, scene changes and sudden events.
- Skip a line between descriptions of any kind.  
Skip a line between paragraphs. It makes reading your stories easier.. .
- Skip a line to indicate time has passed
- Don't spell out long numbers.
- Don't over exaggerate and overuse hyperboles. She is not the most beautiful person in the Sapphire system. He was not the most noble man this side of the Evoverse
- Use left justification only justifying both edges of print looks nice but it makes it harder for readers to track from one line to the next.
- Centred "+++" signals a point of view change
- "... " means a voice trail-off. Use three dots to express a speaker's voice trailing off or waiting for an answer.

"I know I said that it was legal. And from one point of view it is. It's just that, well..."

- "- " means an interruption. Use a dash to express an interrupted conversation.

"but, Marty-"

"I said that's enough!"

- Avoid using dashes, italics, colons and semicolons, words enclosed in parenthesis or with all their letters capitalized, and exclamation points - they all remind the reader he's reading a story instead of living an adventure



## Good links

<http://jerz.setonhill.edu/writing/creative1/shortstory/>

[http://services.stellardawn.com/m=forum\\_fo/forums.ws?91,92,16,72759](http://services.stellardawn.com/m=forum_fo/forums.ws?91,92,16,72759)

<http://www.fanfiction.net/u/1688505/MistressWinowyll>

<http://io9.com/366707/8-unstoppable-rules-for-writing-killer-short-stories>

<http://www.writersstore.com/writing-great-dialogue/>

[blog.nathanbransford.com/2010/09/seven-keys-to-writing-good-dialogue.html](http://blog.nathanbransford.com/2010/09/seven-keys-to-writing-good-dialogue.html)

<http://www.campaignmastery.com/blog/creating-alien-characters/>

## Exceptional link

<http://www.waynesthisandthat.com/writefanfic.htm>

