There are now not enough commercial magazines regularly publishing literary fiction to count on the fingers of a single hand, says Rust Hills. So why bother writing literary short stories, or books about doing so? Because, says Hills, a longtime fiction editor at Esquire, what young writers want to write, or ought to want to write, is literature. In Writing in General and the Short Story in Particular, Hills examines the essential techniques of fiction and how they function. The short story is a tricky form, with no margin for error: The successful contemporary short story, says Hills, will demonstrate a more harmonious relationship of all its aspects than will any other literary art form, excepting perhaps lyric poetry. Many of the fictional elements discussed in this book will not be new to most fiction writers. We know that stories must have beginnings, middles, and ends; we know about epiphany and suspense and stock characters. But Hills claims that much of how we look at fiction derives from drama theory and from the formulas of slick fiction (fiction that once served the purpose mindless television now serves). Learned but not pedantic, Hills addresses these elements strictly in terms of literary short fiction. An interesting side note here is Hillss discussion of the shift in support for American writers. It is no longer the book publishers and magazines, he says, but rather the colleges and universities that ... provide the major financial support for the great majority of American writers today. Given that, we might find it odd that this book comes from a man best known for his magazine editing. But we shouldnt. Teaching fiction writing and editing magazine fiction have ... the same rather odd ultimate purpose in common: trying to get someone else to produce a fine short story. One caveat emptor: our copy of this edition fell quite apart upon our first, gentle reading of it. --Jane Steinberg

Tools of the Muse
In his informative and entertaining book, Writing in General and the Short Story in Particular, Rust Hills sets out to reach a broad range of potential writers. He attempts to establish a basic guide, useful to the nascent writer working in a workshop environment and to the solitary writer, who wishes to learn to read literary stories in such a way as to help...write them. Hills main idea that he stresses throughout the book revolves around the interrelation of every element within a short story. He writes: A successful short story will thus necessarily show a more harmonious relationship of
part to whole, and part to part...Everything must work with everything else.

Everything enhances everything else, interrelates with everything else, is inseparable with everything else- and all this is done with a necessary and perfect economy. Hills formats the book so that each of the major literary terms and devices, essential to the short story writer, receive its own section for deeper analysis. Within these ongoing essays he often uses simplified fictional characters of his own invention to illuminate the discussion at hand. The characters, Martin and Miranda, grow irksome at times, but his point is to make sure the reader unquestionably comprehends. Most of the sections close with a statement that reiterates how the specific device or term fits into the overall design of the whole. He pounds this notion of interrelation into the readers head. Hills presents a vast array of useful literary terms and devices in a manner that never hinders the logical sequence of the book. His witticisms and fresh style of economic prose help to maintain the momentum and readability through the weighty, technical material. He differentiates the short story from the novel or the sketch. He touches upon the spectrum of characterization: the type as opposed to the stock character, the fixed compared to the moving character. He spends a great length discussing the origin, the meaning, and the contemporary interpretation of every beginning writers worst enemy, that ill-fated, e-word, epiphany. Point-of-view, the most important decisions about techniques that a writer has to make also receives extensive attention in the book. Hidden within Hills rich sea of information are some tidbits and treasures from the great masters of the profession. He cites Edgar Allen Poe in the analysis of the short story versus the sketch or novel. Poe writes of a single and unique effect to which every word of a short story should lead: If his (the authors ) very initial sentence tend not to the outbringing of this effect, then he has failed in his first step. In the whole composition there should be no word written, of which the tendency, direct or indirect, is not to the one pre-established design. To shed light on the discussion of the epiphany, Hills relies upon the man who originated the terms contemporary meaning, James Joyce, This is the moment which I call epiphany...when the relations of the parts is exquisite...its soul, its whatness leaps to us from the vestment of its appearance. The soul of the commonest object, the structure of which is so adjusted, seems to us radiant. The object achieves its epiphany. Hills does not hold the fallacious belief that he can ultimately teach one to write, rather he states that hes just showing something of how short stories work. The objective in Hills, Writing in General and the Short Story in Particular, is to equip the potential writer with the necessary tools to create the most incisive and well-crafted fiction possible. As Hills suggests, All you have to have is originality of perception and utterance.

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Writing in general and the short story in particular: An informal textbook by L. Rust Hills - 5 Star Customer Reviews and Lowest Price!