The University of Essex uses microfiction as a methodology for teaching writing, reading, and thinking skills, but what is ‘microfiction’?

It is not to our knowledge a formally recognised literary method, genre, tradition, or movement but has been used as an alternative term for ‘flash fiction’, which is a short piece of creative writing usually no more than a page long. However we use the term to denote a much shorter piece of creative writing, often no longer than a single line or sentence, and ideally less than ten words. As a pseudonym for flash fiction, microfiction has sometimes been called ‘postcard fiction’ but ‘stamp fiction’ would be closer to our own definition, which is:

**A self-contained piece of writing in ten words or fewer**

There are examples in literary history of writing that could be described as microfiction (perhaps most famously Ernest Hemingway’s ‘For sale. Baby shoes. Never used.’) and there have been instances of contemporary authors being commissioned to write one-off pieces.

In the crudest terms we use microfiction as a byword for creative concision. The most studied example is Augusto Monterroso’s seven-word “epic” The Dinosaur which has ironically been the subject of numerous doctoral theses and was once playfully described as a ‘novel’ because by at least one definition it featured all of the key elements. Italo Clavino described it as the most perfect story ever written.

‘Upon waking, the dinosaur was still there.’ (Augusto Monterroso, 1959, *The Dinosaur*)

Other admirers have included Mario Vargas Llosa who explored its ambiguities in narrative, space, and level of reality. Microfiction encourages the reader to be ‘co-fabulator’ and ‘fill in the gaps’.

But the last word should of course be given to Guillermo Samperio, however, a Mexican writer whose story Fantasma (‘Phantasm’ or ‘Ghost’) is a story of no words at all, just the title followed by a blank page.

NB. We are not limiting the phrase to just ‘creative writing’. We believe all writing is ‘creative’. We use it interchangeably with ‘microsummary’ when ‘fiction’ is inappropriate.