

The Two Hundred Word Challenge

By Kellie Finley

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Recently I challenged you to a simple sounding writing exercise. Let's call it the "two hundred word challenge." I challenged you to write a story or scene or describe a picture using two hundred words - just two hundred words. Really it sounds simple enough - two hundred words is a short email message. A holiday grocery list. A letter to my son's teacher explaining that the dog really did eat his homework. How hard can it be?

That's what I thought the first time I tried to do it. I had no problem with describing scenes, telling stories, painting a picture. But two hundred words?! Well, I could get to four hundred, three fifty when I started cutting away at it. But two hundred?!

The exercise talk me a lot about my love of words and my love to ramble. It focused me on choosing just the right word or two not just the right seven words. And it gave me some insight into yet another way to fine tune my writing by learning to be concise, precise, and specific in my just two hundred words.

(By the way, the above section was *just two hundred words* <wink>.)

Too simple for you? You've mastered choosing your words, describing a scene, pulling on emotions? You think so do you? Ok, I'll challenge you to take it a step further - let's go with the "one hundred words or bust challenge."

Take your two hundred words scene and cut it in half. Make each and every word really earn its keep. Make them work to remain on the page.

Can you do it and still use those five senses - see it, touch it, hear it, smell it, taste it? Give it a try. Let me know how you do.

(By the way, the above section was *just one hundred words* <wink>.)

My one hundred words - enjoy!

The room was a wreck. Once resembling a kitchen with pale blue walls and spotless counter tops, it now looked like something painted by Picasso.

There were burgundy red hand prints everywhere. Flimsy wormlike shapes covered every flat surface. Clumps of orange had been ground into the braided rug.

She stood in the eye of a storm – no sound with uncanny calm. Yet clearly uncontrolled energy had radiated here only moments before. As three pair of chestnut brown eyes stared up at her, she knew she would never feel the same about spaghetti again.

"Happy Birthday, Momma!" they chimed.

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