CONTENTS

Preface page xiii
Acknowledgements xiv

1 Getting started 1
2 Memory and imagination 7
3 Character 17
   Introducing characters 17
   Character and plot 23
   Characters are individuals 24
   Character and narrative voice 27
   How many characters? 28
   Minor characters 29
   Character isn’t fixed 30
   Planning characters 32
4 Plot and structure I 35
   Getting to grips with plot 35
   Telling it slant 48
5 Plot and structure II 55
   The patterns of plot 55
   Hiding plot – putting doors in alleyways 64
   Narrative time 65
6 Form and length 70
   Definitions 70
   Novels 71
   Short stories 72
   Flash fiction 76
## Contents

7 Dialogue  
  Dialogue matters 83  
  Carrying information in dialogue 84  
  Capturing character in dialogue 87  
  Writing between the lines 90  
  Attributing dialogue 93  
  Punctuating dialogue conventionally 96  
  Alternative ways of punctuating dialogue 100  
  Accent and dialect 103  
  Other worlds, other times 106  
  How do we show a character's thoughts? 109

8 Narrative viewpoint and narrative voice 112  
  Where do we stand? 112  
  Author and narrator – knowing and telling 115  
  First- and third-person narratives: the basics 118  
  How perspective changes the story 121  
  Multiple-viewpoint narratives 124  
  The range of perspectives 127  
  Centres of consciousness in the third-person narrative 130  
  Character and state of mind as revealed in first-person voices 133  
  The unreliable narrator 136  
  First-person plural narration 139  
  Second-person address 142  
  Other-world narrative voices 145

9 Beginnings and endings; tension and pace 148  
  A good enough beginning 148  
  Exposition and starting in medias res 151  
  A sense of an ending 154  
  Tension and pace 157

10 Description 160  
  The purpose of description 160  
  Preconceptions about style 163  
  Clichés 166  
  Metaphors and similes 169  
  Modifiers 172
# Contents

Describing place 194  
How much detail? 202  
Showing through description 206

## Research 208

- Keeping research unobtrusive 211  
- Subjects 212  
- Sources 215  
- Serving your story 217

## Drawing it all together 220

- An approach to editing 226  
- Editing techniques 227  
- Getting value from a critical reader 232  
- Editing in response to notes 233  
- Accepting imperfection 238

## Publication and the writing life 240

- Publishing short stories 240  
- Agents and editors 242  
- Targeting and pitching 243  
- Understanding rejection 245  
- Interpreting rejection 246  
- It's just an opinion 248  
- Hold your nerve 250  
- The writing life 251  
- Writer's block 254  
- Set achievable goals 257  
- Stick at it 257  
- Feed the compost heap 258  
- The pleasures of writing 258

Notes 261

Select bibliography 271

Index 276