Small RNA are polymeric RNA molecules that are less than 200 nucleotides in length, and are usually non-coding.

RNA silencing is often a function of these molecules, with the most common and well-studied example being RNA interference (RNAi), in which endogenously expressed microRNA (miRNA) or exogenously derived small interfering RNA (siRNA) induces the degradation of complementary messenger RNA. Other classes of small RNA have been identified, including piwi-interacting RNA (piRNA) and its subspecies repeat associated small interfering RNA (rasiRNA). Small RNA “is unable to induce RNAi alone, and to accomplish the task it must form the core of the RNA–protein complex termed the RNA-induced silencing complex (RISC), specifically with Argonaute protein.