

Finding the Start of Your Story



Welcome

Finding the Start of Your Story is here to help you begin planning your opening and the first few chapters of your novel.

Throughout this workbook, I will refer to something called the "Inciting Incident". You may have also heard this referred to as the "inciting moment" or "the call to action".

The Inciting Incident of a story is a moment that hooks the reader and sets in motion the rest of the story.

The best way to think about it is: *if the Inciting Incident didn't happen, then nothing that follows would happen. There would be no book.*

Without the Inciting Incident to move the plot forward and force the characters to take action, there would be no story.

Inciting Incident examples include:

Hagrid telling Harry he's a wizard, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*.

Katniss volunteering as tribute, *The Hunger Games*.

Nick meeting Gatsby at his party, *The Great Gatsby*.



Opening Your Story



Teasing out your idea

What was your initial idea seed for this story? Where did the idea come from? What was the initial inspiration?

What are you most excited about in this idea?

Who will be your main character?

Who will be your antagonist?

Where will this take place?

What will be the central conflict?

A word on openings

It may seem simple to find a place to open your story, but it's actually one of the hardest aspects of starting.

It's important to make sure that you are striking that balance between opening fast enough that the plot feels like it's moving, but not too fast that you're confusing the reader.

Too slow = too much build up and backstory

Too fast = not enough build up and backstory

Getting that balance right will depend on where you open the story and what you include in your opening chapters.

Openings you should avoid

Domestic scenes/waking up to an alarm clock.

These openings run the risk of being boring to read. If your character is waking up and getting ready for work and nothing is really happening, the reader will probably lose interest.

A dream sequence.

This is rarely recommended. Don't get your reader invested in something that is going to turn out being false.

Starting with descriptions, especially of weather.

I'm not saying all descriptions have to go, but be mindful of how much attention you're paying them.

Introducing a character that will soon die.

Although this may be interesting, the reader might feel hard done by if they've invested in a character who dies at the end of the first chapter for no reason. (Though this can depend on your plot and the death's significance.)

Backstory.

Backstory is extremely important in a book, but it should never be used to open. Don't go into a monologue of backstory and overwhelm the reader.

Introducing too many characters at once/not introducing your protagonist immediately.

Firstly, get your protagonist front and centre. Secondly, don't confuse the reader with too many names and people because they may lose track of what's happening.

Openings you should try

Open with an intriguing statement.

Try starting with an intriguing first line that will make the reader wonder.

Eg: "Today is the first day of November and so, today, someone will die." *The Scorpio Races*

A general statement.

A statement is a short, sweet way to hook the reader. These are usually an intriguing or humorous first line.

Eg: "I'm pretty much f*cked." *The Martian*.

Action.

I don't always agree with starting with action as it can easily confuse the reader, but it can be a preference for some. Be careful though to give the reader context of who is involved in the action and why the reader should care, otherwise they might lose interest.

Eg: "The man in black fled across the desert, and the gunslinger followed." *The Gunslinger*.

Openings you should try

Dialogue

Dialogue can be a personal preference, but if done well, it can be a great way to introduce characters and settings. Depending on what the dialogue is, it can also be a great way to intrigue the reader.

Eg: "'You've got to be kidding me,' the bouncer said, folding his arms across his massive chest." *City of Bones*

Characters.

Whether it's your protagonist, antagonist, or an important secondary character, this is a good way to connect the reader to someone in your story.

Eg: "Mr and Mrs Dursley, of number four, Privet Drive, were proud to say that they were perfectly normal, thank you very much." *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*

You may not want to use exposition to introduce your characters like the above example. Instead, you might choose to introduce them directly.

Eg: "When I stepped out into the bright sunlight from the darkness of the movie house, I had only two things on my mind: Paul Newman and a ride home." *The Outsiders*

Narrowing it down

Which of these openings stood out to you?

Which kinds of openings do you think would work best for your genre and the type of story you want to tell? Why do you think that?

Which of these openings do you not feel would work for your story and why?

Finding your beginning

Who is the narrator of your book and why? Are there multiple narrators/points of view?

What tone do you want to convey in your opening?

What is the narrator's voice like? What kind of quality and feel does that give the book?

What will be the overall mood in the first chapter?

Finding your beginning

What settings are important to your story? Which setting will you introduce to the reader first?

What themes are important to the story? How can you foreshadow or highlight these to the reader?

What other characters (secondary, minor, or antagonist) can you introduce to the reader?

What will the main character's relationship with these other characters convey to the reader?

Finding your beginning

What important information does the reader need to know about the main and secondary characters before the Inciting Incident occurs?

For example: the reader might need to understand the main character's relationships, their thoughts/opinions on their life, their wants/needs, etc.

Finding your beginning

Is there a significant event that can open your story?

For example: in *Percy Jackson and the Lightning Thief*, the book opens with a field trip day at a museum.

In *The Fellowship of the Ring*, the story starts with Bilbo Baggins's birthday celebration.

In *Chocolat*, the story begins with Vianne arriving in a new town with her daughter.

What event or significant moment could your book open with?

Finding your beginning

What other events will take place that will keep the reader interested?

For example: in *Percy Jackson and the Lightning Thief*, the first chapter introduces a monster that tries to attack Percy.

In *The Fellowship of the Ring*, Bilbo announces that he will be going away and then disappears.

In *Chocolat*, Vianne purchases a small shop that she will renovate.

What interesting occurrence can you introduce?

Finding your beginning

What information and details will be revealed in your first chapter? What will the reader learn about the main character and the plot so far?

For example: this could be parts of the main character's backstory or an important event that will happen later in the story.

Finding your beginning

What does your first chapter need to set up for the rest of the story? How will the first chapter influence the chapters that follow? How is it connected to the rest of the story? Explore how your first chapter sets up your story.

Finding your beginning

What will the Inciting Incident reveal about the main character and their world?

Eg: they've been lied to about their childhood, they discover they have powers, etc.

Finding your beginning

How will you follow on from the Inciting Incident? What will happen immediately afterwards?

How will the main character cross into the New World? The New World doesn't have to be a literal new world, it simply means they are crossing a threshold that takes them deeper into the story.

For example: Harry Potter discovers Diagon Alley, Bilbo Baggins leaves Bag End to help the dwarves.

Narrowing it down again

Now that you've given your opening some thought, lay your thoughts out so you can see them clearly.

What is the setting that you will introduce up to the Inciting Incident?

What information will you reveal about the protagonist up to the Inciting Incident?

What theme/s will you introduce or foreshadow up to the Inciting Incident?


What events will occur after the Inciting Incident?

Opening chapters checklist

 **Introduced my protagonist**

 **Introduced and/or foreshadowed upcoming conflicts**


 **Established and/or foreshadowed the protagonist's goal**

 **Established and/or foreshadowed the protagonist's motivation**

 **Introduced the setting of the Ordinary World and the character's everyday life**

 **Introduced important secondary characters**

 **Established the tone and mood**

 **Established a strong narrator voice and perspective**

WANT MORE SUPPORT?



Opening chapters are something many writers find difficult. If you're still struggling to find the start of your story, I'd LOVE to help!

You can join me in my 2-day VIP coaching: Set Up Your Story.



Together, we'll find the best opening for your story, develop your plot and characters, and make a game plan for getting those first words on the page so you can write with clarity and confidence.

You can find more details by clicking the button below!

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