

Story Openings

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Remember, one
or more of these
techniques can
be used in a
story opening

Tip:

Use what you learn to
improve the openings
of stories you write!

Writing first lines

There's nothing to say
that your story
absolutely must begin
at the beginning. Many
story openings cut
forward to later events
or recall much earlier
ones than the main
time-frame of the story.

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Hook

- Invite the reader in by leaving them with one or more **questions** to which they will want answers.



- ‘I disappeared on the night before my twelfth birthday.’ Kensuke’s Kingdom by Michael Morpurgo
- This arouses our curiosity straight away. Why did the narrator disappear? If he disappeared, how is he narrating the story?

Character

- Describe a **character or characters** in whom the reader will become interested



- ‘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 by JK Rowling
- Clearly, Mr and Mrs Dursley are far from normal. Why would they need to state it if they were? Against whom are they comparing themselves? There is a strong hint here that an abnormal world lies somewhere on the margins of the Dursley’s ‘normal’ world.

Setting

- Describe the **setting** in such a way that the reader can visualise it and is immediately drawn in.



- ‘The hottest day of the summer so far was drawing to a close and a drowsy silence lay over the large, square houses of Privet Drive’. Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix by JK Rowling
- The description is clear yet interesting. It is obvious that the silence will soon be broken.

Action

- Draw the reader in by dropping them straight into the **action** of the story.



- ‘Peter crouched over the fire stirring the embers so that the sparks swarmed up like imps on the rocky walls of hell.’ Count Karlstein by Philip Pullman
- This gripping opening creates a tense atmosphere by describing the action in a menacing way. The sparks are like ‘imps on on the rocky walls of hell’, which leads the reader to believe that danger lurks just around the corner. The atmosphere is dark and menacing because of the linked images of fire and hell.

Dialogue

- Use **dialogue** (direct speech between two or more characters) to engage the readers.



- ‘I’m going shopping in the village,’ George’s mother said to George on Saturday morning. ‘So be a good boy and don’t get up to mischief.’ George’s Marvellous Medicine by Roald Dahl
- The dialogue makes this opening relatable and realistic. The mention of not getting into trouble is a hint that trouble is probably not far away!