

As writers advance through short stories to novels, some important changes are required, starting with the first page.

Whether in a short story or a long novel, readers want it to do three things for them:

1. To entertain.
2. To arouse some degree of emotion.
3. To have rising suspense culminating in a conclusion that satisfies readers.

Before starting to write the story, you should know the answers to these questions:

1. **What is this story about?** Write a simple declarative sentence limited to 40 words and using no more than one comma. If you cannot summarize your story well this way, you're not ready to write the novel.
 - Example: *A boy frantically seeks to find and rescue his kidnapped father who is being held in the path of an erupting volcano now sending massive lava flows toward an abandoned fishing village where his captors left him.* (36 words)
2. **How does the story end?** As the writer, you should have this clearly in mind, so you won't become hopelessly lost or not finish the work.
3. **How can you avoid a general tendency to create ugly blocks of narrative type on the first page?** Try creating a sparkling scene which introduces the motivated focal character with action, presents him with a situation which leads to a problem that sets up his objective. Use narration sparingly so the page is visually appealing and helps hook readers.

CREATING THE OBJECTIVE:

The BEGINNING of any length story must quickly "hook" the reader.

The short opening needs seven key elements setting up the protagonist's objective. Those set-up words are listed here and then explained.

1. **Idea**
2. **Character**
3. **Situation**
4. **Problem**
5. **Objective**
6. **Motive**
7. **Decision**

1. **THE IDEA** should be reduced to a single tight sentence that gives readers some concept of what the story is going to be about. Example: *The story of a boy who disobeys his father and ends up in a pool filled with sharks – and no way out*
2. **THE MAIN CHARACTER:** The success of a story is largely dependent upon the protagonist. He must have strong appeal to readers. If they don't like him, they won't like the story. This protagonist must be highly motivated, but he is flawed in some way. He is the viewpoint character so everything is seen through his point of view. He must grow and change in the story, overcoming his flaw.
3. **THE SITUATION:** There must be a condition which has changed or is about to change and impact the main character. Include the locale, time, and bits of description.
4. **THE PROBLEM:** The changed situation presents a major problem that influences the focal character in an important way so he must act to resolve the difficulty.
5. **THE OBJECTIVE:** Any story should present the protagonist with a tangible story goal so that readers know when the goal has been achieved and the problem resolved. In advanced stories, the focal character also needs a second emotional or mental objective, often involving overcoming his character flaw.
6. **MOTIVE:** This is what drives the main character so that he will not quit when he encounters various obstacles, conflict, set-backs and complications in the story.
7. **DECISION:** The end of the beginning occurs when the focal character makes a decision to go for the Objective in spite of risks. The story then transitions to the long middle part.

SUMMARY OF THE ABOVE:

The writer needs an idea that includes a likeable but flawed main **character**, a changed **situation** with time and place leading to a **major problem** and a focal character's **objective** of resolving the problem. When the **motivated** protagonist makes a **decision** to go for the **objective** regardless of risks, **the story beginning is over** and transitions to the middle section.

To avoid a tendency to narrate the beginning of a story, here's a way to avoid creating ugly blocks of type.

Try to write an opening scene that sparkles with crisp dialogue, has lots of white space and at least some of seven basics need to open a story. At a minimum, they should include the main character, the situation, the problem, the time and place and some hint of what's ahead.

Think in scenes so that narration is used sparingly. Let scene carry most of the reader appeal so the author only adds explanation where necessary.

Remember, the first page is the author's initial tenuous contact with readers. If that first page is visually appealing as well as hinting at something interesting about to happen, the reader will want to read on. Make your first page some of your best writing.

Now, write with confidence that your grabber of a first page has set your story in motion. Readers will turn the page and keep going. Then you create the rest of the beginning section with the remaining required opening elements. When they are complete, you are ready to start the middle of the story. There the protagonist faces the first of many obstacles that prevent him from reaching his story objective.

MIDDLE

The middle begins with the main character taking the first action to carry out the decision made at the end of the opening. The middle is the longest part of a narrative and is mostly concerned with obstacles that prevent the main character from achieving his story objective set forth in the opening chapter.

The middle seems complex, but can be simplified by realizing that it all fits into a paradigm or pattern of tries and failures which are constantly repeated with variations. The main character takes the first action to achieve his objective. This fails or falls short, leading to a repeat of another attempt with similar results. He makes some advances, but the reverses strike again, creating reader suspense.

SUMMARY OF POSSIBLE OBSTACLES

The main character takes the first action in an attempt to solve problem.

- Conflicts (major and minor) are faced by the focal character.
- Three types of conflict:
 1. Person vs. person (opponent or adversary)
 2. Person vs. self (the character flaw)
 3. Person vs. environment. This covers everything else not in the first two.
- The protagonist struggles with complications, confrontations and reversals.
- He keeps trying to solve the original problem (cause and effect).
- He encounters increased tension and suspense so that the outcome is in doubt.
- RAT: Adding a race against time puts more pressure on the principal character because racing the clock is an old but effective suspense element.
- ACE: The author hints at an anticipated catastrophic event looming ever closer.
- Plot Points: The protagonist may seem to be making some progress toward his story goal, but unexpected twists not only surprise readers, but spin the story in a new direction, further complicating the story.

- Epiphany: The writer may hint that the focal character needs to have a catalyst that will lead to an epiphany. This does occur in the last chapter.
- There are confrontations, complications and other set backs that raise reader suspense and continue to test the focal character's will to reach his objective.
- Reversal: Just when things seem to finally be going well for the main character, a major plot point suddenly reverses his situation and leads to a catastrophe to end the middle section. It now seems impossible for him ever reach his objective.

The writer ends the long middle part of the story at this moment of intense uncertainty. He transitions to the ending part. Hopefully, readers are anxious to turn the page to see how the protagonist is going to resolve his catastrophe.

ENDING

Up to now, the writer has repeatedly thrown obstacles in the protagonist's way, raising reader tension and doubt about how the story is going to end. The narrative accelerates as the main character sprints for the finish line – but the worst obstacle of all blocks his way and threatens his hope of ever achieving the story goal.

RAT: If there was a race against time, that time has run out.

ACE: The anticipated catastrophic event which the author has hinted at earlier
In the novel is now upon the protagonist.

SUSPENSE: The protagonist's goal is in sight, but now seems impossible to ever reach. It is a decisive moment which has critical significance. Some writers call it the Black Moment. Readers eagerly hurry to learn if the main character can escape from this predicament.

CHANGES: These happened so fast and often that the protagonist is driven into a bottleneck with the story ending in sight.

The best way to present change is by showing instead of telling (scenes, not narration)

As revealed before, scenes have three parts which need to be repeated here:

1. Purpose: The protagonist seeks to deal with the latest problem
2. Conflict of some sort results, as should happen in any scene
3. Disappointment, if not failure, shows that this effort did not work.

The focal character is not a quitter, so in great urgency, he has to re-think what to do next. This is done in a sequel, which can be quickly narrated in a three-part sequence:

1. Reaction: He responds according to the type of person he is.
2. Quandary: Time is precious, but he has to briefly think of what to try now.

3. **Choice:** He makes another decision and implements it.

Epiphany: One of the changes in this pressure-cooker crisis should show the main character being changed as a result of the story's events. Also known as a pivotal, turn-around or "come-to-realize" scene, here's where the focal character sees something in a new way (or gains insight) because of overcoming his character flaw. He makes an emotional decision so he grows and becomes changed from what he was at the beginning of the story.

The ending of a novel can be divided into three parts, with various sub sections.

1. **CRISIS:** The ending of a novel begins with a crisis where it seems the protagonist's struggles so far have failed, making it now seem impossible to achieve his original objective. Conditions have changed again, forcing the focal character to rapidly adjust to this new and difficult circumstance. The crisis culminates with the focal character facing one final hard choice, which leads to the high point of the story.
1. **CLIMAX:** The desperate protagonist is seemingly out of options. Then he sees one possibility. It is hard and seems wrong, but because of the type of person he is, he must act. This is the peak or point of highest dramatic tension and a major turning point in the story. With no turning back, in a now -or-never choice, he makes a decision to act on it. It is successful. He survives the ordeal and reaches his original story objective.
2. **CONCLUSION:** This is a brief wrap-up of loose ends. The protagonist got what he wanted: solved his own problem (no angelic Seventh Cavalry to the rescue) and achieved his original story objective.
 - The theme is subtly proven by the story without preaching...
 - The story question answered in the affirmative, and preferably in a way readers did not expect.
 - The ending satisfies the readers (happy ending are preferred by most readers). They plan to buy your next novel.

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With this third and final part of writing a story detailed, it is hoped that those who had been writing short stories are now ready to become novelists.

Aspiring novelists keeps these handouts as handy references. They can help authors achieve their writing objective. Writers wanting greater details on all aspects of novel writing will find them in the presenter's new book:

A Guide to Writing Your Novel. It is now available through the publisher, *Institute for Excellence in Writing*. Autographed copies may be ordered through the presenter's website: www.leeroddybooks.com