

WHAT GOES ON THE FIRST PAGE?

The first sentence, first paragraph, and first page of any story or novel are crucial in establishing reader expectations. A strong opening is like a promise to a reader: you can expect x, y, and z.

Or you can think of it like the first bite of a meal. After taking that first bite, the reader is figuring out what kind of meal this is going to be: Sweet? Hot? Salty? Light? Filling? And, not coincidentally, the reader is also figuring out if she wants to keep eating or push the plate away. If you lose your reader's attention on the first page, it's game over; the chances she'll keep reading are slim to none.

Accordingly, we suggest beginning a novel at the beginning. Think about how you want to direct your reader's attention at the outset, the tone you want to establish, the characters you want to prioritize, the kind of curiosity you want to evoke in your reader about the novel to come.

Will it be a comedy? A family drama? Will it feature spare, minimalist prose reflecting a character's hard-scrabble life, or will it open with a murder that it will be the business of the novel to solve? Perhaps you're writing speculative fiction or fantasy, and need to start with world-building, whisking the reader to a convincing far-off time or place. Whatever your goal, you have just a few sentences in which to accomplish it.

-- Excerpted from UBCx: [How to Write a Novel – Part 1: Plan & Outline](#)