

First Lines

Instructions: Try this exercise all at once. It's fairly quick and #3 can be done any time you want to generate a few ideas.

- 1.** Browse through some novels and stories (and try poems, too), reading only the opening lines.
- 2.** Do you notice any similarities between opening lines? Are there techniques a writer can use to catch the attention of a reader?
- 3.** Make a list of brand new opening lines that you make up off the top of your head. Don't worry about whether or not you'd actually want to use them, just think them up and write them down.
- 4.** When you've got a fair number (say half a page or a page), read through them again. Which ones catch your attention? Which ones make you laugh? Think about why these ones might work better than the others.
- 5.** Pick your favorite couple of opening lines and see if you can expand them into a paragraph or more. If you start getting some really good ideas about any of them, you may want to just keep going to see how far it takes you, or you may want to pause to take point form notes about your ideas first.
- 6.** Set the list aside in a place you'll find it again. Later on -- days, weeks or even months later -- have a look at your list again to see if the same lines still grab you. Maybe a different line will really appeal to you; in that case, try #5 with it.

Notes: This is a fun way to get ideas. You may come up with many that will never amount to anything, but now and then you'll get a good one. Try this more than once and save your lists to look at again later.

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