

Creating a Grabbing Beginning

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Most readers choose whether or not to read a book based on three things; the cover, the jacket and the first page. If you publish with a publishing house you will have no say about the first two, so it is essential that you have a wonderful, grabbing opening.

“I value beginnings. I will write the beginning to a story five, ten, fifteen times, looking for the right mix, an exact feel, because I know that the beginning will determine how the rest of the story will shape itself.” Todd James Pierce

Even if chapters 2 through 12 are works of staggering genius, if the beginning of your story is not interesting, only your family will read your book.

So what makes a good opening? The answer is high-quality prose and tension. Good writing will allow the reader to trust that you have a handle on the story and are worth listening to. The tension will make them start to wonder what will happen next. These wonderings are what will keep the reader turning pages. Let's look at some successful beginnings.

“On the morning the last Lisbon daughter took her turn at suicide - it was Mary this time, and sleeping pills, like Therese - the two paramedics arrived at the house knowing exactly where the knife drawer was, and the gas oven, and the beam in the basement from which it is possible to tie a rope.”
That is from Jeffrey Eugenides's first novel, *The Virgin Suicides*. Here is the first paragraph of *The Kite Runner* by Khaled Hosseini.

“I became what I am today at the age of twelve, on a frigid overcast day in the winter of 1975. I remember the precise moment, crouching behind a crumbling mud wall, peeking into the alley near the frozen creek. That was a long time ago, but it's wrong what they say about the past, I've learned, about how you can bury it. Because the past claws its way out. Looking back now, I realize I have been peeking into that deserted alley for the last twenty-six years.”

Both of these paragraphs give only a little information and leave us with many questions. Both hint at dark, deeply emotional events. Both are about people. If you can include these three elements in your beginning, readers will want to keep reading.