

THE ENDING FIRST

WHERE DID THE STORY BEGIN?

WHERE SHOULD THE STORY END?

These are key questions best defined up front. Defining the ending first reminds us of where we are headed and where we want this story to end. If chapters begin to unravel while writing, ask yourself: Does this take me further away from, or closer to, the ending that I have already written?

WHY DOES THE STORY END HERE?

WHAT IS THE FEELING YOU WANT TO LEAVE WITH THE READER?

HOW HAVE YOU CHANGED?

WHERE DO YOU GO FROM HERE?

WHAT IN THE STORY IS SYMBOLIC OF THE CHANGE?



THE BEGINNING – THE OPENING SCENE

It doesn't matter what you are writing, you must start with a great "hook". Here are a few tips to help you engage readers in the first paragraph.

1. Start with the spice - something intriguing, some oddity, danger or tension. Jump right into the action. Assume we know who and what the viewpoint character or narrator is talking about.
2. Foreshadow. Imply a change is coming.
3. Raise questions. Use the first few sentences to cause the reader to ask questions. What is going on here? How did he/she get into that situation? Then, provide just enough information to keep the reader from getting lost, but keep them guessing.
4. Provide context. Hint at the setting or situation so the reader gets a broad view of the environment and what is happening around the character.

A FEW EXAMPLES FOR INSPIRATION

"I was sitting in a taxi, wondering if I had overdressed for the evening, when I looked out the window and saw Mom rooting through a dumpster." – The Glass Castle, by Jeanette Walls. We wonder why Mom was dumpster diving, and how Jeanette will react.

"When I was nine, I wrote a vow of celibacy on a piece of paper and ate it." – Not That Kind of Girl, by Lena Dunham.

"International baggage claim in the Brussels airport was large and airy, with multiple carousels circling endlessly. I scurried from one to another, desperately trying to find my black suitcase. Because it was stuffed with drug money, I was more concerned than one might normally be about lost luggage." – Orange Is the New Black: My Year in a Woman's Prison, by Piper Kerman.

