

Crafting the Perfect First Sentence

The first few words you write make or break everything. If your first sentence is dull, readers might not want to continue reading. The pressure is real.

Even acclaimed and well-seasoned writers take time to craft a catchy beginning. In an interview with the [Atlantic](#), famous author Stephen King admits he can spend months or years on an opening line.

But who has months, let alone **years**, to work on a single sentence?

Let me show you a few tricks for writing a great first sentence. With practice, you can use these tips to become super-fast.

What Makes an Opening Sentence Good?

In my experience, the best first sentences of a story will entice and stoke curiosity. A dramatic opening line raises questions and makes readers want to continue immediately. The most excellent sentences might also:

- Draw in your readers' attention
- Create an emotional connection
- Use motion or action
- Explain the setting (time and place)
- Set the rules of the universe
- Show your unique voice
- Provides humor or entertainment
- Introduce the character(s)
- Establish a mood

- Drop a significant fact or paired facts
- Adds a shock factor

Whatever you do, make your first sentence seduce your readers. It should be irresistible, compelling them to continue reading.

Never allow your first sentence to:

- Dive straight into the boring backstory
- Be written in an indirect or passive voice
- Talk only about the weather
- State the obvious, like “you are about to begin reading.”

Examples of Popular First Sentences

1) “I was not sorry when my brother died.” – *Nervous Conditions* by Tsitsi Dangarembga

2) “He believed he was safe.” – *Tar Baby* by Toni Morrison

3) “Mr. and Mrs. Dursley, of number four, Privet Drive, were proud to say that they were perfectly normal, thank you very much.” – *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone* by J.K. Rowling

4) “The morning one of the lost twins returned to Mallard, Lou LeBon ran to the diner to break the news, and even now, many years later, everyone remembers the shock of sweaty Lou pushing through the glass doors, chest heaving, neckline darkened with his own effort.” – *The Vanishing Half* by Brit Bennett

5) “I was born upside down, the umbilical cord looped twice around my neck.” “Poppies” by Ulrica Hume

6) “If you really want to hear about it, the first thing you’ll probably want to know is where I was born, and what my lousy childhood was like, and how my parents were occupied and all before they had me,

and all that David Copperfield kind of crap, but I don't feel like going into it, if you want to know the truth." – *Catcher In the Rye* by J.D. Salinger

7) "Marley was dead: to begin with." *A Christmas Carol* by Charles Dickens

8) "The candleflame and the image of the candleflame caught in the pierglass twisted and righted when he entered the hall and again when he shut the door." – *All the Pretty Horses* by Cormac McCarthy

9) "It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife." *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen

10) "It was a queer, sultry summer, the summer they electrocuted the Rosenbergs, and I didn't know what I was doing in New York." *The Bell Jar* by Sylvia Plath

How to Write the Best First Sentence

The magic opening line for your story doesn't exist. You won't find it hiding on the internet.

How can you grab your readers' focus? How do you engage with your audience? What can you say to make them read the next sentence?

Focus on your readers.

There are many examples of perfect first lines, sure. But they are each perfect for their story. The best lines for your story will reflect its contents.

Keep Searching Until You Figure Out the Perfect Opener

Be patient. The first sentence may take longer than you imagined. You might re-write it multiple times.

Practice makes perfect, right?

The right line will hook your reader until the end of the story. Keep searching until you find the right opener for you.

First Sentence Exercise #1: Open with Dialogue, Action, or a Statement

You know you need to captivate readers and set the scene, but how? Frame your first sentence to include dialogue, action, or a statement. For example:

- **Dialogue:** “I’ve watched through his eyes, I’ve listened through his ears, and I tell you he’s the one.” – *Ender’s Game* by Orson Scott Card
- **Action:** “When he grabs mama’s wrist and yanks her toward the wall-hanging like that, it must hurt.” *Bitterblue* by Kristin Cashore
- **Statement:** “The way I figure it, everyone gets a miracle.” *Paper Towns* by John Green

Play around with your opener and try re-framing the line around each type of popular framework. Write down your three best sentences below.

1.

2.

3.

First Sentence Exercise #2: Generate Random Line Prompts

Use [Writing Exercises.co.uk](https://writingexercises.co.uk) if you are stuck. Generate a random first line and look at how each example goes together. Study the lines and write down your favorite parts about each sample.

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First Sentence Exercise #3: Try Ten

Brainstorm ten opening lines for your piece. Avoid focusing on any sentence for too long. Instead, write out as your ideas quickly to move past the blockage. The best line you come up with is often towards the end, so push past ten if you have the steam.

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