

Fishing for Readers, How to Hook 'Em

Everyone wants to sell their fiction. The best way to do that is to write an opening that drags the editor or the reader down into the story and doesn't give them an out.

A writer has about one hundred and fifty words to convince an editor or reader to keep reading. Writers should use them to the best advantage.

This technique teaches the seven point plot structure, how the first three points are crucial to good story bones, how sensory detail adds flesh to the them, and how character voice clothes them. The focused practice tool will give you an opening that grabs the reader and pulls them under, deep into your story.

Seven Point Plot Structure

- 1) Character
- 2) Need a setting
- 3) A conflict/problem (doesn't have to be the story, just one bothering them)
- 4) Character tries to solve the problem, intelligently
- 5) Character must fail or can succeed-- things get worse as a direct result
- 6) Things are going to crash and burn if they don't succeed (if he dies you must tell them at the beginning of the story) climax
- 7) Validation you tell the reader there are no more try/fail cycles; you are done

Opening 1-3

Middle 4-5

End 6-7

(a) Beginning, middle, and end This is the structure of the 150 words you have to convince anyone to keep reading.

Sensory Detail

Working all five senses into your manuscript makes it richer and involves your brain in the story to a large degree, based on an article in The New York Times (http://www.nytimes.com/2012/03/18/opinion/sunday/the-neuroscience-of-your-brain-on-fiction.html?pagewanted=1&_r=3).

The brain doesn't know the difference between doing something and reading a richly detailed description of something and reacts the same to either, firing off a lot of synapses. So books that include lots of sensual detail will light up more parts of the brain, making it more enjoyable and memorable.

Sensory detail adds flesh to the bones of the structure. Character voice puts the clothes on.

- (a) Think of some “voicely” books you like? Why? What does voice add to the story and the reading experience?
- (b) Character voice is key to jumping out of the slush pile

Character Voice Defined

All setting is Point of View and Point of view equals Character Voice which is comprised of

1. Accent--where the character is from
2. Attitude--what the character wears
3. Content--what the character sees or says about what they see/say. Not necessarily dialogue
4. Opinion--what the character believes
5. Action--what the character is doing/how they behave. Characters don't have to be moving to have action.
6. Manuscript--how the text on the page reflects the action and the mood.
 - Character action drives the structure/look of your manuscript.
 - Character emotion drives the look of your manuscript.
 - Agitated character, manuscript looks agitated.

Lolling, the shape of paragraphs indicates the lazy Sunday afternoon in the hammock

Long slows it down.

Short, choppy sentences and paragraphs convey confusion, anger, fear, etc., and speed up the action, giving a breathless sensation to the reader.

Using sensory detail is also a clever way to add character and voice to the story. You can sprinkle the senses in like a good oregano *from the Point of View of the Character*.

These three samples contain 150 word story openings with a Character in a Setting with a Problem and include all five senses--taste, smell, hearing, seeing, feeling

This is *hard* to do. It takes practice, but the benefits of focused practice with this technique will make your writing richer and more memorable across the board.

This technique is good for regrounding at the beginning of each new chapter as well.

Samples

Marriage of Convenience

Leigh Saunders

(science fiction)

<http://amzn.to/2wz6rA4>

first 149 words:

“They want what?”

I (character) pushed myself to a sitting position, and briefly realized that I was still wearing the same clothes I'd had on the last time I saw (sight) Jenner – which my bedside (setting) chrono told me was two days before (see) – and that I reeked of sweat (smell). My hair hadn't seen a brush in at least three days (sight), and my mouth tasted like I'd been licking the floor in my sleep (taste), but none of that mattered, I just had pneumonia (feeling by implication). Jenner had seen me in worse shape.

Besides, this was business.

I pushed the tangled mass of my hair over my shoulder and grabbed the notepad from Jenner's hand. He'd programmed the typeface himself, but the delicately stylized lettering didn't alter the harsh reality of the words on the screen.

The Rhysa had changed the rules for the trade negotiations. (problem)

Just when I thought it was safe to get sick.

To Wrest Our Bodies From the Fire

by T. Thorn Coyle

The Panther Chronicles, Book Two (a four book series)

<https://www.amazon.com/Wrest-Bodies-Fire-Panther-Chronicles-ebook/dp/B073XSRHFM>

Chapter Zero: Lizard

Lizard (character) thought that he was dreaming. There was pounding...and then, with a rush of air to the lungs, he was awake and coughing (feeling).

The smell of cordite and gunpowder assaulted him (smell with taste implied) as the noise established itself as not inside his head, but just above.

A strange thumping sound, like boots kicking, coming from up on the roof, and the whump whump whump of a helicopter rotor (setting implied).

Then Cotton's voice shouted (hear) from downstairs.

"Wake up! Wake up! They're coming in!" followed quickly by the bam, bam, bam and the splintering crash of wood exploding inward (hear). The downstairs door was being battered down (problem).

Lizard shook himself upright on the raspy carpeted floor, raking a hand across his eyes to clear them (sight implied). His other hand was already on the rifle he'd fallen asleep next to. The rapid fire of automatics, punctuated with the carefully placed shots from a .45, cracked through the small building from downstairs (hear).

"Blind Leaps"

By Ron Collins

Fantasy

Short story from *Tempest* anthology

<https://www.amazon.com/Tempest-Valdemar-Mercedes-Lackey-ebook/dp/B01CZCW4LS>

93 words

Startled, Nwah (character) snapped out of a daydream.

Her fur tingled (feel). A delicious knot of pressure (touch) seeped from her body as if she breathed it out in a single, long exhale. It was late in the afternoon. The sound of water sliding over rock (hear) came low to her ears. The smell of the forest (setting) was delicate fronds of fir trees over the coarse aroma of river wort (smell). A spider spun her web overhead, silently, but with ancient movements (see) that made Nwah feel something deep inside her.

She felt embarrassed, though she couldn't say why. (problem)

Now it's Time to Practice.

Story Opening Exercise

- You are going to write three separate openings describing the **SAME SCENE**.
- **150 words each opening MAX!!!!**
- The scene is somewhere in either a café, a restaurant, a hotel lobby, or on a beach.
- Have 3 people in this scene.

In #1, describe the scene as if you were beginning a story from Character 1's point of view.

In #2, describe the scene as if you were beginning the same story from Character 2's point of view.

In #3, describe the scene as if you were beginning the story from Character 3's point of view.

Do not link these three scenes as if they were part of the same manuscript. **These openings represent three different stories in three different manuscripts.** *Think of it like trying to decide whose point of view the book should be told from.*

Write all three in First Person.

If you don't get all three done, I urge you to finish the focused practice later. And keep practicing the technique until it is unconscious.

Each narrative voice should be *very* different from the others. How do you achieve that?

Remember: All Setting is Opinion. Character Voice=

Accent
Attitude
Content
Opinion
Actions
Manuscript

Example Scene 1-1

I settled into the stiff chair, nestled among the riot of plants stabbed by shafts of sunlight in the lobby. The tink-tink of water tricking down the stone fountain could almost convince me I was in a jungle, in a blind, stalking my prey. The Essex hotel's granite reservation counter belied that fact, but I felt comfortable in the setting, which scared me.

Besri had taken the bait and the trap was ready to spring. But my prey was dangerous, ancient, and canny. Failure would ruin years of careful work. I drummed calloused fingers on the formica table top as Besri ran scarlet nails up Cal's suit coat. *Stay cool.* There's a good man. Get her up to the room, roger her properly. It was a shame to let Besri eat Cal's dreams, his hopes, his ragged horror, but revenge for my wife's murder was a small price to pay.

Scene 1-2

Sunlight streaming through the skylight at the Essex Hotel almost made the ugly lines of the modern furniture pretty. If only the water chuckling down the natural stone wall wasn't chlorinated, the man-made jungle could seem like home. Cal shifted beside me at the counter and I reached out lazily, running scarlet nails across his arm. His pounding heart excited me, made my mouth water, my body tingle. I'd straddle him, take him inside me, ride him ragged. His sharp horror when I ate his hopes like sugar, licked his dreams, dripping out like caramel, would add a welcome leaven. I looked toward the jungle and saw the man again. He stared at me, his eyes like arrows aimed straight at my heart. Was he hunting me? A bud of fear blossomed in my chest. I trembled at the possibility of danger. I'd need a plan, but first things first.

Scene 1-3

Fear bangs my heart like a bass drum as I stand at the Essex Hotel reservation counter. I concentrate on the modern furniture, all pale greens and soft blues haloed by the golden sunlight streaming through the skylight. My mouth tastes of the coffee we just

drank. Besri snuggles against me, her scarlet nails tracing over my arm. She's a tiger, no, much more dangerous than that. And Abram says I have to take her up to the room and fuck her. I breathe, seemingly calm, and smell the riotous jungle that crowns the lobby. If I could, I'd bolt past him sitting in that greenery, and burrow down into the mulch, like a hunted rabbit. But he set me in her path, and I can't run now, no way. He says he'll trap her. He promises I'll be safe, but I don't believe him, not for one lousy second.