

Back to the Beginning

Here you are, ready to start your novel! We know what you're thinking. You're thinking "Okay, I've got my paper, my pencil, my lucky pencil sharpener, 15 packs of gum, a month's supply of energy drinks, and my noveling iPod playlist to get me pumped and ready to go. So now what?"

If you are feeling a little nervous, and the blank page and you are having a staring contest, don't worry! It's perfectly natural. Many novelists will tell you that figuring out the first few lines of a novel is the hardest part. Lucky for you, you're about a million steps ahead of most novelists—you've already got your characters, your plot, your setting, and you know how to write some seriously awesome dialogue! Not bad for a month's work.

Like we said earlier, there are several ways to start your novel. You can begin with the inciting incident or work backwards from the resolution to the beginning. Novels are filled with flashbacks, flash-forwards, and unexpected plot twists. So feel free to begin anywhere you like!

When telling a story, you can ...

➤ ***Start at the beginning:***

Stories can start at the set-up, before anything has happened. Stories like this often begin with some phrase like 'once upon a time,' or 'long ago,' or a description of the protagonist going about his/her/its normal life.

➤ ***Start at your inciting incident:***

When a story starts at the inciting incident, we first meet the protagonist experiencing that event that sets the ball rolling for the story. Then the author will go back and describe what led up to the incident.

➤ ***Start in the middle of things (in medias res):***

This is also the pattern for the story starting with the climax, falling action, or resolution. We call those kinds of beginnings in media res, meaning 'in the middle of things' in Latin. When you start here, you throw a whole lot of information at the reader as though they were familiar with the story, then you jump backwards in time to explain. Think of movies that start when the villain's sword is raised over the hero's head and then the scene cuts to a time when the hero was at his desk and it says 'three years earlier' at the bottom of the screen.

➤ ***Start at the end:***

The final way you can start a novel is at the end. This is tricky, since you can't give all the details away. You can tell the reader how things end up, but leave enough mystery for them to keep reading.

Beginnings

Where Does It Begin?

In remembering your own day, do you sometimes jump around?

Many people don't even start at the beginning. Real life has this funny thing about it where you always try to start from the beginning, but when you tell a story you can start wherever you want!

- Start at the beginning.
- Start at your inciting incident.
- Start in the middle of things (*in medias res*).
- Start at the end.

Recall the beginning of a favorite novel:

Can you identify which type of beginning the author used and how this “set up” the plot for the rest of the book?

What are some examples of each type of beginning from novels you have read:

How does each type of beginning impact the way the rest of the novel would have to be written?
For example, if you start the novel in media res, you will have to decide whether to proceed chronologically to the climax next or to flash back to the start of the story before moving on to the climax.

Back to the Beginning

Start at the Beginning

As you learned in the "Outlining Your Plot" worksheet, the beginning or set-up of your novel needs to introduce your characters and your conflict. Starting a novel at the very beginning is a great way to ease your readers in. So many stories and fairy tales begin this way (Once upon a time...), that readers feel right at home in your story almost immediately.

There once lived a young girl named Judy who spent almost every moment of every day dreaming about owning her very own horse. And to her surprise, on the morning of her fourteenth birthday, a genie popped out of her box of cornflakes. His name was Bob, and he smelled slightly of onions. But that was okay—she was finally going to get the horse she'd always wanted.

Try starting your novel at the beginning. Take out your plot worksheet and review your set-up. Make sure you include your protagonist in your beginning, and you may also want to introduce your main conflict, and a supporting character.

Start with the Inciting Incident

The inciting incident, as you know, is the moment that changes your protagonist's life and launches them into his/her adventure. Starting with this moment sucks your readers into your story, and leaves them wondering what will happen next.

Two days after Judy's fourteenth birthday, she woke up to find that she had turned into a horse. This was not what she wished for. She should've known not to trust a genie with a name like Bob.

Now try and begin with the inciting incident. Go back and review your inciting incident and then write a beginning to your novel that starts with this event.

Back to the Beginning

Start In medias res

In medias res (pronounced en med-ee-ya rez) is Latin for "in the middle of things." It literally means starting your story right smack in the middle of the action, and then filling in the holes—explaining who the characters are and what got them into the mess they're in. A lot of suspense, mystery, and action novels begin *in medias res*. It's a great way to draw readers in and to make sure they stick around for all the details.

Judy stood standing face to face with the four-headed dragon from the planet Gandoria—its eyes spinning with rage and spit pooling at the corners of its hungry mouths. She couldn't help but wonder how she got here, and more importantly, where Bob was.

Start *in medias res*. Check out your rising action, falling action, and climax to see if there are any moments you might want to start with.

Start at the End

This one is a bit tricky, but well worth a try! You basically tell the ending to your readers, but leave just enough mystery to keep them reading. Then, you can either work backwards to reveal just how that ending came about or jump to any other point of your novel and continue.

When it was all over and Judy was finally the queen of that forsaken land, she looked back and knew that it had all been worth it. She had learned to love Bob even if he did smell like onions, and knew that she would never want to be anything else but the horse she had become.

Start at the end. Try to include clues to the story's main conflict so readers get some idea of what the rest of the novel will be about and intrigue them to learn more.

Now you have a bunch of beginnings to start with. Recopy your favorite in your noveling notebook or onto your computer, and write, write, write!