

# Creative Writing 1

with Johnny Worthen

Week 3 – Once Upon a Time  
Beginnings



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## Today's Plan

- Talk about why beginnings are so important
- Talk about events before the start of the story
- Explore strategies on how to start a story
- Expose cautions on story starts
- Share some great openings



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## Discussion of Reading



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## Critique & Workshop

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## Making Promises

- Getting the reader to turn the page
- The writer makes “unspoken” promises right away
- Covenant between Writer and Reader
  - *I will not waste your time*
  - *It will be consistent*
  - *It will be interesting and rewarding*

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## Before Page One

- While your story starts on page one, the lives of your characters do not.
- Readers need to know what is “normal” for your characters before you can take off and disrupt that normality.
  - “Act 1”
- Readers do not want to read a laundry list of events that explain how your character got to this point.

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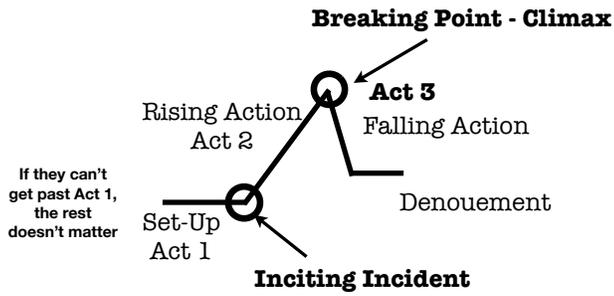
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## Freytag Pyramid as Three Acts

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## Showing The Past

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- **Exposition** – have the character mention the past in relation to the present or future.
- **Dialog** – your character can talk with another character about the past.
- **Flashback** – your character can remember a moment from the past.



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## How to start a story

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- **Any way you want to!**
- After writing for a while, you may find that your story starts later than where you started writing.
- Dialog is good to use very early in your first few pages.
- No matter how or where you start, you have to grab the reader's attention right away and compel them to turn the page.

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# Start at the Start?

- Begin as close to the action (inciting incident) as possible.
- *In Medias Res* (“in the middle of things”)
- If you know where you want your story to go, you can figure out some likely places to start.
- When you are deciding where to begin, try to identify the point in your character’s story that provides the most opportunity for inviting the reader in.
- It’s okay to break the rules – as long as you know why you’re breaking them.

IN MEDIAS RES



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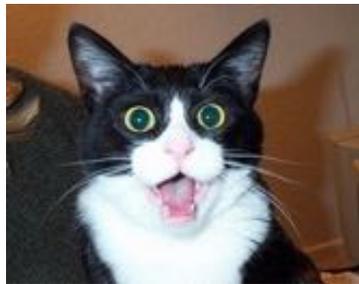
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# What grabs a reader’s attention?

- Action
- Dialog
- Vivid description
- Something surprising



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# Some Cautions

- Beware the “As you know, Bob,” dialog.
- Beware of over-writing descriptions.
- Beware of starting with action— “a sucker punch” — that doesn’t relate to your story in a meaningful way.



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## Other Notes

- Engage as many **SENSES** as possible (smell especially)
- Not all writers write in a linear fashion.
- Prologues are sometimes helpful – but only sometimes, be prepared to cut in later draft.
- Many people find the beginning the hardest part to write. If that's you, it's okay.
- You can write the beginning later.
- Your writing style and process will be your own. Never let anyone try to tell you that one way is better than another.

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## Some Great Openings

- *It was a bright cold day in April, and the clocks were striking thirteen.*  
(1984 - George Orwell)
- *It was a pleasure to burn.*  
(Fahrenheit 451 - Ray Bradbury)
- *In fairy-tales, witches always wear silly black hats and black coats, and they ride on broomsticks. But this is not a fairy-tale. This is about REAL WITCHES.*  
(The Witches - Roald Dahl)
- *One morning, as Gregor Samsa awoke from anxious dreams, he discovered that during the night he had been transformed into a monstrous bug.*  
(The Metamorphosis, Franz Kafka)
- *We were somewhere around Barstow on the edge of the desert when the drugs began to take hold.*  
(Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas - Hunter S. Thompson)

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- *Many years later, as he faced the firing squad, Colonel Aureliano Buendía was to remember that distant afternoon when his father took him to discover ice.*  
(One Hundred Years of Solitude — Gabriel García Márquez)
- *In my younger and more vulnerable years my father gave me some advice that I've been turning over in my mind ever since. "Whenever you feel like criticizing any one," he told me, "just remember that all the people in this world haven't had the advantages that you've had."*  
(The Great Gatsby — F. Scott Fitzgerald)
- *Far out in the uncharted backwaters of the unfashionable end of the Western Spiral arm of the Galaxy lies a small unregarded yellow sun. Orbiting this at a distance of roughly ninety-eight million miles is an utterly insignificant little blue-green planet whose ape-descended life forms are so amazingly primitive that they still think digital watches are a pretty neat idea.*  
(The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy — Douglas Adams)

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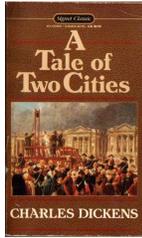
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*It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way — in short, the period was so far like the present period, that some of its noisiest authorities insisted on its being received, for good or for evil, in the superlative degree of comparison only.*

(Tale of Two Cities – Charles Dickens)



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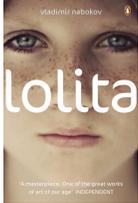
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*Lolita, light of my life, fire of my loins. My sin, my soul. Lo-lee-ta: the tip of the tongue taking a trip of three steps down the palate to tap, at three, on the teeth. Lo. Lee. Ta.*

*She was Lo, plain Lo, in the morning, standing four feet ten in one sock. She was Lola in slacks. She was Dolly at school. She was Dolores on the dotted line. But in my arms she was always Lolita.*

(Lolita - Vladimir Nabokov)

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## Homework for Week 4

- **Writing:**

- Write One Page (<300 words) **Beginning**
  - “Grab me” — Concentrate on opening **promises**

- **Read:**

- “To Build a Fire” by Jack London

**To Share —  
Email to me by Sunday afternoon:  
johnny@johnnyworthen.com**

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