

3 weeks ago

## The Art of Getting Started



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First sentences are a novelist's signature. They should whisper a question to the reader—one answered slowly, deliciously, by the story. They should make an editor lean forward. They should crack the story wide open.

I spend hours—days, sometimes—writing and rewriting that first line. I've tossed more than I've kept. And that's okay. A great first sentence carries the weight of everything that comes after it.

**It has to do a lot of heavy lifting:**

- Suggest tone
- Spark curiosity
- Hint at character
- And, ideally, set a little trouble in motion

Here's one I wrote for *Fallen Angels*:


“A bit of trouble with attempted murder sent Jeb Nubey over the Texarkana border in the unfortunate direction of hunger.”

In one line, you already know a few things:

Jeb’s in hot water. He’s probably not new to it. He’s a little unlucky—and very human. There’s trouble, voice, and setting—all baked in from the start.

The first line opens the door. It tells your reader, *You want to know what happens next.*

So take your time. Shape it carefully. Toss a few. Then keep the one that makes the story impossible not to read.

 **Try this:** Write three different first lines for the same story idea. Don’t worry about perfection. Just make them whisper trouble.

Posted 3 weeks ago by [Patty](#)



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**Patty** [August 16, 2020 at 9:07 AM](#)

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