



KEY STRUCTURAL ELEMENTS

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10 CORE COMPONENTS OF BEGINNINGS

The external goal, The internal goal, the inciting incident, backstory, a stellar opening sentence, language, character, setting, foreshadowing, theme

- Extracts in the GCSE English language paper are often taken from the beginnings of texts, even the opening scenes.
 - Therefore, it is important to understand how beginnings work
 - Beginnings, especially opening scenes, have ten core components:
 - The external goal
 - Also known as the initial surface problem
 - Win
 - Stop
 - Retrieve
 - Escape
 - Revenge
 - Deliver
 - Maintain
 - The external goal is an external, physical representation of the protagonist's internal goal
 - The internal goal
 - Also known as the story-worthy problem; a character can have one or all of these goals:
 - Positive relationships
 - Self-acceptance (positive evaluation of oneself and one's life)
 - Personal growth
 - Environmental mastery (the capacity to effectively manage one's life and the surrounding environment)
 - Autonomy
 - Purpose in life
 - the inciting incident;
 - The inciting incident of a story is the event that sets the main character or characters on the journey that will occupy them throughout the narrative.
 - Typically, this incident will upset the balance within the main character's world.
 - The inciting incident introduces this problem by either bringing to the forefront a buried problem or creating a new one, thus beginning the gradual revealing process that will encompass the rest of the story as the protagonist's—and the reader's—understanding of the true nature of the story-worthy problem deepens.
 - By the end of the story, the character realizes the truth about this problem, and the truth reveals the irony of his/her initial beliefs
 - backstory;
 - There are times when a backstory is necessary. In many





- police procedurals,
- mysteries,
- thrillers
- and related genres,
 - the story begins often with a crime being committed.
 - The protagonist is nowhere around the scene at the book's beginning.
 - The author has to decide when this backstory is necessary
- a stellar opening sentence;
 - This provides a hook and encourages the reader to find out what happens next
- language;
- character;
- setting;
- foreshadowing.
 - Foreshadowing is a literary device used to give an indication or hint of what is to come later in the story. Foreshadowing is useful for creating
 - suspense,
 - a feeling of unease,
 - a sense of curiosity,
 - or a mark that things may not be as they seem.
 -
- Theme
 - Beginnings introduce the themes that the rest of the story will explore

GOALS OF OPENINGS

The opening of a story carries an awesome responsibility,

- and the ten core components outlined in the previous section work together to make sure the opening meets reader demands.
- The goals of the opening scene are:
 - (1) to successfully introduce the internal goal of the protagonist;
 - Also known as the story-worthy problem
 - (2) to hook the readers;
 - (3) to establish the rules of the story; and
 - (4) to forecast the ending of the story.
 - the beginnings of the best stories very often contain at least a hint of the ending.
 - As T.S. Eliot said, "In my beginning is my end."
 - If the opening fails to accomplish any one of these elements, it will be faulty at best and unreadable at worst.

7 WAYS AUTHORS START THEIR STORIES: INTRODUCTION





1. Action
2. Dialogue
3. Internal Monologue
4. Mystery
5. Premonition
6. Profound Statement
7. Setting

7 WAYS AUTHORS START THEIR STORIES: ACTION

THE NUMBER ONE WAY to open a genre book is with action (in media res),

- Announce the action is taking place and place the enemy close, but not too close.
 - This allows you to get your hero's reaction to the danger, providing valuable insight into
 - who they are,
 - where they are,
 - and what they are up to when the action occurs:
 - Logen plunged through the trees, bare feet slipping and sliding on the wet earth, the slush, the wet pine needles, breath rasping in his chest, blood thumping in his head. He stumbled and sprawled onto his side, nearly cut his chest open on his own axe, lay there panting, peering through the shadow forest.
 - We learn Logen has an axe, so whatever he's running from is more powerful than he and his weapon can handle.
 - We also increase the potential danger of his "bare feet slipping and sliding" from the first sentence by making Logen fall in the second.
 - That lets us know Logen is not invincible, nor is he immune to fear or accidents.
 - Abercrombie has efficiently humanized his hero right from the start by showing, not telling.
 - If he'd simply told us Logen was afraid, that would have been lazy writing.
 - Instead, he shows us through internal and external sensory details.
 - The fast, choppy style conveys panic.
 - As a result, readers can empathize with Logen.
 - The only problem is, we don't know much about him. That's where the second paragraph comes in....

7 WAYS AUTHORS START THEIR STORIES: DIALOGUE

LIKE ACTION, when an author starts with dialogue, they are often in media res.

- Dialogue puts the author into the mouth of a character with something brief and important to say.
 - It can't be, "Hello, how are you?" or "Please, sit down."





- Anything normal is the kiss of death.
 - Dialogue must be powerful, and, like action, it must refer to something exciting that either
 - has happened,
 - is happening,
 - or is about to happen,
 - so, authors try to make sure there is at least a hint of mystery or danger in their words.
 - “We should head back,” Gared urged as the woods began to grow dark around them. “The wildlings are dead.” — GEORGE R. R. MARTIN, *A GAME OF THRONES*
 - Although Gared is a minor character, this third person opening is still an excellent beginning.
 - We get an immediate sense of peril, and know that there has been a battle, yet some greater danger remains. What is it? We cannot help but find out. Also, notice how the author mentions the darkening forest between the dialogue. That helps set the scene... and the danger.

7 WAYS AUTHORS START THEIR STORIES: (INTERNAL) MONOLOGUE

A monologue is a literary device by which the reader gains access to the interior thoughts and emotions of a character.

- This is usually called “internal monologue,”
 - Monologue has several advantages over dialogue,
 - chiefly its intimacy.
 - We are firmly rooted in the head of the protagonist.
 - The second advantage is it operates in the realm of thought, not speech, and theoretically, that frees the writer to talk about anything.
 - But whatever is thought or said must be filtered through the viewpoint of the protagonist,
 - so, it may not be entirely factual.
 - This is especially true in the case of unreliable narrators who may
 - lie to the reader,
 - omit important facts,
 - or steadfastly believe certain untruths, such as Holden Caulfield in J.D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*.

7 WAYS AUTHORS START THEIR STORIES: MYSTERY

A MYSTERY MUST INTRIGUE the reader, raising a question worth answering.

- It is often expressed in the form of dialogue or monologue, though there is no hard or fast rule.
 - *Outside the blood spirals down.* — DAN SIMMONS, *SHAVE AND A HAIRCUT, TWO BITES*
-





7 WAYS AUTHORS START THEIR STORIES: PREMONITION

PREMONITION IS an overwhelming but unprovable feeling that something important is about to happen.

- Usually, it's the anticipation of a negative event, but can be felt prior to positive events as well.
 - [Twenty minutes before the quake hit, Stanley Banks was standing at his living room window.](#) — RICHARD LAYMON, *QUAKE*
-

7 WAYS AUTHORS START THEIR STORIES: PROFOUND STATEMENT

[The secret is how to die.](#) — DAN BROWN, *THE LOST SYMBOL*

- Some authors offer only a single line like Dan Brown,
 - or a few explanatory sentences before switching to how it relates to the hero:
 - [Some people are just born evil. No twisted childhood trauma, no abusive stepfather, or alcoholic mother, just plain God-awful mean. Dr. Jasmine Cooper, dream therapist and empath, believed that, knew that. She had spent too many years looking inside the minds of murderers not to believe it.](#) — LAURELL K. HAMILTON, *HERE BE DRAGONS*
-

7 WAYS AUTHORS START THEIR STORIES: SETTING

ONCE THE MOST COMMON WAY to open a story, setting can be tricky to make interesting. It better be a very good (and brief) description if it's going to hook today's readers.

- Compare these examples
 - [Darkness. Winter. A night of frost and no moon.](#) — BERNARD CORNWELL, *SWORD SONG*
 - [It was night. It was hot. The sea wasn't far away.](#) — DAY KEENE, *HOME IS THE SAILOR*
 - What do these story hooks both have in common?
 - They both use short, choppy sentences to describe the setting.
 - This tells the reader it is going to be a grim, nasty tale, and also an adventure—
 - perhaps one best not taken by the protagonist.
 - You don't have to use choppy prose; you can convey the same message in one clean sentence just as easily:
 - [It was one of those tourist traps that have turned the coast of Florida into a glittering facade.](#) — ROBERT EDMOND ALTER, *CARNY KILL*
 - This paints a seedy picture of a world of greed and illusion, which is exactly what the carnival in question is: a cotton candy deathtrap of attractive exteriors and lies waiting for the protagonist to walk in...
 - Maybe the setting needs a slightly longer, more complex story hook:
 - [The place was on the Sunset Strip, a second-floor outfit with several big-lettered banners...](#)





IRONY - DEFINITION

Irony is another core structural element of stories

- Almost all good stories feature irony
 - Once an author has set an audience's expectations, they can control the relationship between expectation and outcome, and that means that they can generate irony.
 - irony is the heart of meaning.
 - Irony can have many different definitions, but we can define it as
 - any meaningful gap between expectation and reality.
 - The tricky part is that word meaningful.
 - Why are some gaps ironic, while others are merely unexpected?
 - In truly ironic situations, characters are trying to preserve a false expectation or prevent an unwanted outcome, and then reality upsets their expectations or efforts.

IRONY - EFFECTS

Ironic story elements create meaning because they lure the audience into expecting a certain outcome and then upset that expectation in more ways than one.

- This not only piques the audience's interest,
 - but it also upsets their certainties.
 - It lets them know the author is going to do things they don't expect in ways they haven't seen before;
 - It also forces readers to question their ideas and values
 - and ultimately show them things they don't already know.
 - This is why almost every element of good writing should be packed with irony.
 - An ironic difference between expectation and outcome can be
 - comedic
 - (expected a hug but got a pie in the face, or vice versa)
 - or it can be dramatic
 - (sought justice but found injustice, or vice versa).
 - Either way, the greater the gulf between expectation and outcome, the more meaning the story will have.
 - Likewise, the smaller the gap, the less meaningful it will be, no matter how well it is written.

IRONY – GENERAL TECHNIQUES

When stories seem meaningless, it is usually because they lack irony.





- When stories are especially powerful, you can be certain the author has packed it full of many different types of irony.
 - Learning to recognize and control irony in a story is one of the most important skills a writer can have.
 - Here are some techniques for creating irony
 - present a fundamentally ironic concept (which will sometimes be encapsulated by an ironic title).
 - For example, the things we love can be the things that destroy us
 - three major techniques for ironic characterization:
 - a protagonist with an ironic backstory,
 - an ironic contrast between their exterior and interior,
 - and a great flaw that's the ironic flip side of a great strength.
 - Story structure is often centered around another great irony:
 - Though the protagonist might initially perceive this challenge as an unwelcome crisis, it will often prove to be a crisis that ironically provides just the opportunity they need, directly or indirectly, to address their longstanding social problems and/or internal flaws.
 - Each scene will be more meaningful if the protagonist encounters a turn of events that upsets some pre-established ironic presumptions about what would happen.
 - Likewise, the conclusion of each scene will be more meaningful if the character's actions result in an ironic scene outcome in which the events of the scene ironically flip the original intention, even if things turn out well for them.
 - intentionally ironic dialogue, such as sarcasm.
 - unintentionally ironic dialogue,
 - such as when there's an ironic contrast between word and deed or an ironic contrast between what the character says and what the audience knows.
 - The story's ironic thematic dilemma,
 - the story's overall dilemma comes down to a choice of
 - good versus good (or bad versus bad),
 - stories may also have several smaller ironic dilemmas along the way,
 - in which the characters must consistently choose between
 - goods,
 - or between evils, throughout the story.

POINT OF VIEW (POV) - DEFINITION

The narrative point of view—POV—is the perspective from which a story or at least a section of the story is told.

- It's like a lens through which readers view the events.
 - POV makes reading a book a more intimate experience compared to other forms of storytelling such as movies and TV shows.
 - In novels and short stories, readers aren't limited to seeing just the outer actions and hearing the dialogue.
 - They get to
 - dip into the minds of the characters,
 - see the events through their eyes,
 - and experience their emotions.
 - They are





- becoming the protagonist
- and living the story instead of just watching it.
 - That's why as readers, we're often much more emotionally involved in books than movies.

POINT OF VIEW (POV) – DRAMATIC FUNCTION

Point of view determines

- how readers will view characters,
- how close they feel to them,
- and with whom they will identify.

Point of view helps authors

- create tension
- and suspense by controlling how much information they give their readers about what's going on in the story.
 - Readers will keep turning the pages if they get to discover what will happen next along with the POV character.
 - A close point of view encourages authors to show instead of tell—
 - which basically means bringing the story to life instead of delivering a secondhand report.

POINT OF VIEW (POV) – TYPES

Most novels are told either in first-person or third-person POV.

- These terms are derived from the pronouns used to tell the story.
 - First-person POV uses the pronoun “I”
 - while third-person POV uses the pronouns “he” or “she.”
 - Third-person is further divided into several subtypes.
 - First-person POV:
 - The narrator is one of the characters in the story,
 - so the reader has access to only this character's feelings and thoughts.
 - Second-person POV:
 - The narrator is an outside observer who tells the story using the pronoun “you,”
 - which casts the reader in the role of the protagonist.
 - The author supplants and explicitly directs the thoughts and emotions of the reader.
 - Third-person omniscient POV (also called omniscient POV):
 - The narrator is an all-knowing and often opinionated entity who's not a character in the story.
 - He or she can see into the minds of all characters.
 - Third-person limited POV:
 - The narrator is a neutral observer, not a character in the story.
 - He or she has access to the mind of only one character
 - and can tell readers only what this character is thinking or feeling.





- Deep third-person POV:
 - Like in first-person POV, the narrator is a character in the story.
 - Like in third-person limited POV, readers can only be told about the thoughts and feelings of one character.
- Third-person multiple POV:
 - This is a variant of third-person limited POV,
 - but it can also be used in a deep point of view.
 - The narrator is either a character or a neutral observer.
 - He or she has access to the thoughts and feelings of only one character per scene (or per chapter),
 - but the author can switch to the point of view of a different character at scene or chapter breaks.
- Third-person objective POV:
 - The narrator is a neutral observer who views the action from the outside,
 - like a camera, and cannot reveal the thoughts or feelings of any character.

SETTING - DEFINITION

Story setting is not merely the physical backdrop of the tale.

- It may also include the
 - historical background
 - and cultural attitudes of a given
 - place and time,
 - the mood of a time,
 - and how the story people talk.
 - Also tied closely to setting may be such details as
 - the author's style,
 - a period's traditions,
 - and the kind of story the writer wishes to relate.
 - All of these factors must dovetail properly with the story's
 - plot,
 - its characters,
 - the theme
 - the genre
 - and the desired general emotional tone of the piece if the finished fiction is to "work" for the reader.
 - Would Dickens's *A Christmas Carol* have the same kind of impact if set in the English countryside?
 - Think about a story you have studied; how would a change of setting alter the meaning of the story?

SETTING - EFFECTS





good handling of a proper setting can

- "decorate" a story,
 - thus enhancing its
 - color
 - and general appeal as well as making it more convincing.
 - Reader involvement may be intensified by proper handling of setting because physical, sensory descriptions of the story world allow the reader to experience those surroundings through his own imagination —
 - as if he were "really there,"
 - seeing,
 - hearing,
 - breathing,
 - tasting
 - and feeling the world of the tale.
 - Vivid, evocative physical description of setting can transport the reader into the story's universe.
 - The reader may also derive an additional sense of involvement and satisfaction if he is given, as part of the setting, factual data which fascinates him and makes him feel he is learning something.
 - This kind of involvement and possible satisfaction not only predisposes the reader to be friendly to the writer, and generally relaxed, it also makes him more likely to believe the story's plot and characters because he is already having a pleasurable experience from the setting, and believes in the story world.

