

GRAB READERS'

ATTENTION:

Writing a Great Hook



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Published by  Little Dog Communications

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GRAB YOUR READER'S ATTENTION: Writing a Great Hook

WHAT IS A HOOK IN FICTION?

Within the first few sentences, readers decide whether the story feels interesting, emotionally engaging, or worth continuing. A hook is designed to grab their attention and draw them in before they've learned anything at all about the story.

Hooks can take all forms, such as a thought-provoking opening sentence, a punchy phrase, clever joke, intriguing opening paragraph, quick but interesting story, a question, a visual image, or even an entire chapter crafted specifically to keep a reader reading. Frankly, a hook can be whatever is new, unexpected, breaks a pattern, or even shocks the reader.

Hooks are used in all types of storytelling, including in advertising, marketing, nonfiction, and fiction. When you create a strong opening to a story, you can make readers feel tension, sympathy, attraction, fear, humor, or heartbreak almost instantly. Once emotion is involved, readers become attached to the outcome and will keep turning pages. That's the goal. Motivate them to keep reading by raising a question in their mind, making them curious, inflaming an emotion, painting an emotional picture, making them laugh, or provoking thought or debate.

WHY DO YOU NEED A HOOK?

Studies have shown that humans now have an 8-second attention span. This means that a weak opening can lose the reader's attention quickly, prompting them to turn to one of an endless supply of alternatives. Therefore, if you don't grab their interest immediately, they are more likely to stop reading and move on to something else.

But remember! The goal isn't just to "grab attention," but create a psychological need to continue reading. It's important to link the hook to the story's theme, mood, or genre/style and to create something the reader feels compelled to investigate further.

EXAMPLES:

Mysteries: Hooks work extremely well in mysteries because they imply danger, create immediate intrigue, and usually make the reader ask *why?* Here's the opening from my book *A Candidate for Murder*.

It was a good night for a murder.

A storm raged around him as he waited patiently in the shadows. The wind wrestled with the trees, and a punishing rain flooded the parking lot. With the temperature dipping precariously close to freezing, he anticipated sleet, if not snow. There were only a few cars on the road and fewer individuals who were foolish enough to wander outside on foot.

Yes, it was a good night for a murder.

Horror stories: In a horror story, you want to allude to the horror that awaits the reader without giving too much away. You also want to create a certain tone along with a feeling of unease. You can do this through imagery. This is the opening from my short story, *If I Should Die Before I Wake*.

A noise from somewhere in the bowels of the old house woke her. It wasn't a thud, or the house as it settled on its foundation. It sounded more like a low growl, a rumbling in the back of the throat. And it chilled her to the bone.

Dramatic stories: In a dramatic story, it's critical to set the stage for the emotional storms to come. You do this by creating a human connection and emotional immediacy, which helps to make readers curious as to how things turn out in the end. Here's an example:

"My mother didn't want me. In fact, she attempted an abortion when she was six months pregnant. Like most things in her life, however, she screwed it up, and here I am."

Humorous stories: If you're writing humor, you want to establish the tone of the book quickly. You can do that by revealing a funny narrator's voice. Here's an example of that from my book *A History of Murder*.

"I've begun to think murder follows me around. No really."

This immediately shows us how Julia Applegate, the narrator, reacts to the world around her. In humor, you can also use contradiction or surprise, illustrate an absurd situation, or treat something casually that is actually serious, such as the opening line from my book *A Key to Murder*.

"My uncle was dead before he hit the floor. Not in the literal sense. He would die a minute or so later. But I didn't know that at the time."

Love story: In a love story, it is important to create chemistry, emotional vulnerability, while showing a unique and dynamic voice. Here's a great example from *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen:

"It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife."



FINAL THOUGHTS

In the end, hooks create curiosity about the story in front of them. A good hook will introduce something unresolved, such as a secret, danger, unusual behavior, contradiction, or desire. In dramas and love stories, readers are looking for emotion, so the hook should foreshadow that.

Without a hook, readers are left to wonder when the story will begin. A hook creates a promise and sparks movement towards that promise immediately. For instance, a romantic hook promises relationships, conflict, and emotion. A thriller hook promises tension, danger, and suspense. And a fantasy hook promises new worlds, wonder, and surprise.

No matter what you're writing, the best way to succeed in writing a hook is to connect with emotional triggers from the story and to create strong imagery. Take a few minutes and try your hand at the following exercise.



HOOK EXERCISE

Write a hook for your story using each of the following prompts. Then, share them with someone you trust to ask for their feedback—namely would any or all of the hooks work in making them want to read more.

A Question:

A Bold Statement of Fact:

A Statement of Mood:

A Strong Visual Image:

Something Humorous:



LYNN BOHART - BIO

After retiring from a 35+ year career in the nonprofit world, Ms. Bohart launched her own freelance writing company, Lil Dog Communications, and now writes for clients all over the world. She holds a master's degree in theater, has taught "Crafting the Story" through Green River College for 10+ years, and has written for both Patch.com and the Renton Reporter.

Currently, she has eleven paranormal mystery novels, two short story books, and three nonfiction books on Amazon. She also offers several free and low-cost books on writing through her website.

As a mystery and true crime aficionado, she has redesigned her author website into *The No Alibi Zone* to showcase criminal investigations. Her bi-monthly newsletter called "Let's Talk About Murder," includes blog posts and interviews with people who talk about, write about, and investigate crime as well as information on writing, her summit presentations, and her books. You can sign up to receive the newsletter for free by going to her website: [Sign up here](#).

If you're interested in Lynn's story coaching services, you can visit her website to get information or reach out to her at: Lildog67@icloud.com.

Would you like to pick up one of the companion books in this series? Click [HERE](#).

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