

Short Story Leads: Hooking the Reader

Begin a story in the middle of a conversation.

“If you don’t put that away right now, you and I are gonna have problems,” Carla snarled as Janet scribbled in her writer’s notebook. Janet stared at her round face, squinting eyes, and muscular arms crossed in front of her chest for just a second, snarled right back at her, and continued to write furiously. All the other students around the playground were quiet.

“Just who do you think you are?” Mrs. Fleming asked as April slammed her notebook on the desk.

Begin with a description:

Millie’s face turned red when she entered the room. Staped on the walls all around were pictures of her. There she was holding the first place trophy high above her head after her team won the state basketball tournament. Above the dresser was a poster-size photograph of her eighth grade graduation; she was standing proudly at the podium delivering her class president’s speech. To the left of the door was a collage of all her school pictures dating back to first grade, her gap-toothed smile framed by her dark face and tangled brown hair. How had someone she had never seen before created such a monument in her honor?

Jason’s house was a lot like a museum. There were pretty, breakable objects everywhere and you weren’t allowed to touch a thing.

Begin with background information (exposition):

Kevin was accustomed to being first. Since he had started track, a sixth grader on the high school team, he had always been a champion.

As long as she could remember, Dimein’s name had always been mispronounced by the teacher on the first day of school.

Begin with a peek into a character’s mind:

Not this time, you won’t, I thought as I stood there staring into my father’s eyes. I picked up the basketball and began to dribble with my left hand.

How could things have gone so wrong? I asked myself, as I looked out over a sea of laughing faces.

Start with a simile, metaphor, hyperbole, or pun:

They murdered him. (The *Chocolate War*)

Start with a startling statement:

When I was little, I would think of ways to kill my daddy. (Ellen *Foster*)

Start with a question:

What would you do if you were standing in the mall one day minding your own business, when suddenly, the girl who you knew you would spend your whole life with . . . the girl who makes your heart beat like the drumming in Metallica’s best songs . . . the woman whose finger could crush you like a bug or hold you like a delicate flower . . . walks by? What would you do if you had never seen her before and did not even know her name? You would do what I did, turn red in the face and tell your posse to quit starin’.

Have you ever eaten one of those sugar-coated pieces of fried dough at the fair? I think they're called *elephant ears* or some such.

Begin with a quote from a song, movie, famous person or book:

David stared at the poster through the store window. It was a sketch of a man. "Nothing can be loved or hated until it is first understood" was written below the picture, with the name Leonardo DaVinci. If only his parents would follow that DaVinci's advice.

"*It's the end of the world as we know it and I feel fine.*" Kevin spun in circles as he listened to his older brother's old R.E.M. record in the basement. In a time like this, the lyrics seemed particularly suitable.