

Use this checklist to check your opening chapter includes the following:

Your protagonist AND why your reader should care about them

When introducing the protagonist, readers will want to know information about him or her – their background, gender and so on, but more importantly, as the author, you need to entice the reader to *care* about the main character. You can do this by including emotion in the scene and making them human and relatable.

The goal / objective

If you're writing fiction, it might be difficult to introduce the main goal of your protagonist so early on, but you can hint at what the protagonist wants in your opening chapter. That doesn't mean that the goal needs to be explicitly identified on the first page, but the seeds should be planted early. What is it about the character's current situation they want to change?

If you're writing nonfiction, such as personal development book or a business book, this task is a little easier because you're introducing the goal of the reader. For example, if it's a book on time management, the goal might be for readers to be able to have an extra hour to themselves every day. Make sure you stipulate that in the opening chapter.

Antagonist and / or conflict

When I say conflict here, I don't necessarily mean a huge fighting scene, although you could if you chose to, but even something on a smaller scale. For example, if we think of the opening of the Hunger Games, when everyone is waiting to see who will be called to participate in the competition, there's tension there – a question for the reader. And this helps build up to the central conflict – will Katniss survive the Hunger Games? By including a problem, conflict, or antagonist in your opening chapter, you're hoping to engage the reader and make them sympathetic to your protagonist.

Setting

Introduce your setting – specifically, the time and the place of your book – to help ground the reader to the narrative. Think of creative ways to do this.

Tone

The opening chapter will set the tone for the book – so make sure the readers' expectations are fulfilled. If you're writing a romantic comedy but open with a gory crime, the reader is going to be disappointed. I'm sure you've come across examples where authors have used the weather to set the tone – a dark, stormy night for a murder for example – but there are other ways to set the tone such as dialogue – a clipped, conversation can imply danger. The

opening chapter is your opportunity to establish the tone that the reader can expect from the rest of your book.

Point of view

This needs to be established early on in the writing process. A first-person narrative allows the reader to gain deep insight into the protagonist's thoughts, whereas a third-person limited perspective may increase suspense by withholding information about important characters and their backstories.

Inciting Incident

You may want to include your inciting incident here because this is the one thing that will keep your story moving and engage the reader to continue. The inciting incident is the engine for your story, providing a starting point for your main character's journey. It might not always work to include it in the first chapter but do try to include your inciting incident as early as possible.