

Back to the Beginning!

Here you are, ready to start your novel! We know what you're thinking. You're thinking "Okay, I've got my paper, my pencil, my lucky pencil sharpener, 15 packs of gum, a month's supply of energy drinks, and my noveling iPod playlist to get me pumped and ready to go. So now what?"

If you are feeling a little nervous, and the blank page and you are having a staring contest, don't worry! It's perfectly natural. Many novelists will tell you that figuring out the first few lines of a novel is the hardest part. Lucky for you, you're about a million steps ahead of most novelists—you've already got your characters, your plot, your setting, *and* you know how to write some seriously awesome dialogue! Not bad for a month's work.

Like we said earlier, there are several ways to start your novel. You can begin with the inciting incident or work backwards from the resolution to the beginning. Novels are filled with flashbacks, flash-forwards, and unexpected plot twists. So feel free to begin anywhere you like!



You can:

- Start at the beginning.
- Start at your inciting incident.
- Start *in medias res* (in the middle of things).
- Start at the end.

Start at the Beginning

As you learned in the "Outlining Your Plot" worksheet, the beginning or set-up of your novel needs to introduce your characters and your conflict. Starting a novel at the very beginning is a great way to ease your readers in. So many stories and fairy tales begin this way (Once upon a time...), that readers feel right at home in your story almost immediately.

There once lived a young girl named Judy who spent almost every moment of every day dreaming about owning her very own horse. And to her surprise, on the morning of her fourteenth birthday, a genie popped out of her box of cornflakes. His name was Bob, and he smelled slightly of onions. But that was okay—she was finally going to get the horse she'd always wanted.

Try starting your novel at the beginning. Take out your plot worksheet and review your set-up. Make sure you include your protagonist in your beginning, and you may also want to introduce your main conflict, and a supporting character.

Start with the Inciting Incident

The inciting incident, as you know, is the moment that changes your protagonist's life and launches them into his/her adventure. Starting with this moment sucks your readers into your story, and leaves them wondering what will happen next.

Two days after Judy's fourteenth birthday, she woke up to find that she had turned into a horse. This was not what she wished for. She should've known not to trust a genie with a name like Bob.

Now try and begin with the inciting incident. Go back and review your inciting incident and then write a beginning to your novel that starts with this event.

Start *In Medias Res*

In medias res (pronounced *en med-ee-ya rez*) is Latin for "in the middle of things." It literally means starting your story right smack in the middle of the action, and then filling in the holes—explaining who the characters are and what got them into the mess they're in. A lot of suspense, mystery, and action novels begin *in medias res*. It's a great way to draw readers in and to make sure they stick around for all the details.

Judy stood standing face to face with the four-headed dragon from the planet Gandoria—its eyes spinning with rage and spit pooling at the corners of its hungry mouths. She couldn't help but wonder how she got here, and more importantly, where Bob was.

Start *in medias res*. Check out your rising action, falling action, and climax to see if there are any moments you might want to start with.

Start at the End

This one is a bit tricky, but well worth a try! You basically tell the ending to your readers, but leave just enough mystery to keep them reading. Then, you can either work backwards to reveal just how that ending came about or jump to any other point of your novel and continue.

When it was all over and Judy was finally the queen of that forsaken land, she looked back and knew that it had all been worth it. She had learned to love Bob even if he did smell like onions, and knew that she would never want to be anything else but the horse she had become.

Start at the end. Try to include clues to the story's main conflict so readers get some idea of what the rest of the novel will be about and intrigue them to learn more.

Now you have a bunch of beginnings to start with. Recopy your favorite in your noveling notebook or onto your computer, and write, write, write!