

First Page Critiques

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The first pages of your story set the tone, setting, and page, while introducing key characters and offering a taste of your writing style.

Opening lines

The first words a reader sees. Does it introduce the world, character, or plot?

Perspective

How is this book different or better than any other book?

World Building

World building can start as early as the first line.

Give your reader immediate access to the world that readers will be living in for the next few hundred pages—through description, character interaction, or dialogue.

Authentic Voice

Voice must connect to readers, regardless of writing style or point of view, while convincing them to follow the characters' journey through the rest of the story.

Attention-Grabbing Characters

Attention-grabbing characters are critical in getting readers invested in your book. And that can start on page one.

How to critique

Keep in mind: the genre; requests from the author in terms of feedback; diversity, inclusivity, equity, and belonging - in both the work itself and your feedback.

Genre: Historical Fiction

Specific, editorial questions for your readers / anything readers should know: N/A

Title: The Land Between Us

Chapter 1: Forty Days Before

The day Savannah found out about Tom Hardy's troubles with the Bureau of Land Management, long before she knew how those troubles would rip her family and her town apart, she was sitting on a stool behind the front counter of her hopeless job, sketching a chubby little quail, the one from her backyard covey that she'd named Grace. She wanted to capture the essence of the bird, its uniqueness: what makes a quail a quail and not, say, a finch? Was it its head plume? The way it pecked the ground? Its posture? She'd done a lot of coaxing to get the quail to return to her family's backyard: millet, seeds, water, pleading, prayer, whatever it took. No one had fed them while she'd been gone. Quail were short-lived, poor things. A one-year lifespan. That was it. They had to cram a whole life's worth of experiences into one year—and here she was, at age twenty-three, feeling like her life hadn't even begun.

Savannah was trying to decide whether she'd made Grace's head plume (which was made of six feathers, not one, like a lot of people thought) too crooked or too straight, her breastplate too mottled or not mottled enough, and her white eye ring too wide or too narrow when the mini-cowbell on the front door jingled.

"Glad to be back?"

Mr. Hardy's greeting caught her by surprise—first because she was preoccupied with Grace and her eye rings, and second because seeing Mr. Hardy after all this time roused an awkward jumble of pleasantness and mortification. Her throat tightened.

"Sure." She brushed her pencil to the side and shoved her artwork under a stack of *Gazettes*.

"For real?" He eyed her.

Genre: Fiction

Specific, editorial questions for your readers / anything readers should know: N/A

Title: Oneironaut

“Murderer” is painted elegantly in white at the foot of my driveway. Powdery snow is falling softly upon the message. It is left for me. The powder is melting in with the letters instead of collecting on top to hide them. “Fuck,” I whisper. I’ve never wished for it to be cold enough for the snow to pile up. Yet, here I am, wishing.

Shouldn’t a message like this make me feel something? Something strong? I’ve been drifting along in a state of dissociation ever since the news. Shocking news, but not surprising. Then, just when I thought I couldn’t get any more detached from myself...the blaming began.

The temperature is dropping, and I keep praying for the narrow-minded message to soon be hidden by Mother Nature’s dandruff. Why didn’t they paint it under the awning on my porch? Were they too afraid to share their thoughts about me up close?

I roll my eyes and look up into the vast emptiness above me. The snowflakes kiss my face with tender coldness, the way my father used to before the foster homes started. I begin to feel disappointed by this act of cowardness. I put a hand over my heart. I try to tune in to the whisper of my soul. Disappointment, yuck. At least it’s something.

The white words are spelt in cursive and dotted with a period. The bold statement sits elegantly against the sharp, black pavement. It emanates a haunting grace. To be honest, I can’t help but notice how beautiful it is.

Genre: Memoir

Specific, editorial questions for your readers:

Is this understandable to an average reader in some way, in a self help section or spiritual section of a bookshop? or a turnoff?

Title: My first page

Today I live and love in a most joyful and beautiful way, becoming one with birds flying overhead or with a light fog hanging in among the tall Douglas Fir treetops in the Oregon forest, where I lived for twenty odd years. Daily chores were done in a seemingly effortless manner, while "I" stayed focused on being present with whatever *is*.

Often in quiet moments, there was and still is a magical internal opening up and an especially strong sense of gratitude, which always brings involuntary joy tears along with a sudden humorous chuckle at Life ITSelf. Whenever intrusive thoughts appeared it was like an external cold winter chill blowing into my cozy, warm inner room. Now, I'm able to simply close the door on intrusive thoughts, my attention turning towards "Now" and whatever is happening in front of me.

NOW is the moment that *never ends* and I have learned to love being here. I owe this relaxed and peaceful way of existence to the mysterious Great Spirit, whatever or whoever S/he may be. This way of living began in earnest in 1980, over forty years ago. I was living in California with my beloved live-in partner of two years. One night, she rejected and abandoned me for another woman, leaving me *beyond* devastated.

Unknown and undealt with feelings of emotional rejection at eighteen months, became triggered big time. My internal existence was significantly altered as I was unwillingly taken to a previously unknown internal place.

Genre: literary, historical fiction

Specific, editorial questions for your readers / anything readers should know:

This is the prologue, but it describes an event that occurs at the end of the story

Title: Black and Tan Fantasy

ISAAC MENDELSSOHN

THE HANGED MAN

SUMMER, 1963

“Killed by the Klan.” Those four words: they were the headline of every newspaper and the lead story on the six o’clock news. Isaac Mendelssohn’s father came down from New York City to Mississippi. He clutched his son’s casket and wept. He bore the body home by train and, even though he was white (or perhaps, because he was Jewish) he insisted on riding in the car for Negroes. To every question asked he gave the same reply: “Killed by the Klan. My son was killed by the Klan.” He released the morgue shot to the press: the three K’s carved in his dead son’s chest. It became iconic.

Genre: Historical Fiction

Specific, editorial questions for your readers/ anything readers should know: Did you have to stop and reread any part of the first page because of awkward writing; If you read this would you continue on to the second page?

Title: The Jewess of Norwich

As she put the beaker of ale in front of the stranger, Naomi felt certain she had seen at least one plainer face than his, but she was hard-pressed to bring any to mind. Maybe the leprous child she had seen ringing a bell, warning others of her presence on Stepping Lane – but even that girl had been blessed with large green eyes, stealing away some of the attention from her collapsed nose. Naomi spit three times on the back of her hand and then touched the tip of her own nose, which dipped down, the nostrils flaring out.

As for the strange man sitting alone in the hall, his widely spaced eyes held a thoughtful expression under perfectly horizontal eyebrows, while thin lips struggled to hold back a set of buckled teeth. How this wisp of a man could claim any relation to Isaiah of Norwich baffled Naomi – not that it was her place to question the word of her mistress.

On Michaelmas the mistress had taken the master's body to be buried in Cripplegate, and lucky it was that the master had been murdered within a four-day ride to London - Jews from York had to spend weeks on the road with their dead.

When she returned to Norwich the mistress was joined by the stranger, who had been presented as Reuben fils Abraham, the master's younger brother. It was in the brother's house near the West Cheap market in London that the mistress had completed her seven days of sitting Shiva as she mourned for her husband.

Naomi cleared the last of the trenchers and silver spoons from the table where the young man now sat alone and then made her way across the short walkway that connected the main house to the kitchen. Her hands full, Naomi checked the unbarred door with her hip and found the two ex-soldiers eating by the fire. Having been given coin to provide protection to the mistress on the road, they now helped themselves to the pottage Naomi had cooked earlier in the day.

Genre: Non-Fiction

Specific, editorial questions for your readers / anything readers should know: What's the best tone to convey this message?

Title: Science, Policy, and Truth

Scientists – they're just like us! But curiously, scientific facts are not just like other types of facts. How does that happen?

Scientists are normal people – they're just like you and me, because they are just you and me. Anyone who takes the time to pursue training as a scientist, and then works as a scientist, is a scientist. It's merely a job and a profession. It's not like being an Olympic marathoner, where only a tiny subset of the population innately has what it takes to succeed. It's more like being a postal delivery person; most people are capable of taking the steps needed every day to keep the process moving.

But here's the interesting part: even though scientists are normal people, the type of facts that scientists produce as a part of their regular work are different from other types of facts. Religious facts, or historical facts, or journalistic facts, or personal facts – all are facts, and yet most people understand that scientific facts are different, even if they can't articulate precisely how they are different. This intuition is correct – scientific facts are categorically different from other types of facts, and I hope to convince even the most skeptical reader of this assertion by the end of Part Two of this book. For now, let's hold this assertion as a mere assumption that requires justification. Further, most people also know from experience that scientific facts are different. Scientific facts lead to technologies that we can use, solve problems that we couldn't solve otherwise, and sometimes solve problems that we didn't even know existed until we had a particular suite of scientific facts in front of us.

Genre: Urban Fantasy/Literary with Magical Realism

Specific, editorial questions for your readers / anything readers should know: Mostly I'm just trying to get myself back into the habit of writing. I've had writer's block and resistance for years so I just finally busted something out to submit as a motivation.

Title: Born Again (Note: this is the chapter title not the book title. Don't have a book title yet)

When she was 13 she was born again at a Southern Baptist pizza party although she was secretly Jewish. In the 70s and 80s being Jewish in Mississippi was not widely accepted. All that aside, the real story here is that this was when Jerry discovered the portal. In the Baptist church after the pizza party all the teenagers sat on the wooden pews and the preacher up front spoke emotionally and forcefully that all the sinners must come forward and relieve themselves of their sins. Jerry knew she had to go forward. She was shaking all over and nearly crying. She was worried about the sinner part sure but additionally on her mind was the issue of the white light that came to her room at night. This and the smell of roses. These things had to be messages from Jesus. Jerry was so afraid at night after that time that her friend Kirsten Griffin's dad dropped her off after a sleepover and commented in an offhand voice "Oh I know this house. This was the one where that lady went crazy and shot herself, or was it her husband, in the stairwell." Jerry felt ice in her veins 100% when she heard this. From that point forward she was terrified at night in her room and that's when the white light and roses smell started to come in.

So at the pizza party it was only natural to come forward and absolve herself of sin. The tricky part would be breaking her habit of cussing. The saying "mouth like a sailor" did not even begin to do justice to the amount of swearing this girl did. So Jerry was shaking and overcome. She looked over at her friend Luanne who did not appear shaking or overcome. Luanne was blankly looking forward at the pastor. She appeared to be paying attention but did not seem particularly overcome.

Genre: Pulp Fiction

Specific, editorial questions for your readers / anything readers should know: N/A

Title: Underground Express

I ran with a crew of Boosters in The Early Nineties and we rolled up the aisles from Yakima to Eugene Yodel-Ay-Hee-Hoo...We generally targeted The Walmart's as we blended in with the customers who appeared to be just as wild and depraved as we were...We were an impressive collection of All Star Fuck-ups...Chef John (Crazy John) was from some sinkhole near Lake Charles...He went to Culinary School there for a few Month before he got caught blowing a Clydesdale in a Neighboring Field...He told the Magistrate that he was in a serious relationship with The animal...Apparently that was not uncommon in Calcasieu Parish so they cut him loose...The Troopers drove Him out to The State Line and shoved a lit Roman Candle up his Ass just for funsies...Had a pronounced aversion to Fireworks afterward...Mom (Klepto Mom) was a semi-retired Lot Lizard from Stockton...She worked the truck drivers near the Port until she aged out and business slowed down to a crawl...After that only the most Psychotic Trucker in a Peterbilt would take her on and there was always collateral damage...She tooled around in a huge trench coat when we were on the job and was blessed with the stickiest fingers in The Northwest...Saw her walk out of a Store in Woodburn with a 48" Flatscreen underneath that outfit...Craig (Indian Craig) was a Hurculean Shoshone Indian from The Wind River Reservation...He was our muscle for when things went South...They frequently did so he was regularly throwing Chingasos...Had a smile that could light up a black hole...And quite the practical joker...His favorite Shtick was waiting for a victim to pass out near a campfire...He would light the poor schlubs Shoes on fire and settle back for the Pyrotechnics...Screams chaos orange fireball of Nike High Tops streaking toward the tree line branches breaking coyotes yipping...It was cash I tell you...A real knee slapper...But his mood could change instantaneously... Once in a while his eyes would glaze over and a cyclonic fit of violence and mayhem would follow...Saw him almost beat a Man to death over a dispute about peanut allergies...Moses (Albino Moses) was a Notorious Heroin Junky from The Mission District...We

picked him up at Pelican Bay after he did a Nickel for possession and that's where the train started coming off the Tracks...He was a master pan handler...Banned for life at Harvard Square for various unappetizing acts...His job was to keep us in Gas Money...But he was an unmitigated liability...Long White hair white beard red eyes gravelly voice...Most people who saw him coming would cross over to the other side of the street with the nervous quickness...He was slamming Black Tar Heroin into his neck and drinking gallons on Mad Dog 20/20 within days after he got out of The Glass House...Wherever he went La Jura was not far behind...A Ticking fucking time bomb...Chris Gatlin (No Nickname) was our undisputed Shot caller...Nobody knew where he came from...And nobody asked...Word around the campfire was that he killed a Hells Angel with a Bowie Knife in an Oakland Biker Bar...He coordinated the grab and go's and fenced our Plunder through his contacts along The I5 Corridor...He stayed out of the nightly booze and drug fueled debauchery and watched the freak show with cold Komodo Dragon eyes...When we got a little too froggy he would wade into us with a cattle prod and lower the temperature considerably...Early Fall of 92 we piled into The sled and glided South through The Oregon High Desert purple and violet rays of sunlight filtering downward through the mist and holes in the shifting cloud cover...We navigated past broken wagon wheels and the bleached bones of Oklahoma Pioneers and continued down along The Santiam Pass snaking through the Blue green Pine and Fir forests past Clear Lake then Lost lake and down into The primeval Willamette Forest below...End of the line was the camp at French Pete ...The Electrician was waiting for us...

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I met The Electrician (Angel Rodriguez) in The Lane County Lock-Up circa 87...88...It wasn't hard finding him...We were the only inmates in the Jail...

Genre: Non-fiction, popular science

Specific, editorial questions for your readers / anything readers should know: Just, how to make it better!

Title: Why Stuff Falls Down - from feathers and hammers to a bendy universe

1. We Got This, Right?

“One thing I have learned in a long life:

that all our science, measured against reality, is primitive and childlike

— and yet it is the most precious thing we have.”

~ Albert Einstein

What’s This Book About?

There are many things that tickle my old brain cells. One of the most curious and irritating subjects to itch the gray matter is that thing we glibly call “gravity.” I mean, how complicated can it be? Stuff falls down. Something as straightforward as stuff falling down should be totally figured out. Straightforward facts, straightforward explanation, surely.

It turns out that a lot of folks have tried to explain gravity. From ancient times up to this very day, philosophers and physicists have come up with one theory after another to explain gravity.

Now, I do a lot of name-dropping in this little book, but don’t worry about keeping all of the characters sorted out. I give out names for a couple of reasons — first, to give credit where credit is due, and second, so that if you are curious, you can research this or that historical person on your own.

From ancient to modern times, one theory of gravity has replaced another, each one more accurate than the ones that came before. But, even as the older theories have been disproved, each and every one of these theories is useful in its own way.

So if the earliest theory of gravity was useful, then why did folks bother to create all the later theories of gravity?

Because, my inquisitive reader, while an earlier theory might be useful in its limited way, there always seemed to be some situation in which the theory would fall apart. Real-world facts would come to light that would not fit into what the old theory said should happen. So what then? The challenge was to construct a new theory of gravity, which would not only cover all of the things that the old theory got right but also hold together for the situation(s) where the old theory fell apart.

Genre: Science Fiction

Specific, editorial questions for your readers / anything readers should know: N/A

Title: Novel

Fitful city lights pierce the gathering night. Stampeding, roiling clouds flee foreboding high winds aloft. Evil forms prowl from deep shadow to deep shadow, startled by areas suddenly illuminated.

Pedestrians draw into their heavy coats as they instinctively scurry to the refuge of their cars and familiar buildings. Only the flashing lights from second-floor windows brightens one dark high-rise. Two young women open the front doors to enter its lobby. They hurry to the elevator bank that accesses the mezzanine level where the retro nightclub, Bottomfeeders, blasts driving music and pulsating strobe lights. They glance up to see frenzied dancers savaged by the hottest band.

Kore McCane, 19, pushes the Up button for the elevator car, then turns to comfort her friend, Katrina Taylor, 20, who violently sneezes.

Katrina struggles for breath.

Kore suggests, "Let's do this another time when you feel better."

Katrina is desperately resolute, "No, I want this to be your birthday pres..." The word present is cut short by another brutal sneeze. Her world is a handkerchief contaminated with multi-hued mucous globules, especially yellow-green ones. Katrina's eyes roll back, and she wavers standing upright until Kore steadies her.

"We'll have plenty of good times," Kore offers brightly. "So, can we go home now?"

The elevator car doors open, Katrina lurches forward. Jason Rawlings, 18, starts to walk out but pauses when Katrina and Kore step into the elevator. Jason and Kore's eyes lock, with caught breaths. With an exaggerated flourish, he bids both young women inside. Staying, Jason inches close to the two until Katrina has another slathered explosion. He backs away, glimpsing Kore's fleeting chuckle.

The elevator door opens on the mezzanine floor and five forcefully drugged teenagers with spiked, colorful hair and profusions of tattoos are roughly manhandled into the elevator car by a hulking androgynous warrior Red Guard. Kore, Katrina and Jason are pressed against the elevator's back wall and hidden with the five teenagers in front of them.

Prince Beliar, 54, is the last to enter the elevator. A handsome, wiry man, his cruel eyes are rimmed by dark circles that offset even darker pupils. His brilliant surgical skill at creating androgyny is matched by the neuro-pharmaceutical genius of Beliar's partner, Princess Hecate. In their clandestine underworld medical factory, young, abducted teenagers are surgically bisected. Bonding female to male halves, and male to female halves, two mythological creatures become immortal if they survive nesting in womb-cell pods dedicated to manifesting a cohort of invincible warriors.

People have always whispered that Beliar was born bad. His first tooth came in at three months, one month early. It was not until the next month that he bit his first nurse, and again the following day. She quit. The terrible day came a week later when a frail and elderly aunt visited the family. She had dipped the tip of her little finger in molasses and offered it to baby Beliar to suck. But he bit down so hard that

Younger Women

Chapter 1

In 1999 Annie Decides to Trust her Mother While in 1959 She Avoids the Bulldog in the Black Dress

You trust your mother, but you cut the cards. Proverb

Emerald City, Oregon June 1, 1999

So much for intuition or knowing. If I had even a tiny clue of what would come about from the morning visit, I would have been miles away rather than walking up the broad steps of the stone building in downtown Emerald City. There, according to my mother, Linda, we would find the office of the man who would help us “solve everything.”

“Annie?” she’d had said earlier that week when I had finally decided to pick up the phone. “Annie? Oh there, you are! I just had the best talk with an old friend of your Granddad, and I am just so excited. He is the attorney Granddad used at the bank and they were friends for years. He said he thought he could help us straighten out the situation with the place. We have an appointment Tuesday morning at 10:00.”

I had trusted my grandfather and despite her bewildering behavior and horrible husband, I had made a recent decision to trust my mother. “I’ll drive,” I said and set the phone on its cradle.

We were about halfway to town when I noticed that she carried nothing but one of her smaller purses. “You have Granddad’s will with you? Right?”

“Oh,” she said exhaling loudly. “I can’t believe I forgot to get it. It’s in the safe at the bank but William has a copy.” She looked at her watch.

William?