

Narrative Hook Starters & Examples



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What exactly defines a narrative hook? It's a technique used in the opening of a story, or key places with a story, that "hook" the reader's attention to keep them reading. For the opening of a book, this could fall anywhere in the first few paragraphs, but the ideal is to have it start your story.

When you start new scenes, you want to have a hook, too, and a hook at the end of a chapter is a solid way to keep a reader turning the page.

Narrative Hook	Example
Open Question. A question that puzzles the reader	Sure, the memory is faint, but a pillow clamped over your head isn't something you forget. What I don't recall for sure is whether the hands holding it were my mother's or father's.
Science Data. Uses an interesting fact or piece of data to begin.	Babies have around 100 more bones than adults. Those eventually fuse into what is the average adult skeleton. The young woman on the table looked like the breaks in her bones had more in common with those of a baby than an adult. Even so, those breaks hadn't caused her death.
Visual Painter. Paints a visual image of the scene	Pools of a silvery substance lay like mercury around the base of the castle wall. When one roan-colored mare pulled away too late, the substance connected and began to solidify her leg, progressing quickly up her body and turning the moving horse into solid crystal.
The Joke. The funny approach that can remain funny or turn dark	He'd bought a bathmat that turned a bloody red when someone put their feet on it coming out of the shower. The joke was on him after my flashback, when he had to rush me to the hospital after I screamed and fell on the tile, breaking my arm.
The Weatherman. Sets the atmosphere	Clouds rolled across the sky, darkening the sun, and brisk wind blew tumbleweeds and sand across the road. I pulled over. If she'd gotten very far, it would be tough, if not impossible, to find her.
Direct Address. Directly speaks to the reader	So you think you're a survivor, do you? Let me tell you why that's not going to work here.

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A Question. Asks a question the reader wants answered.	"What's the difference between being a soldier's wife and being the soldier? Have a seat. You may learn more than you expected."
Strong Statement/Declaration. Especially good for topic-related nonfiction.	"Emergency room nurses make more money than standard-care nurses. Let me tell you why making less could be a good choice."
Fact/Statistic. Useful in nonfiction, but can be used as a starting premise to engage fiction readers.	"Small farms, those between one to nine acres, represent only 0.1% of farmland in the U.S. I might have been in the minority, but per acre, I brought in more profit. How? Until now, that's been my secret."
Metaphor. Can be used for contrast or comparison	"You've heard the saying, 'They fought like cats and dogs?' From what I could see, the cat was a lion and the dog, well, think Chihuahua."
Simile. Another way to use contrast/comparison.	"They say life is a rollercoaster. The problem with that is my rollercoaster seems to go backwards and sideways and has a lot of bumps that would make anyone fly out of their seat."
Description. Be sure this one is engaging so it doesn't come off as too much telling.	"She was, at best, 4'11". Standing there in shoes that looked straight out of the box and with a basketball that was as pristine as a newly bloomed rose, she asked if she could join the team. Why, I wondered, had she decided basketball was the sport for her?"
Quotation. Has many uses, both for fiction and nonfiction	"Nelson Mandela said, 'The greatest glory in living lies not in never falling, but in rising every time we fall.'" While I appreciate the sentiment, I figure by now I should be living in a great ball of shining glory so brilliant your eyes would hurt."

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The Hinder. This involves dropping hints for the reader to put together.	'It wasn't as if she really liked camping. But she knew what she was doing. I didn't have a chance.'
The Interrupter. Brings you in during a conversation.	"You can believe that! Tell me what else he said," Rene demanded.

More Examples

"Novalee Nation, seventeen, seven months pregnant, thirty-seven pounds overweight—and superstitious about sevens—shifted uncomfortably in the seat of the old Plymouth and ran her hands down the curve of her belly." *Where the Heart Is*, Billie Letts

"Dust cakes our faces, invades our sinuses, and stings our eyes. The heat bakes the moisture from us with utter relentlessness. Our body temperatures hover at a hundred and three. Our ears ring. On the edge of exhaustion, we get dizzy as our stomachs heave." *House to House—A Soldier's Memoir*, David Bellavia with John R. Bruning

"I was left back when I was twelve because I had a baby for my father." *Push*, Sapphire

"My high school friends have begun to suspect I haven't told them the full story of my life." *A Long Way Gone, Memoirs of a Boy Soldier*, Ishmael Beah

"This is how Mortimer Tate ended up killing the first three human beings he'd laid eyes on in nearly a decade." *Go-Go Girls of the Apocalypse*, Victor Gischler

"The snow in the mountains was melting and Bunny had been dead for several weeks before we came to understand the gravity of our situation." *The Secret History*, Donna Tartt

"Many years later, as he faced the firing squad, Colonel Aureliano Buendia was to remember that distant afternoon when his father took him to discover ice." *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, Gabriel Garcia Marquez

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