

In writing fiction, creative nonfiction or poetry, consider opening with a hook. Grab your reader's attention with your first words.

Hook the reader with

- specific details and imagery
- a mystery of some kind, however slight
- words that offer emotional content; words that suggest feeling

#### Open short stories with a hook

1. "Justice demands that we hang these two fellers." Dorf Jolson paused for a dramatic sneer at the two boys. He glanced toward the burning clouds on the horizon and thought it best to hurry the trial.

2. "Sir An-DEE," Jeb declared, his voice tuned to mockery, "be neither gentleman nor poet. You call him honest, but to my view he springs from corruption itself, and in spite of silk finery proves himself a knave and a rogue and the lowest form of London lice."

3. Frank stepped through the iron gate and went to the corner of the courtyard, pausing to look at the bullet holes in the faces of the poet and the two communists.

4. I went after Brother Jones with a machete. Anger, red and rosy, dragged me out of the jungle bungalow to the Commons where the Jones group ate meals, but he wasn't there. A cement block beneath the bell held a jar of arsenic Brother Jones said was for killing howler monkeys.

5. The rain came in a gray mist. Sensitivity ferns along the ground closed so often from the splash of occasional drops that they lay half-opened, energyless, unable to move. My drive home from the jungle's edge took me by a sign warning of a 500 ringgit fine for dumping trash, by a goat nuzzling through a heap of plastic garbage bags, rusting cans, cardboard boxes limp from the rain, and rotting fruit. A crow stood on the back of the goat. All of Shah Alam smelled of decaying vegetation.

#### Open nonfiction with a hook

1. On a day of intense tropical sun when waves of heat shimmered from the asphalt, I nearly killed a Chinaman. That was my paradigm: that I nearly killed him. He saw it quite differently.

2. Smoke oozed from the pile of wood, acrid and white, to fall on the waters of the Bagmati while a man squatted beside a fire, smudging his face with charcoaled hands, and in the ashes of a nearby fire another man pounded something black and angular with a stick. "The lungs," Chandra told me. "They are the hardest to burn."

3. Marion Andrew Craven found God in a glass of milk and corn bread. Maybe, he admitted to Cecil Brown, a Friendswood Quaker, *God* wasn't the right word, adding that similar experiences came to him infrequently over the years, and always they drifted into him with the slightest of warning. "Grace might be a better term," he said, then confessed that he had never found any words to describe the experience.

4. When I first spoke with Simón, an octopus had him by the arm and he was struggling to free himself.

5. The moment I released the leather pouch to send the stone whistling, I knew that I had killed Mom's songbird. Worse yet, there were rubbery-looking babies in the songbird's nest, two of them, and they would need their mother to survive. But I shot her with a stone.

#### Consider opening a poem with a hook

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| 1. There is death in the dogbane oleander           | 10. In darkness they claw closer, teeth            |
| 2. This man Hartley is not my father.               | and belly taking roots from careless weed          |
| 3. Washed in prairie sun, you touched my golden     | 11. Epstein wandered the golden plains,            |
| limbs with the floral spikelet of weeping lovegrass | ablaze with the knowledge of Satan                 |
| 4. West Texas is a black tarantula                  | 12. I am desert death, waiting, watching for spoor |
| 5. We embrace in the fullness of discontent         | 13. His prose rounded into wonder:                 |
| 6. There is death in the dogbane oleander           | "I could have died," he said.                      |
| 7. I'm weeping here in this florescent room         | 14. Warm was that final touching cheek to cheek    |
| 8. Must we unbuild or find another cave?            | 15. He moved among amber shards of broken          |
| 9. When the airplane went beyond its track          | bottles, linoleum stained with coffee grounds      |