

One-Page Insights: Perfecting Page One

The standard page length is only 250-300 words. Despite this, it IS possible to immediately draw your reader right into your story. My favourite example is page one of George Orwell's *1984*, and I encourage you to go off and read it! If you cannot hit the four objectives of page one, make sure your first chapter covers them all.

4 Objectives of Page One

1. **To orientate** (or disorientate) the reader in the world of the story.

An opening should answer or hint at the following:

- What genre?
- Whose story?
- Where are we in space (planet, country/city/town, specific location, e.g., a school)?
- Where are we in time (historical, contemporary, future, none)?
- Where are we within the timeline of the story (present, past, future)?

2. **To hook** the reader and compel them to keep reading.

Here are some ways a first page makes an impression:

- Opens with a great first line (essential).
- Introduces a compelling and/or appealing protagonist or narratorial voice.
- Shocks or intrigues the reader.
- Begins "in media res", i.e., "in the midst of things" (a high-octane chase, or heated argument, for example).
- Uses humour or an engaging tone.
- Deploys a gimmick, e.g., an unusual POV. But ensure it doesn't give a false impression of the book as a whole or confuse the reader.

3. **To reassure** the reader they're in safe hands.

Show your best writing!

- Craft: great diction, economical (not overwritten), error-free, evocative
- Voice: sense of style

4. **To make commitments** to the reader regarding the novel/story to come.

Ask trusted readers for their impressions and assumptions about your story based on your first page because they can be more objective than you, the author.

- What tone has been set? E.g., Serious, informal, light-hearted, humorous.
- What do you want the reader to feel/experience? E.g., Will they be entertained or challenged?
- What theme is being hinted at?

Flashback/Flashforward/Prologue Option

If your current first page is important but doesn't make quite the impact you need it to, choose a dramatic/tense/powerful moment from either before the main story begins or later in the narrative (as a hint of what's to come) to begin the book instead. But keep it short, and ensure any subsequent time/narrative shift isn't confusing.