

-MY POOR NERVES -

How to start in the middle

Starting in the middle of situation (good or bad) is my favorite way of opening a story! This is your chance to show off some clever prose, witty dialogue, and introduce your main character in an action scene. In chapter two you can slow down because the audience is hooked from that stellar first chapter.

Our starting-in-the-middle-of-the-situation character will be called John. He is in a fist fight at a bar.

But first...some tips on where NOT to open your story, whether you're beginning in the middle, the start, or the end.

- **Exposition;** this is also called info dumping. No one cares the entire backstory of John's life leading up to the fight or the life story of who he's fighting or why John chose the old faded Metallica shirt over the KISS t-shirt with holes in it. None of that matters in chapter one. Keep it to the absolute bare bones.
- **Dream sequence;** leave these to the professionals. At chapter one, readers want the here and now. Not a psychic dream about the future or a memory from the past or an illustration of John's emotional turmoil.
- **Too much;** John loses the fight then gets arrested then he leaves the police station and gets mugged and ends up in the ER and... *chill the beans*. That's about two or three chapters worth of content. (Lighten things up in the next chapter though. Buy John an ice cream, the poor thing.)

How to start in the middle

Now an example on how to properly open your story in the middle. The aim of chapter one is to get Reader to chapter two.

Do not give information; create intrigue.

- John is fighting with precision, with only defensive moves. He hasn't thrown a single punch. Background Character 1 says "He's like some kung-fu master!" to which Background Character 2 says "Marine, actually!" The other guy is just swinging punches, purely from adrenaline and emotions.
- Two policemen storm in the bar and take the guy John was fighting outside. John goes to the bar and asks for a couple of napkins and tweezers. He apologizes for the mess, looking at the overturned chairs and broken glass shards on the floor. Bartender looks outside, disappointed. "Sally and I were wondering if Benji's back on drugs."
- A young policeman, looking fresh off recruitment, comes to the bar where John is plucking some glass shards out of his fist. John explains how the fight started; Benji had swung a beer bottle at John's head, which John blocked with his hand. John chooses not to press charges, readjusts his black dress shirt and clerical collar, then leaves.

You now have a dozen questions in the readers' mind that you can unravel in the coming chapters.

Did you know?

These are on the rubric I use for my editing services! You don't need an entire book written. Just the first three chapters! Follow the QR code to my website, fill out the questionnaire, and I'll put the kettle on.

