



Start Your Novel: Six Winning Steps Toward a Compelling Opening Line, Scene and Chapter

Darcy Pattison

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START YOUR NOVEL

You want to write a novel, but you don't know where to start. You have a great idea and--well, that's all. This book explains the writing process of starting a novel in six winning steps.

Starting the Journey Why Editors Focus on Page 1 STEP ONE: Clarify Your Idea STEP TWO: Review Your Skills STEP Three: Plan the Opening Chapter STEP FOUR: Plan the Opening Line STEP FIVE: Now, Write! STEP SIX: Revise In 1999, writing teacher and author, Darcy Pattison, established the Novel Revision retreat, which she has taught nationally and internationally. After her retreat, writers regularly break through to publication. However, the retreat requires a complete draft of a novel. What is you're just starting out?

This book, **START YOUR NOVEL**, takes you from the beginning stages and helps you plan the story and get started. Simple examples from fairy tales illuminate the process of narrowing down your ideas into something manageable. Pattison reviews basic writing skills, and helps you get a strong beginning to your story.

NaNoWriMo? You need this book in October to help you plan what to write in November!

In this book, you'll discover:

29 Plot Templates 2 Essential Writing Skills 100 Examples of Opening Lines 7 Weak Openings to Avoid 4 Strong Openings to Use 3 Assignments to Get Unstuck 7 Problems to Resolve The Math adds up to one thing: a publishable manuscript. Finally, a book that brings your dream novel a step closer! Get started today!

FROM THE AUTHOR

In 1999, I started working with fiction authors on revising their novels. In order to come to a Novel Revision Retreat, they needed a complete draft of a novel and we spent an intensive weekend revising. The results? Many published novels, including *HATTIE BIG SKY* by Kirby Larson, winner of the Newbery Honor award.

Now, I am turning to beginning writers and bringing order to the writing process. If you start well, you have a better chance of writing a publishable manuscript--and needing fewer revisions. **START YOUR NOVEL** is a natural extension of my teaching of fiction and will get you past the terror of the blank page. My passion is to help readers realize their dream. I believe in YOUR story, and this book can help make it a reality.

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Chapter Details

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T. P. Jagger says

The book was a quick read that supplied me with a number of ideas to apply to my own writing. While I'd read many of the same words of writing advice from other sources before, one new bit that stuck with me was Darcy Pattison's "Page 5 Test" (pp. 85-87), which provides a great idea for checking how effectively the opening of your novel provides characterization for your main character. I'm definitely going to be doing the Page 5 Test on my own work-in-progress.

Anny Rusk says

Darcy Pattison delivers on her promise to help you Start Your Novel off in a compelling way, which will hook readers and publishers alike.

The book is broken down into six steps, with each step explained in a direct and easy to follow way. Within each step, Darcy offers specific tools to help you find, shape and hone your story, especially its beginning.

Though I was familiar with much of the basic material, having taken writing classes and written for a few years now, I found the book full of tools and observations I hadn't come across before.

For example, being a pantster, i.e. a writer who doesn't like outlines, I failed to fully appreciate the value of a plot template. Through Darcy's description of 29 plot templates, and her example of using a Rivalry template on Cinderella, I saw for the first time how valuable plotting can be. Each plot template dictates a different focus and thus a different ending for your characters. By deciding upfront which plot template you want to use, you're insuring that you tell the tale that you actually want to tell before committing months or years to a draft that doesn't serve your story. (Thanks to Darcy, I just realized my current draft doesn't work.)

Another issue Darcy tackles is backstory. Every editor I've talked to complains about writers loading up their first chapters with info dump, which makes for a boring and slow start. Though I've been counseled on backstory before, Darcy's emphasis on using it for emotional weight, and showing where and how to use it to accomplish this goal was a revelation.

I've added Start Your Novel to the short list of books that I use to help me be the best writer I can be. I recommend you do the same.

Margo Dill says

(Originally appeared on WOW! Women On Writing)

We've all heard agents, editors, and even readers state that they don't give a novel very long to catch their interest before they put down the manuscript or close up the book. In today's fast-paced and competitive

society, you have to catch a reader's attention from the first sentence of your novel. That's what Darcy's book is going to help you do!

After she shares with you why editors focus on page one of a novel, even if writers think it's unfair, she dives into the six steps. The first is to clarify your idea. In this chapter, Darcy has included twenty-nine plot templates, which are possible slants or directions a story idea could take, and uses the familiar story of Cinderella for all of us to understand how to use templates. She writes, "I consult the plot templates when I'm first thinking of an idea for a novel and again when I start a revision."

Some of these templates are: "Adventure comes to you. A stranger comes to town." or "You go to adventure. You leave town." or "Someone is wronged and vows to take revenge on someone else." You fill your novel idea into these templates to see the best direction to take while writing it. In this section, she also provides some great questions you should ask yourself about your characters' emotions.

After your idea is clarified, Darcy moves on to discuss your writing skills. She claims there are two skills that are essential for novelists, and these make perfect sense. Novelists must be able to: write in scenes and write with vivid imagery. A valuable tidbit in this chapter is that Darcy helps define a scene: "a scene is a series of connected actions which contain a small story question. Will John get a home run in this game?" We all know what a scene is, of course; but when writing one, sometimes we lose focus. Darcy's book helps you get it back whether you are a beginner or an expert.

By the middle of the book, Darcy writes about planning the first chapter. No wonder novel writing is so hard—there's a lot to do to prepare to even write the first sentence. *Start Your Novel* helps you through this process with easy to understand instructions and examples. What's great about this third step is that she first shows us how NOT to open a novel—no back story (and then she helps you figure out how to work in your back story), no characters waking up, no giving away the ending, and more. She does provide writing prompts to help you figure out where to start to catch your readers' attention!

The fourth step is dedicated to that all important FIRST LINE. This is another great chapter, full of examples from published novels and some explanation as to why that particular first line worked. The fifth step is to WRITE. Darcy gives some important advice about writing first drafts—you must get something down on paper. You can fuss over the exact details later. So, if you are still playing around with the first line and you have nothing more of your novel written, pick the line you like the best so far, and keep writing.

Finally, the last step, which writers either love or hate but have to do anyway, is REVISE. She helps you revise that first chapter and again covers some ways that novelists make mistakes and how to avoid these when revising.

There are a lot of writing craft books on the shelf, and many of them are dedicated to novel writing. What I like about *Start Your Novel* is that Darcy has focused on one of the most crucial sections of a successful novel—the beginning. If you turn readers off at the beginning, then no one will read your brilliant middle or incredible ending. Darcy's latest book would be helpful for anyone struggling to begin a novel, whether you've written one or one hundred.

Lizann Flatt says

This is a terrific book for any author wanting to polish and perfect a story beginning. From multiple ways to rethink your beginning to an in-depth look at successful book beginnings, this is a great resource for writers.
