

# READY, SET, GO: Creating a Compelling Beginning

Land of Enchantment Romance Authors

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Presented by Robin L. Perini

*“Don’t tell me the moon is shining; show me the glint of light on broken glass.” –Anton Chekhov*  
*“The difference between the right word and the almost right word is the difference between lightning and a lightning bug.” – Mark Twain*

## A. INTRODUCTION

### i. Take what you want and leave the rest.

*What a writer ... "wants is a set of rules on what to do and what not to do in writing fiction...."when one begins to be persuaded that certain things must never be done in fiction and certain other things must always be done, one has entered the first stage of aesthetic arthritis, the disease that ends in pedantic rigidity and the atrophy of intuition." — John Gardner, The Art of Fiction*

## B. FIRST THREE PAGES

- i. An opening’s job is to hook the reader into turning the page and becoming invested in the story so they keep turning the pages
- ii. You don’t have three chapters, or one chapter or even three pages. You have three paragraphs...one page if you’re lucky.
- iii. Review Survey of Agents, Booksellers and Readers

## C. HOOK THE READER

- i. Types of Hooks
  - Beginning Hooks
    1. Openings, Scenes, Chapters
  - Ending Hooks (first page, third page, scene, chapter, book):
- ii. Categories of Hooks
  1. Threat of Danger (Emotional or Physical)
  2. Shock Factor
  3. Ending Question
  4. Ending Prediction

## D. ELEMENTS TO A GREAT OPENING

- i. Checklist (Use as many as possible)
  - Set your tone and maintain it
  - Set reader expectations
  - Introduce your theme early, and explore it on different levels throughout the book
  - Create a question in the reader's mind
  - Intensity
  - Compelling Situation
  - MOTIVATE, MOTIVATE, MOTIVATE
  - Make it concise: what does your reader REALLY need to know?

- ii. Characters
    - Readers must fall in love or want to be your character
    - Let the reader know who to root for/against immediately
    - Who, what, where, when and how must be introduced immediately
    - Character goal must be introduced immediately
  - iii. Conflict
    - Bickering is NOT conflict
    - Conflict must reside WITHIN the character
    - Conflict is a struggle between deeply held belief systems
    - Balance out internal, external and relationship conflicts
    - The heroine's goal is NOT to fall in love (in a romance)
      1. Give your main characters their own story
    - Introduce new story questions before answering the other ones
- E. Activate Your Writing**
- i. Dialogue is the best way to show character and emotion.
  - ii. Is there a "zinger" on every page?
  - iii. Word Choices
  - iv. Active words
  - v. SPICED
  - vi. Craft Tip: Watch Out for:
    - 's/he felt,'
    - 's/he thought,'
    - 's/he saw,'
    - 's/he wondered,'
    - 's/he realized...
- F. EXAMPLES – What I saw**
- i. The Good
    - Good writing, and some great writing
    - Intriguing stories
  - ii. Areas to improve
    - Find the drama
    - Specificity and clarity (to decrease ambiguity)
    - Activate your writing
    - Give characters depth. We need to care.
    - Start in the right place
    - Travelling at the beginning is risky
    - Dump the backstory
- G. FIRST SCENE**
- i. Definition
    - Basic large building block of the structure of any long story
    - Analogous to Cause and Effect; Stimulus and Response
    - A segment of story action, written moment-by-moment, without summary, presented onstage in the story “now”. (It could be acted out on screen)
  - ii. Start with Characters
    - Create Characters Readers Care About

- Put them in jeopardy (physical and/or emotional)
  1. Make it personal (not just a world in danger, Grandma lives there)
  2. Isolate the character so choices are limited
- GMC
  1. Goal: How much a character cares about his goal is in direct proportion too how much the reader will care (Laura DeVries)
  2. Motivation – why he wants it and what makes it important
  3. Conflict – what’s stopping him from getting it and what are the stakes (what terrible consequences will result if he doesn’t get it?)
- Character Arc
- Surprise the Reader
- iii. Purpose
  - Take a character through conflict
    1. Things get worse...or they get better
    2. Scene has
      - GOAL – CONFLICT – DISASTER
  - Response to a scene
    1. Sequel
      - EMOTION – QUANDARY – DECISION – ACTION
    2. New events/scenes stem from emotion
  - The mistakes people make
    1. Writing scene without emotion.
    2. Writing scene without conflict.
    3. Writing scene without an arc
    4. Writing a scene without purpose/goal
    5. Writing a scene that isn’t compelling
    6. Writing a backstory heavy scene where significant details are based on research, not emotion
- iv. Key to Scene – Emotion
  - Actions don’t drive the story; actions drive emotions, emotions drive the story.
  - Motivated Drama
- v. Arc of the Scene
  - Polarity
  - Define beginning and ending



## H. Conclusion

- i. Trust your instincts
- ii. Find Your Own Process and Don't Edit Out the Passion
- iii. Let your Voice Shine Through.
  - iv. Ray Bradbury says, "There is only one type of story in the world--YOUR story."

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**BIOGRAPHY**

Award-winning, international bestselling author and RITA® finalist Robin Perini has hit the Top 5 on Amazon Bestseller lists in the U.S., UK and Germany. Devoted to giving her readers fast-paced, high-stakes adventures with a love story sure to melt their hearts, she invites readers to “Step into the Crossfire” with her romantic thriller novels, which Publishers Weekly call ‘refresh[ing] romantic suspense’ and RT Book Reviews calls “edge-of-the-seat, gripping suspense...with memorable and scarred characters who readers care about.”

Robin’s strong characters and tightly woven plots have garnered her numerous awards. After winning the prestigious Romance Writers of America® Golden Heart® in 2011, she went on to sell fourteen novels in a little over two years, which tests her sanity on a regular basis. Robin works for an advanced technology corporation as an analyst. You can find out more information at her website [www.robinperini.com](http://www.robinperini.com) or visit her on Twitter @RobinPerini, Facebook (RobinPeriniAuthor), Goodreads or Pinterest. Her literary agent is Jill Marsal of the Marsal Lyon Literary Agency.

**MONTGOMERY JUSTICE NOVELS (Amazon’s Montlake Romance)**

- In Her Sights (November 2011) • Behind the Lies (April 2013)  
Game of Fear (August 2014) • Edge of Deceit (2016)

**CARDER TEXAS CONNECTIONS (Harlequin Intrigue)**

- Finding Her Son (March 2012) • Cowboy in the Crossfire (July 2012)  
Christmas Conspiracy (December 2012) • Undercover Texas (June 2013)  
The Cradle Conspiracy (December 2013) • Secret Obsession (August 2014)  
Christmas Justice (December 2014) • Rodeo Justice (2016)

**DARK GUARDIANS (Thursday Publishing)**

- Night of the Jaguar (Novella) (October 2014) • The Ultimate Price (2016)