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Formularende

**Narrative Engaging Beginnings**

Good writers sweat their engaging beginnings. Leads give shape to the piece and to the experience of writing it. A strong engaging beginning sets the tone for the piece, determines the content and direction of the piece, and establishes the voice. Of equal importance, the engaging beginning captures the reader’s interest, inviting the reader to dive headfirst into the text.

When you read, pay attention to how the writer engages you at the beginning of a story.

When you write, experiment with multiple engaging beginnings. Deliberately craft different leads. During revision, choose the lead that you believe works best.

Below are examples of many different strategies for engaging the reader.

**Typical**  
It was a day at the end of June. My mom, dad, brother, and I were at our camp on Rangeley Lake. We arrived the night before at 10:00, so it was dark when we got there and unpacked. We went straight to bed. The next morning, when I was eating breakfast, my dad started yelling for me from down at the dock at the top of his lungs. He said there was a car in the lake.

*Some effective strategies for engaging the reader:*

*\** **Action: A Main Character Doing Something**I gulped my milk, pushed away from the table, and bolted out of the kitchen, slamming the broken screen door behind me. I ran down to our dock as fast as my legs could carry me. My feet pounded on the old wood, hurrying me toward my dad’s voice. “Scott!” he bellowed again.

“Coming, Dad!” I gasped. I couldn’t see him yet—just the sails of the boats that had already put out into the lake for the day.

\* **Dialogue: A Character or Characters Speaking**  
“Scott! Get down here on the double!” Dad bellowed. His voice sounded far away.

“Dad?” I hollered. “Where are you?” I squinted through the screen door but couldn’t see him.

“I’m down on the dock. MOVE IT. You’re not going to believe this,” he replied.

\* **Reaction: A Character Thinking**  
I couldn’t imagine why my father was hollering for me at 7:00 in the morning. I thought fast about what I might have done to get him so riled. Had he found out about the way I talked to my mother the night before, when we got to camp and she asked me to help unpack the car? Did he discover the fishing reel I broke last week? Before I could consider a third possibility, Dad’s voice shattered my thoughts.

“Scott! Move it! You’re not going to believe this!”

*Additional effective strategies for engaging the reader:*

*\** **Onomatopoeia: A Sound Associated with an Action**  
Squish thunk, squish thunk, went out boots as we trudged down the back road of the ranch. There had been a storm the night before and as my brother, sister, and I went for a walk, we were enjoying the crisp spring air and the sunshine putting its warming hands on our backs. As we approached the corral, we noticed a mud puddle, a particularly marvelous mud puddle where the rain had mixed with water, mud, and cow dung that had been there before the storm. Little did I know that I was about to be involved in the mud fight of a lifetime.

\* **Shocking Statement: Something Surprising or Out of the Ordinary**  
They say Maniac Magee was born in a dump. They say his stomach was a cereal box and his heart a sofa spring.

They say he kept an eight-inch cockroach on a leash and that rats stood guard over him while he slept.

They say if you knew he was coming and you sprinkled salt on the ground and he ran over it, within two or three blocks, he would be as slow as everybody else.

They say…

(from *Maniac Magee* by Jerry Spinelli)

\* **List: Complex Listing of Just about Anything**  
Peggy was a kind woman, a quiet woman, a librarian who lived on Oak Street with her loyal dog, Ginger. They ate together. They walked together. They read books together. They watched television together. Their life was perfect.

\* **Lively Description: Specific Details Paint a Vivid Picture**   
Scarcely a breath of wind disturbed the stillness of the day, and the long rows of cabbages were bright green in the sunlight. Large white clouds drifted slowly across the deep blue sky. Now and then they obscured the sun and caused a chill on the backs of the prisoners who had to work all day long in the cabbage field.

(from “The Prisoner Who Wore Glasses” by Bessie Head)

(Source: http://msmcclure.com/?page\_id=6319)