4

Introduce conflict

3

Introduce the immediate goal

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Set the tone, style, mood and genre

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Introduce compelling characters

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Elements to Consider in your Opening Chapters

1

A worthy first line

7

A hint of theme

1

A worthy first line

- Consider what sort of conflict you could use to hook the readers attention

- Try using *'in media res'*: drop the reader into the immediate action

- Does your protagonist have a unique voice that we hear right from that first line?

- You could create intrigue with an unanswered question or an unusual statement

- You could use vivid sensory details or a sharp image to create an atmosphere that grabs your readers attention.

2

Introduce compelling characters

- Create multi-layered characters. Show them having both strengths and weaknesses

- Make sure your character has clear motivations, desires and immediate goals. What do they stand to lose?

- Your character could do something reflective of their personality (it doesn't have to be something likeable)

- Make your character active, not passive. Make them drive the story from the start

- Avoid character info dumping, remember *you* need to know all the details, not your reader.

3

Introduce the
immediate goal

- Establish your characters current situation: give some sort of context for their immediate goal

- Introduce an obstacle or resistance that will hinder your character from reaching the immediate goal

- Be careful: avoid having your character state their goal outright

- Consider highlighting a deep desire or need which is connected to the overall goal. This could come in many forms: love, freedom, revenge, success, etc.

- Plant some sort of seed of an initial goal, this helps establish what drives your character.

4

Introduce conflict

- Introduce an unseen threat (this doesn't necessarily have to be the antagonist). Try using mystery or uncertainty to generate tension and conflict

- Show your character wrestling with internal fear/guilt/temptation something that will impede their goals. Perhaps you could have them face a moral or emotional dilemma

- What are your characters desires? Can you contrast them with the reality that they are currently facing?

- You could use a harsh or unstable environment to introduce a different type of conflict

- Introduce an antagonist or antagonistic force that directly challenges the protagonist's values/power/mission/goal.

5

Set the tone, style, mood and genre

- What type of novel are you writing? Dramatic and powerful? Funny and light? Does your choice of vocabulary/sentence structure reflect this? Short and punchy? Long, flowing and lyrical?

- Where does your story take place? Can the setting be used to help establish the mood? If not, what else could you use? Your characters emotional experiences? Sensory imagery?

- What type of narrative voice will you use? Is the narrative voice formal, sarcastic, poetic, detached, intimate?

- Consider what sort of conflict will your novel explore? Perhaps you could start your novel with a situation that reflects this. Could you use metaphors or similes to reinforce the tone?

- Try using familiar tropes or motifs, include key conflicts or stakes, foreshadow genre-specific rules, or invoke reader expectations (even if you plan to subvert them later) to help establish genre.

6

A hint of setting

- Establish a sense of the location or world, something that grounds the reader. You could open with sensory details: the smell of salt air, the feel of dust on your characters skin

- You could introduce specific objects or customs: mention unique items/food/rituals/greetings

- Can you allude to the history/condition of the world? Perhaps there are subtle references to past events that shaped the current situation

- Try to let your character interact with their environment: show, don't tell

- Don't overwhelm your reader, drip, drip, drip, a little goes a long way.

7

A hint of theme

- You could use symbolism: introduce a meaningful object, setting or image that represents a bigger idea

- Try having your protagonist face a small decision or express a viewpoint that aligns with the theme

- You could foreshadow your characters transformation: showing subtle signs that your character might change can indicate a thematic journey

- Perhaps you could start with a contradiction: a belief that challenges the norms? Or show characters with opposing values that clash e.g. tradition vs progress, loyalty vs truth?

- Be careful not to spell it out for your readers, we don't want to be preached at!