

Presentation Proposal

Ray Rhamey

Crafting a Killer First Page

Specifications:

- fiction writing craft
- all levels can learn from this workshop
- 90 minutes (adjustable from 60 minutes to 120 minutes—longer is better)
- Presentation plus interactive critique of submissions by workshopers
- Materials: pre-conference submissions from attendees (not absolutely necessary, but very helpful to your writers), handouts at session of submissions and tutorial material

Three things that workshopers will learn:

- the storytelling issues that will stop a professional reader from turning the page
- how to analyze and recognize storytelling and craft problems
- how to apply their learning and new analysis skills to their own writing with fresh eyes

The first page of a manuscript is the most critical page in a submission to an agent or an editor—it has to truly compel the reader to turn the page. In this case, the readers are jaundiced, simultaneously looking for a reason to reject the submission and to love it.

Experienced pros have seen so many submissions that they can decide whether or not the manuscript will be worth their time from the first page alone. Many rejections happen after the first paragraph. The reason is that the first page foreshadows the craftsmanship and storytelling in the rest of the book.

The workshop is “immersion” training in seeing the shortcomings that cripple a manuscript’s first page—and what workshopers learn applies to subsequent pages, too. They learn by critiquing in class actual writing submitted by the workshopers themselves.

The workshop opens with a brief discussion of how publishing pros assess submissions with quotes from literary agents and publishing editors, and these 6 vital story ingredients:

- Story Questions
- Tension (in the reader, too)
- Voice
- Clarity
- Scene setting
- Character

It is also a “critiqueshop:” Workshopers evaluate the first pages of the opening prologues or chapters of manuscripts submitted by attendees. The first page is defined as the first 16-17 lines, double-spaced, 1” margins; standard formatting calls for chapters to begin about 1/3 of the way down a page.

Workshoppers submit their work prior to the workshop. The presenter extracts the first pages, strips away names, etc., and provides a handout to the workshop consisting of those pages. The class reads a page, then votes on whether or not they were *compelled* them to turn the page. The vote is perhaps the strongest generator of new insights to all the participants, not just those who submitted work. Writers have told me that by the time the class got to their submission they voted against their own first page.

The presenter leads the class in brief examination of why they did or did not turn the page, and adds his own notes. Then the class moves on to the next submission.

With the quick succession of page after page and the discussion of why or why not turn the page, workshoppers soon read the pages in a more analytical and quite different way—and this leads to insights on what they can do with their own first pages.

50-word summary

In this interactive “critiqueshop,” immersion into first page after first page written by workshoppers teaches analytical skills in an intuitive way that you can apply to your writing. Workshoppers vote on whether or not they would turn the page to read more, and, along with the presenter, give reasons why.

Experience:

I have done this workshop at:

- 2005, 2006 Writers Weekend Writers Conference, Seattle, WA
- 2007, 2009, 2011 Write on the Sound Writers Conference, Edmonds, WA
- 2007 Murder in the Grove Writers Conference, Boise, ID
- 2009 Mendocino Coast Writer’s Conference, Mendocino, CA
- 2011 Willamette Writers Association, Central Point, OR
- 2012 South Coast Writers’ Conference, Gold Beach, OR
- 2012 Wordstock Festival, Portland, OR
- 2012 Write on the River Writers’ Conference, Wenatchee, WA
- 2014 San Miguel Writers Conference, San Miguel, Mexico
- 2014 Idaho Writers League Conference, Idaho Falls, ID
- 2014 Writer Unboxed Unconference, Salem, MA

I received workshopper evaluations from Write on the Sound for the 2011 workshop. The class of 52 was sold out, and 37 evaluations were turned in. Here are the ratings on a 5-point scale, with 5 = excellent, 1 = poor:

5 – 21 votes

4 – 15

3 – 1

2 – 0

1 – 0

average rating = 4.54

Some of the comments:

- In my 3 years attending WOTS this is the best, most helpful workshop I've attended.
- Loved his approach to using participants' 1st pages to analyze, also loved his sense of humor.
- Fabulous class, I learned so much.
- Most interesting class of the day, format unique, discussion of other's work most informative.
- Loved this in-class critique.
- Excellent, good presenter, good content.
- Very good workshop.
- Amazing preparation time put in, excellent real-life exercise, by the time we were done I was pretty clear on what did and didn't work for a 1st page.
- Eye opening!
- Excellent, clear and fun, very knowledgeable.
- Good feedback on submitted pages.
- Loved critique and feedback.
- Great, very useful to read so many pages and hear critique, clear presenter.
- Wow, lots to think about, now I know more what to fix
- Very helpful to see what an audience would do with your work.
- Good practical ideas.

Credentials:

I operate a book editing and design business, Crrreative Book Editing and Design—I've been freelance editing full-length fiction manuscripts for about 14 years. I also run the "litblog," Flogging the Quill. I get several thousand page hits per month.

I published my writing craft book titled *Mastering the Craft of Compelling Storytelling* in 2014, a redo of my *Flogging the Quill, Crafting a Novel that Sells*, 2009 and now out of print.

Bestselling author Tess Gerritsen said this about my book:

"For some time now, I've been a fan of "Flogging the Quill," Rhamey's excellent blogsite about the how-to's of writing. Now he's compiled his expertise into a writing guide, and it's a must-have for any novelist--published or aspiring. It's one of the most readable, entertaining books on writing out there."

I'm also a novelist; I've published 4 novels, and have had literary agent representation. My novels are commercial fiction and include speculative fiction; fantasy; and mystery. Samples are at rayrhamey.com.

In screenwriting, I was a story editor for Filmation, Los Angeles, and my screen credits include an adaptation of *The Little Engine that Could* and 20 half-hour screenplays for animated series.

Websites:

crrreative.com (book editing & design)

floggingthequill.com (blog)

rayrhamey.com (writing)

Contact info:

420 Morton St.

Ashland, OR 97520

ray@rayrhomey.com

541.982.4134