

The First Twenty Pages

The most important
pages you will write,
revise, and possibly
re-write.

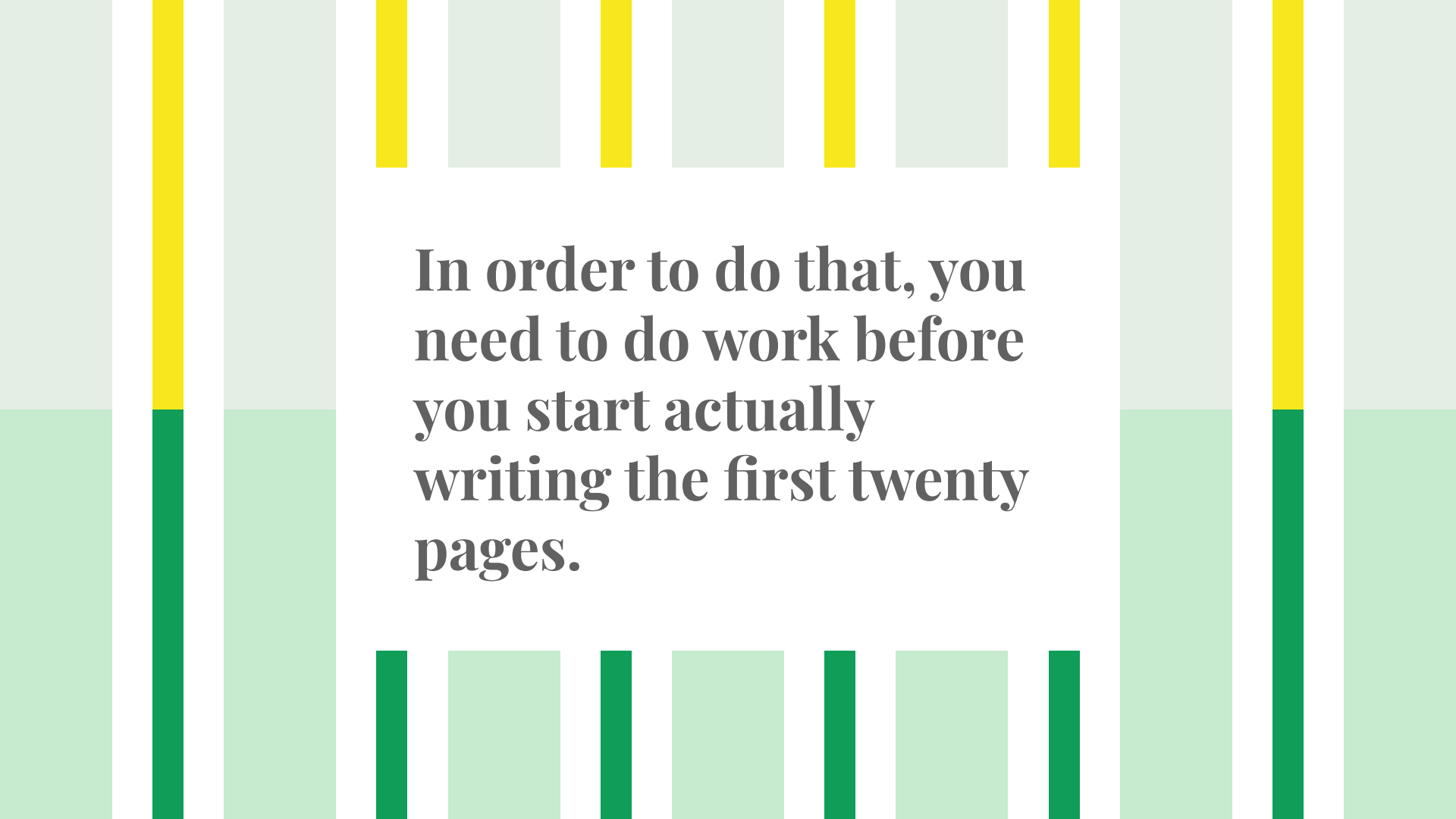
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Why are the first twenty pages so important?

- **They are the first and sometimes only pages editors and agents see.**
- **They are also the first and sometimes only pages readers see.**
- **They are your best opportunity to connect with agents, editors, publishers, and your audience.**

What do you need to do in the first twenty pages to hook a reader?

You have to establish plot,
character, and setting in a way
that makes the reader commit
to reading more.



**In order to do that, you
need to do work before
you start actually
writing the first twenty
pages.**

What Needs to Happen Before the First Twenty Pages - Part 1

1. Make sure you have an idea
2. Make sure that idea is viable
3. Make sure you are the right person to tell the story
4. Read books to support your writing

What Needs to Happen Before the First Twenty Pages - Part 2

5. Choose your genre
6. Pick a point of view and a tense
7. Create an overarching plot
8. Make a writing plan



Doing that work is so important!

It helps your first twenty pages to not be an “on ramp”

It helps you get it right the first time around

It means that you are less likely to face full book revisions

**What needs to
happen in the
first twenty
pages?**





1.

**Establish your main
characters through
their actions.**



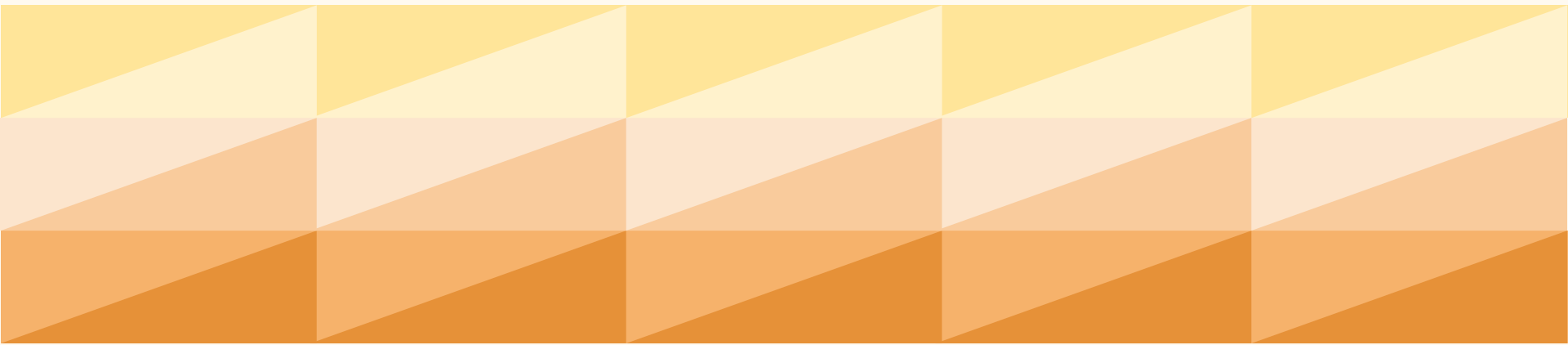
2.

**Establish
the setting.**



3. Set the main plot in motion or establish the world/relationship/characters that the main plot will destroy so we can feel that loss.

**In order to do this effectively, every scene
in the first twenty pages should
serve multiple purposes**



Common/Cliche Opening Scenes

- Characters waking up to the sound of an alarm clock
- Characters waking up drugged/not knowing where they are
- Dream sequences
- Description of the weather/season
- Characters describing themselves in the mirror or a third-person description of character

Clichéd Openings (Continued)

- Simply a description of setting (genre-specific to sci/fi fantasy)
- Exclusively focusing on the character's backstory
- Killing a secondary character
- Prologue involving a life-threatening situation with a character we are not going to meet for a long time
- Overt foreshadowing (“Lilly didn’t know that this time tomorrow, her dog would be dead.”)

Common mistakes that are easy to avoid making!

1. Weak opening paragraph
2. Info dumping
3. Uneven pacing
4. All dialogue
5. No details
6. Over reliance on cliché language



How to verify that you are on the right track?

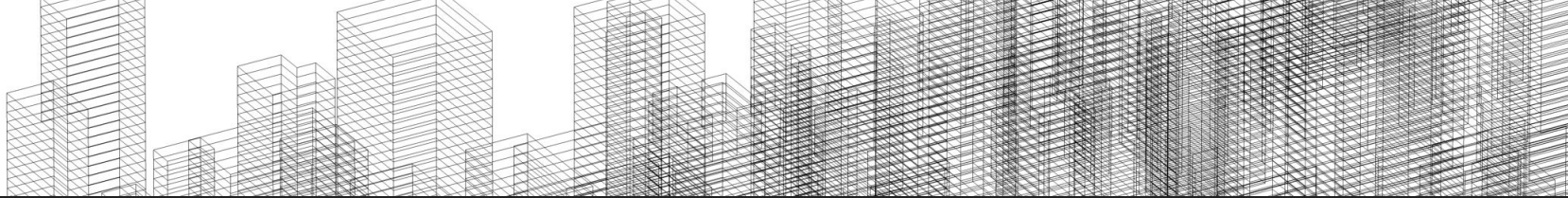
Take a class

Ask a friend

Ask a beta

Be a beta

Read more books



What if it's not working?

Read more

Give it time/space

Hire a developmental editor

Re-write it (It's a good thing you love writing, right?)

Start a new project