

Advanced fiction techniques for reader identification and suspension of disbelief.

BAM Advanced Fiction Techniques: First Pages

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# **BAM**

**Advanced Fiction  
Techniques:  
First Pages**

CYN MOBLEY

## **BAM** Advanced Fiction Techniques: First Pages

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## BAM: You're Done and It's GOOD!

If you read the original **BAM**, you already know how to write one book in a month. This series on Advanced Fiction Techniques came about as a result of repeated requests from folks who'd taken the original one-day course on Structure and Outlining. **BAM AFT**, as a series, is about making a book strong from the very start.

As sort of an overview, let's back up for a moment and talk about good stories (which are at the heart of good books.) There are two aspects to constructing a strong story:

- What you do to readers
- What you do with the story

The basics of the second are covered in the first **BAM** book. The more advanced techniques will be covered in later **BAM AFT**s. This **BAM** is about what you need to do to your readers, and what you need to do is:

- Hook them
- Evoke Identification
- Suspend disbelief

And it's not enough just to do those three things effectively at some point. You've got to do them with in the first few pages. Really, more like the first few paragraphs, because that's about all the time you're going to get with your readers to convince them to keep reading. Seriously. That's all.

I teach a workshop called First Pages, focusing on the things I listed above. I tell the students to bring their first five pages to the workshop. The only reason I tell them that is that they'll feel cheated if they only bring the first page. But in reality, we usually get no further than the first two paragraphs of five or six students' work.

*BAM*

As a writer, you've got a tremendous amount to accomplish in those first few paragraphs—really, just in the first paragraph. I hope you'll have a better handle on that after you read this book.

As with the last **BAM**, we're not going to spend any time at all on your precious inner child. We are going to look at what works and what doesn't and come up with some ways to make sure you accomplish what you need to in those first paragraphs.

But first, let's talk about what we we're talking about. We're talking about printed pages. Paragraphs with words and letters.

Yes, audio books – love 'em. Especially Cracker Barrel's cool deals that enable you to check out books in one store and return them at the next store down the road.

But audio books and movies and all that – that's after the book is written and sold. Not to say you shouldn't keep those possibilities in mind. You should. But focus on the fact that someone is going to be reading your words, probably silently.

The problem with a lot of writing groups is that they read pages aloud. If the writer is the one doing the reading aloud, there's probably a fair amount of nuancing and enthusiasm going into the performance.

What you need to write is something you can sell, not something you can read aloud: a book that's meant to be read as books are normally read.

Here's a big secret: some things that work on the screen, in real life, or in other formats **DON'T WORK IN BOOKS**. All the countless mental stutterings that manifest as “Well, uh, okay, hey,” etc., for starters.

Similarly, oral story tellers – and there are some masters out there – have to get used to the fact that their readers aren't going to see that funny little expression on your face when you tell about the goat that got stuck in a gate – it's all got to be on the page.

*Advanced Fiction Techniques: First Pages*

It's like the Olympics. You don't get points for trying. You have to leave your DNA on the mats.

And it's even worse than that. Your first readers, if you're interested in traditional publishing, are agents and acquisition editors. Editors read a LOT of first pages. Errors and awkwardness jump out at them at a multiple of light speed.

A tough audience. But you've got to get by them to get to your eventual readers, who are – well – readers.

Most editors have slush piles ten feet high next to their desks. They're looking for a quick indication that they can pass on your work and get on to something worthwhile. It's not a malicious thing. It's simply that they don't have time to give you ten pages to warm up.

You probably won't clinch the sale with your first page, but you can very quickly blow it in the first sentence.

So let's talk about First Pages.

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