

INSTANT SEDUCTION: TIPS FOR WRITING A GREAT FIRST CHAPTER

First things first...

Think about your goals when writing a great first chapter.

You want to:

- Grab your reader's attention
- Get her hooked in
- Keep her turning the pages and wanting more

These three aims might seem very simple, obvious even. But many new writers fail to consider them when they sit down to start their stories...

Here are the most common writing personalities and their mistakes that our editors see when they're reading unsolicited submissions in the search for new talent:

- **The Free Spirit** who has no idea on what her story is or where she's going when she begins her book.
- **The Procrastinator** who 'writes herself in'. She spends two to three chapters unfolding a long, rambling back-story and setting the scene, and there's no romance or hero-heroine action in sight.
- **Ms No-Man's-Land** who doesn't introduce the hero until Chapter Two... or even later!
- **She-who-saves-the-best-for-last**, and who clings to the assumption that writers (and editors) will be understanding and hang in there until Chapter Four or Five when her romance really gets going...
- **Me-Me-Me** uses a lot of descriptive narrative, choosing to tell the story and so inserting herself between the readers and the characters, rather than letting characters speak for themselves.
- **The Party Animal** includes loads of minor characters – but who are the hero and heroine?
- **The Show-stopper** thinks of a great opening line or paragraph and then...her book goes downhill from there!

Let's be clear about a couple of things. In terms of word length, these are short books. So you haven't got time to warm up or wait for the hero to arrive! And, despite the quickness of the read, every reader expects to have taken a ride on an emotional rollercoaster by the time she finishes your book.

The Editor's Golden Rules for Packing a Punch from the Very First Page:

- Make the writing of a synopsis of your story your very first task.
- Also be sure of who your hero and heroine are before you start and aim to get them together as soon as possible.
- Keep the focus on the hero and heroine and their developing romance as much as you can.
- Give your reader a tantalising taste of the emotional conflict within the first few pages.
- Give evidence of the instant attraction between the hero and heroine too.
- Aim to unfold the back-story in bite-sized pieces throughout your book – not immediately, in one long, indigestible chunk!
- Use dialogue – when the characters speak for themselves, readers will be instantly engaged.
- Keep minor characters to an absolutely minimum and use them to support the unfolding romance – don't start giving them a life of their own!
- Keep an eye on your pace – it should be tight and fast from page one, with the aim of keeping the reader turning the pages.
- Aim to end your first chapter on a climax – and invite the reader to read on.

It may seem like a lot to remember, but actually it's all about creating a focused emotional environment for your characters and their romance. Good luck!

Harlequin Mills & Boon: the Opportunities

- We are actively buying authors and looking for these types of story:
 - Traditional – intense, passionate, emotionally dramatic stories with experienced men-of-the-world heroes, feisty heroines and fresh renditions of well-loved themes. See the [Harlequin Presents guidelines](#).
 - Hot and fresh – pacy, passionate, emotional and engaging...innovative takes on character and emotional themes. Heroes and heroines are slightly younger, cosmopolitan, making their way in the world with all the concerns that this brings. But he's still Alpha and she's still feisty. See the [Modern Heat guidelines](#).
 - Romantic and deeply emotional – capturing the excitement, the anticipation and *the sheer rush of falling in love!* Fantastic short reads with a lower sensuality level — with stories that are contemporary and 100% relevant to today's woman. [See the Harlequin Romance guidelines](#).
 - Historical – richly textured, emotionally intense stories that encompass a wide range of historical periods. The central relationship is the key driving force, set against an accurate backdrop. [See the Harlequin Historical guidelines](#).
 - Medical – character-driven, highly emotional stories set in the world of the medical profession. They are romantic fantasies albeit with a

realistic set of emotions, conflicts and scenarios that readers can truly relate to. [See the Medical Romance guidelines.](#)

How to contact us:

Harlequin Mills & Boon guidelines are available from eHarlequin.com and millsandboon.co.uk, or Harlequin Mills & Boon, Eton House, 18-24 Paradise Road, Richmond, Surrey, TW9 1SR, United Kingdom.

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Suzanne has worked both in-house and as a freelancer for HM&B over the last nine years. Her love of M&B came from her grandmother, who would pass on a huge stack of the books to Suzanne and her sister every Christmas!

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Sally has been working at Harlequin Mills & Boon for almost three years and, having always been an avid reader and a fan of happy endings that make her cry, loves that she gets to read Romance all day. Her friends often tell her how jealous they are!