

**Title of Session: Hook Line & Cliff Hanger**  
**Creator: Janet Beasley**  
**Curriculum: NOVICE**

**Definition:**

The hook line is the most important (first) sentence used to begin your story and “hook” your reader’s attention so they want to continue reading. The cliff hanger is the most important (last) sentence used to end your story and leave your readers “hanging,” not being able to wait to read the next book in your series.

**Goals:**

By the end of the session enthusiasts will be able to create an effective hook line and an effective cliff hanger.

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**Tools:**

Flipchart or wipe off board and appropriate markers  
Paper and pencils/pens – enough for all enthusiasts

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**Ice Breaker:**

- Hand out the paper and pencils/pens to the enthusiasts
- Ask them each to write a first line to a story – this line cannot be from the story they are working on, it must be newly created by them
- Once enthusiasts have written their first lines have them pass their paper to the person beside them.
- Enthusiasts will then read the first line they’ve been given and elaborate on it with another 2-3 sentences.
- Go around the room having the enthusiasts read their full paragraph aloud
- Ask enthusiasts if their sentence portrayed enough information that the rest of the paragraph fell in line with what they were thinking, or did it give them a whole new idea.

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**Activity 1: Hook Line**

**What makes a good hook line?** *Write the following categories on your flipchart or wipe off board and have the enthusiasts name things within that category.*

- **Action** – Examples: a chase or being chased, escaping death, performing, sports – player or spectator, etc.
- **Weather** – Examples: violent storm, eerily calm, but NOT It was a dark and stormy night
- **Dialogue** – Examples:

- “What are we doing under this bed?” Jenny grabbed her little brother’s hand and together they held their breath watching the big dark boots walk closer.
- “I can’t believe they chose me to be on their team.” Heather muttered. She grabbed her field hockey stick from the rack and played it cool as she walked toward the popular athletes.
  - Dialogue – Dialogue is not highly recommended, but doable in some cases. If used effectively it begins to connect readers with the character. Using a question in dialogue can be a bit more effective as it can make your readers wonder, or ask why or how, this is especially effective when used in children’s or chapter books. SIDE NOTE: If you are choosing dialogue as your hook line, be sure to research some of the uses, and consider using a descriptive beat instead of a dialogue tag that helps bond the reader to the character straight away.
- **Clue** – Examples: something the character finds, someone discreetly passing off something to another person, something odd someone sees, finding a murder victim, etc.
- **Location** – Examples: outer space, a different planet, on a space craft, in a submarine, locked in a dark basement, etc.
- **Introduction** – Examples:
  - Ellie was a haggard old soul.
  - William had no choice but to be himself, strong, willing, and able.
  - Seth stood head and shoulders above the other players.
  - Michelle’s long dark hair was now plastered to her face with the dried blood that had splattered from the final blow of her sword.
- **Time of Day/Light or Dark** – early morning, late morning, midnight, middle of the night, etc.
- **Season** – summer, winter, spring, autumn, the dead of winter, the heat of the summer, the colors of spring

### **Is a hook line only one sentence?**

Yes and no. The first sentence is the most crucial in hooking your readers, however a second sentence is considered part of the hook at times.

### **Can the hook line still be used if I’m starting my story in the middle or end?**

Not only can it be, it **has to** be. The first line of any story must be a hook line that makes readers want to continue reading whether your story begins at the beginning, the middle, or the end.

### **If I choose dialogue for my hook line should it be delivered from the protagonist?**

A hook line of dialogue from the protagonist is most effective.

### **Can I use more than one sentence to hook a reader?**

Yes, but your initial hook line needs to be the prominent sentence. A second hook line can follow and should contain only the important thing(s) that reveal or sum up the story line.

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## Activity 2: Cliff Hanger

**What makes a good cliff hanger?** *Write the following categories on your flipchart or wipe off board and have the enthusiasts name things within that category.*

- **Life changing events**
  - Death – Examples: someone is dying but they have not died at the end of the story, someone dies but someone crucial is born at the same time, creatures who cannot die but come across as being totally dead at the end, etc.
  - Marriage – Examples: a couple at their wedding but someone stands up and shouts something that causes question to continue with the ceremony, the awkward “X” shows up, etc.
  - Having a baby – Examples: the woman didn’t know, the man didn’t know, neither one knew, it is born an alien, it’s twins, etc.
  - Career change – Examples: got a new job, lost a job, the job description changes day of hire, etc.
- **Action** – Examples: diving off a cliff as the only choice (did they live or die?), wrecking a car, a paranormal entity begins to appear from an unknown location, evil wins in a battle, a space ship takes a hit, the outcome of the last quest leaves the characters ready for more action, etc.
- **Season** – Examples: the wrong season follows another i.e. fall follows winter, winter comes too early, summer
- **Dialogue** – when using dialogue for a cliff hanger a dialogue tag may or may not be needed, and a descriptive beat may be used, but is not necessary.
  - Examples:
    - “Look what I found.”
    - “Oh, this can’t be good.”
    - “I can’t believe who I’m seeing headed this way.”
    - “I think the baby’s coming.”
  - **Question** – can be narrative or dialogue
    - Examples:
      - But who will take Samuel’s place?
      - Who ever said aliens don’t exist?
      - “What if we go to the desert?”
      - “Are you certain we should unbury that?”
- **Location** – Examples: moving from one planet to another but characters don’t know which one, lowering a contraption into undiscovered water, earth, Mars, Saturn, the harsh west, the icy Antarctic, etc.

- **Clue** – Examples: leaving a special “something” behind, burying a trinket that brings about evil, discovering a weird looking egg, etc.
- **Weather** – Examples: the sky grows dark and funnel cloud appears, lightning strikes and starts a fire, drought happens overnight, etc.

**Is the cliff hanger only once sentence?**

Yes. In a cliff hanger you want to do just that, leave your readers “hanging on the edge of the cliff” wondering what will happen next. No need to explain further, save it for the next book.

**Does a cliff hanger have to be used at the end of every story?**

No. If you are not writing a series there is no need for a cliff hanger.

**Are cliff hangers only found at the end of a story?**

No. Cliff hangers can be found at the end of chapters as well.

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**Activity 3: Writing Exercise Using a Hook Line and Cliff Hanger**

*Write the following on the flipchart or wipe off board*

**Hook Lines:**

- It wasn't the fall that killed Tammie, it was the sudden stop.
- Carlos could see the top of the water, but he didn't know if he could hold his breath much longer.
- That's when Gail decided it was time to choose another way of life.
- It didn't matter how many times Carol passed by the abandoned barn, she was certain it was a hotel for the undead.
- Ian and Nita locked themselves in the closet thinking they were safe, but the foul-smelling, vaporous entity pushed through the door.
- Who knew Josh and Ty would be the ones to make it happen?
- Thinking it was going to be a much better day, Caleb's heart sunk when he looked out the farmhouse's kitchen window.
- Randal longed for adventure, but never did he intend to find himself in this predicament.

**Cliff Hangers:**

- Are you ready to tackle the jungle?
- She couldn't believe who she saw laying on the table at the morgue.
- His anger turned to panic knowing that for the first time he had actually paid someone to ice another human being, but in deep down he was ready to hire the hit man for the next murder.

- They met face to face for the first time, and when she smiled he couldn't believe what he saw.
- I can't continue running from these guys, but what choice do I have?
- When he pulled the pin on the gate he regretted it from the start.
- She slumped into his arms, still barely breathing.
- If it hadn't been for the mysterious strong man, she would not have made it out alive.

Have enthusiasts choose one Hook Line and one Cliff Hanger and write a micro fiction (50 – 100 words) to tie them together.

When done, select a few to read aloud and critique.

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**Discussion:**

- What grabs your attention when you start a book?
- What are some cliff hangers that made you read the next book in a series?
- Do you like to start your book at the beginning, middle or end, and why?

**Session: Hook Line & Cliff Hanger**  
**Creator: Janet Beasley**  
**Handout: NOVICE**

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**What things make a good hook line and why?**

- Action – plops the reader smack dab in the middle of excitement
- Weather – sets the mood and/or tone
- Dialogue – Dialogue is not highly recommended, but doable in some cases. If used effectively it begins to connect readers with the character. Using a question in dialogue can be a bit more effective as it can make your readers wonder, or ask why or how, this is especially effective when used in children’s or chapter books. SIDE NOTE: If you are choosing dialogue as your hook line, be sure to research some of the uses, and consider using a descriptive beat instead of a dialogue tag that helps bond the reader to the character straight away.
- Clues – these make readers ask questions and want to find the answers
- Location – makes the reader want to know exactly where the character is
- Introduction – introducing an important character begins to develop that character from the start
- Time of Day/Light or Dark – good for showing if your main character is operating within or out of their element. For example, Jill may be afraid of the dark, and the story starts in the dark with Jill under the bed crying.
- Season – sets the tone of the story as any reader can relate any of the four seasons

**Is a hook line only one sentence?**

Yes and no. The first sentence is the most crucial in hooking your readers, however a second sentence is considered part of the hook at times.

**Can the hook line still be used if I’m starting my story in the middle or end?**

Not only can it be, it **has to** be. The first line of any story must be a hook line that makes readers want to continue reading whether your story begins at the beginning, the middle, or the end.

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### **What makes a good cliff hanger?**

- **Life changing events**
  - **Death**
  - **Marriage**
  - **Having a baby**
  - **Career change**
- **Action**
- **Season**
- **Dialogue** – when using dialogue for a cliff hanger a dialogue tag may or may not be needed, and a descriptive beat may be used, but is not necessary.
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### **Is the cliff hanger only once sentence?**

Yes. In a cliff hanger you want to do just that, leave your readers “hanging on the edge of the cliff” wondering what will happen next. No need to explain further, save it for the next book.

### **Does a cliff hanger have to be used at the end of every story?**

No. If you are not writing a series there is no need for a cliff hanger.

### **Are cliff hangers only found at the end of a story?**

No. Cliff hangers can be found at the end of chapters as well.

**Title of Session: Hook Line & Cliff Hanger**  
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**Curriculum: ADVANCED**

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Paper and pencils/pens – enough for all enthusiasts

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- Ask them each to write a first line to a story – this line cannot be from the story they are working on, it must be newly created by them
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**Activity 1: Hook Line**

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- “What are we doing under this bed?” Jenny grabbed her little brother’s hand and together they held their breath watching the big dark boots walk closer.
- “I can’t believe they chose me to be on their team.” Heather muttered. She grabbed her field hockey stick from the rack and played it cool as she walked toward the popular athletes.
  - Dialogue is often times not highly recommended, and considered not to be the best in grabbing your reader’s attention, but it is doable in some cases. The hook line dialogue should be delivered from the protagonist and be accented with a descriptive beat rather than a tag so as to instantly bond the reader to the character. Using a question is a favorable tactic. (see handout for more information)
- **Clue** – Examples: something the character finds, someone discreetly passing off something to another person, something odd someone sees, finding a murder victim, etc.
- **Location** – Examples: outer space, a different planet, on a space craft, in a submarine, locked in a dark basement, etc.
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## Activity 2: Cliff Hanger

**Is the cliff hanger only one sentence?**

Yes. In a cliff hanger you want to do just that, leave your readers “hanging on the edge of the cliff” wondering what will happen next. No need to explain further, save it for the next book.

**Does a cliff hanger have to be used at the end of every story?**

No. If you are not writing a series there is no need for a cliff hanger.

**Are cliff hangers only found at the end of a story?**

No. Cliff hangers are also an effective way to end a chapter leaving the reader wanting more, and not “being able to put your book down.”

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**Activity 3: Writing Exercise Using a Hook Line and Cliff Hanger**

*Write all of the following information on the flipchart or wipe off board*

**Hook Lines:**

- Tammie decided it was time to let go.
- Carlos did not want to die this way.
- Gail had to make up her mind on her next move.
- Jan and Derrick got the creeps every time they walked that stretch of road.
- The dark, ghostly creature seeped through the closet door and gurgled a mantra.
- Why in the world Josh and Ty did that, Cheryl would never know.
- Caleb felt nothing but helpless when he looked out the farmhouse kitchen window.
- The obstacles at the onset of the adventure had already become more than Randal could have imagined.

**Cliff Hangers:**

- So, are we heading to the jungle or what?
- The cold body gracing the stainless table was not who he expected.
- He bit her neck, and she turned to vapor.
- “Then if Duke didn’t kill her, who did?”
- There’s now way we can out run these guys.
- He pulled the pin on his last grenade and threw it as hard as he could.
- He felt her slump in his arms and could not accept that it was over.
- The mysterious man watched silently as his prey slipped away.

Have enthusiasts choose one Hook Line and one Cliff Hanger and write a micro fiction (50 – 100 words) to tie them together.

When done, select a few to read aloud and critique.

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**Discussion:**

- What are your favorite types of cliff hangers?
- If you could be a character in a book who would you want to be, and what would your hook line be?
- What are some of the best hook lines you've ever read, and by what author? What do you think made their hook lines "grab" you?

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