

Chicken Scratch Books



First Page Balance

A lot rides on the effectiveness of your first page to connect with readers. Finding a balance of character, motive and plot is the key to capturing your reader's attention.

Ask someone to read the first page of your manuscript who hasn't seen it or heard about it before. Then ask them these questions:

1. Character

- What is a character trait you know about the protagonist after just one page?
- Is there another trait that stands out?
- Did you notice any specific character mannerisms?
- How does the character's voice come across?

2. Motive

- What does the character think they need to solve their problems?
- How does the character see themselves in their situation?
- Is there a specific hint as to what is driving the character forward?

3. Plot

- After reading one page, what kind of story is this?
- What types of events do you expect to have happening going forward?
- How will the character be moving the plot along?

After having this discussion with your first page reader, consider all the answers they gave. Then ask yourself the same questions.

- Did you answer the questions differently based on what you know is coming?
- Did their answers differ from what is really there in the later story?
- Did your first page make promises that weren't accurate going forward?
- Are there elements that are more clear than others between these three?
- Is the motive the missing piece? (Often it is.)
- What hint can you add to the first page that gives a glimpse of the protagonist's think need?
- What needs to happen on your first page to bring these elements into balance?