Advanced Narrative Composition:
In Medias Res: Narrative Inception

Welcome to the artistry of literary disruption. Today we dissect the classical technique of **in medias res**—plunging readers directly into pivotal narrative moments while eschewing conventional exposition.

> *"Start with the action; explain it afterwards." — Philip Pullman*

Objective: Craft sophisticated narrative apertures employing temporal disruption and sensory immersion to establish immediate narrative tension.

In Medias Res: Starting with Action

- Classical storytelling technique from ***Horace's Art of Poetry*** — beginning in the middle of events instead of lengthy introductions
- Reader psychology and engagement — using ***flashbacks*** and ***flash-forwards*** to create curiosity and suspense
- Comparing with other story structures: ***chronological order*** (from the very beginning) and ***climax-first*** (starting at the most exciting part)
- Famous examples: **Dickens** (***David Copperfield***), **Pullman** (***Northern Lights***), and **Morpurgo** (***Private Peaceful***) all begin with action

Critical Analysis:
Discuss how **Philip Pullman's** opening to *"Northern Lights"* uses multiple senses and mysterious timing to create tension.

Advanced Techniques: Powerful Sensory Writing

- ***Mixed-sensory description*** — combining unexpected senses together (e.g., "**Woolf's *'the taste of colour'***") for immediate reader immersion
- ***Symbolic objects*** — using important objects to signal danger or change, creating mystery and curiosity for readers
- ***Weather and mood*** — using environment to show feelings and tension (e.g., **Dickens'** fog in ***Bleak House***)
- ***Mystery dialogue*** — starting with conversation without explaining who is speaking or where they are, making readers curious immediately

Writing Challenge:
Improve **"Whirr... the classroom 3-D printer jammed and sparks flew..."** by adding *two* advanced sensory techniques to make the scene more vivid and exciting.

Advanced Sensory Techniques

Fun Fact & Flowchart: Action Hooks

Writing Wisdom:

"Start with a bang—not a yawn! Great writers begin with action because it hooks the reader's attention right away—like diving into a pool instead of walking in slowly."

—Advice from master storytellers

Action Story Planning Steps:

1. Choose an exciting moment for your opening

↓

2. Include powerful sensory details (what we see, hear, feel)

↓

3. Use strong action words and varied sentences

↓

4. Add clues about what happened before or will happen next

A dramatic moment captured: The perfect starting point for an exciting story!

Advanced Writing Techniques

Poor Exemplar: What's Weak?

> "In our classroom, we have a 3-D printer. Sometimes it breaks. One day it stopped working."

Analysis:

- **Lacks action** — tells rather than shows
- **No details or suspense** — fails to engage reader
- **Feels slow and flat** — monotonous sentences

Timer: 30 seconds
Spot 2 weaknesses with your partner.

Why This Writing Doesn't Work

> "In our classroom, we have a 3-D printer. Sometimes it breaks. One day it stopped working."

Critical Analysis:

- **Missing sensory details** — fails to immerse the reader through engaging descriptions
- **Repetitive sentence structure** — lacks variety and rhythm in how sentences are crafted
- **Too chronological** — starts from the beginning rather than jumping into an exciting moment

Turn-and-talk: 45 seconds
How could you rewrite this using vivid details and starting at the most exciting moment?

Improved Exemplar—What's Better?

> "Without warning, the 3-D printer spluttered and the lights flickered. The teacher rushed forward as a burning smell curled into the air."

- **Shows** action happening
- Uses **sensory details**

Quickwrite:
One vivid sense you could add?

Teacher and students in mid-reaction as printer sparks

Levelling Up Your Story Openings

Writer's Wisdom:

"When readers start in the middle of an exciting scene, they become curious about what happened before and eager to discover what happens next. This creates a special kind of reading pleasure!"

—Advice from award-winning children's authors

Story Opening Strategy:

1. Find the most exciting moment of tension in your story

↓

2. Add vivid descriptions that engage multiple senses

↓

3. Show how characters react through actions and dialogue

↓

4. Hint at what happened before to create mystery

Critical Practice:

Analyze your story opening for these elements:

- Time (when the story begins)
- Pacing (how quickly events happen)
- Details (what you choose to show)
- Perspective (who tells the story)

Thinking Timer

3 minutes to plan your exciting story opening

Model Exemplar—Narrative Excellence

> "Whirr... Metal shuddered and a flash of orange burst from the printer. Chairs scraped as pupils leapt back. 'Everyone out!' shouted Miss Clarke, her voice almost lost beneath a spray of sparks."

Narrative Analysis:

- **Sensorial hypotyposis** — vivid depiction through onomatopoeia ("Whirr") and chromatic imagery ("flash of orange")
- **Metaleptic tension** — rapid shift from object to characters creates narrative urgency
- **Aural synaesthesia** — layered soundscape ("chairs scraped," "voice almost lost")

Critical Analysis:
Examine the interplay between character agency and environmental threat. How does the author employ kinetic language to establish narrative momentum?

Advanced Narrative Inception

Model Exemplar—Deep Dive Analysis

> "Whirr... Metal shuddered and a flash of orange burst from the printer. Chairs scraped as pupils leapt back. 'Everyone out!' shouted Miss Clarke, her voice almost lost beneath a spray of sparks."

Narrative Technique Analysis:

- **Sound imagery opening:** "Whirr..." creates sound effect technique and immediate action
- **Vivid description:** "flash of orange burst" provides specific visual detail with precise colour choice
- **Indirect characterisation:** "Chairs scraped" shows physical movement revealing emotion
- **Character speech:** Creates perspective shift to authoritative voice
- **Trailing image:** Final detail creates space for reader imagination

Advanced Technique Analysis:

Present Tense Action
Verbs create "here-and-now" feeling

Multi-sensory Details
Visual, sound, and movement combined

Sentence Structure
Short, powerful patterns create rhythm

Emotional Engagement
Reader feels the urgency and danger

Critical inquiry: Analyse how this extract creates a sense of time speeding up through the ratio of actions to words. Which sentences feel fastest and why?

Advanced Technique Toolbox: Mastering In Medias Res

- ***Sensory Symphony*** — Orchestrate multiple senses simultaneously (sight, sound, touch, smell) to create immersive narrative beginnings
- ***Temporal Architecture*** — Deliberate manipulation of time through sentence length variation; short, punchy sentences for urgency followed by longer, flowing ones
- ***Dialogue Integration*** — Embed character speech without introduction, as exemplified in Michael Morpurgo's ***War Horse***
- ***Emotional Geography*** — Map physical reactions that reveal internal states (racing hearts, held breath) without directly naming emotions
- ***Setting Disruption*** — Establish normality then immediately subvert it through unexpected environmental changes or intrusions

Application Challenge:
Select two techniques from the toolbox and incorporate them into your next narrative opening. Annotate with arrows to identify which techniques you've employed.

Strategy Flowchart & Literary Insight

Literary Insight:
"Roald Dahl rewrote the opening to 'Charlie and the Chocolate Factory' 15 times to perfect his in medias res technique!"

Action Opening Mastery Path:

1. Identify climactic moment or tension point
↓
2. Create multi-sensory description (sound, sight, feeling)
↓
3. Include character reactions through dialogue & movement
↓
4. Create narrative questions (subtle mysteries) for the reader

Timed Challenge

Map your action opening:
Using the flowchart, plan an opening for this scenario: "A mysterious object appears in the school playground."

3:00
minutes

Advanced Tip:
Mix sentence lengths for rhythm—start with a short, punchy sentence followed by descriptive elaboration.

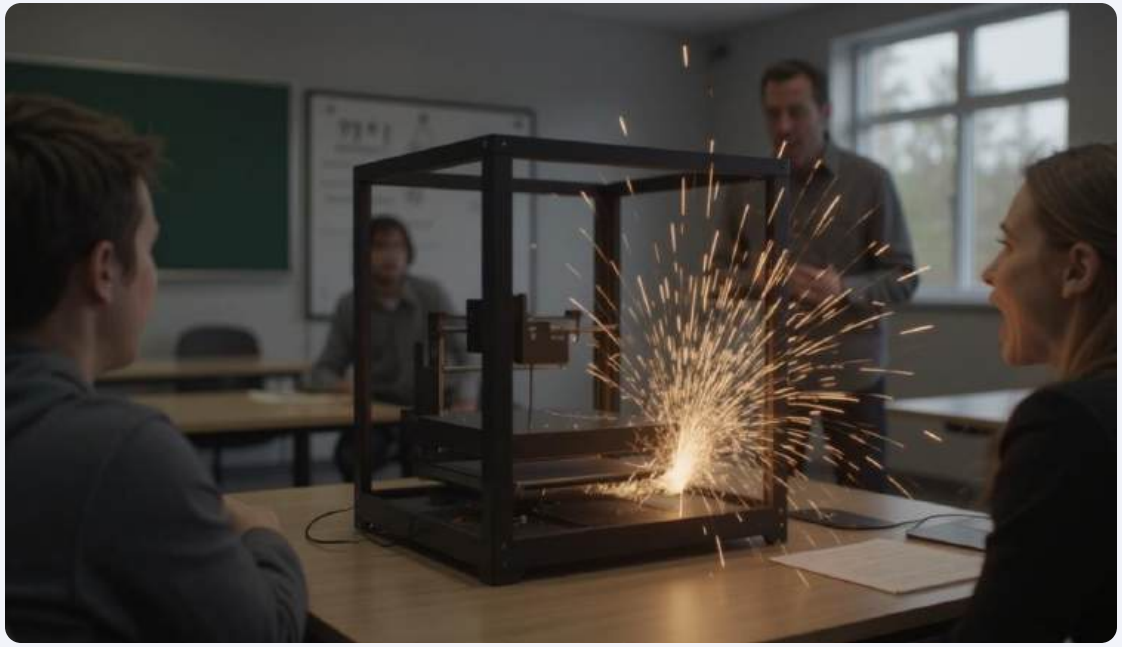
Practice Challenge: Powerful Story Beginnings

Your Challenge: Craft an action-packed opening

> "Buzz... Suddenly, the classroom lights flickered and the robot on the desk began to move on its own."

- **Include:** Sensory details & exciting tension
- **Add:** Character reactions & setting details
- **Use:** Different sentence types for effect

Timed Writing:
3 minutes to craft your opening paragraph



The classroom robot activating unexpectedly

Literary Goal: Create a story hook with unexpected technology

Advanced Narrative Writing

Self-Assessment Rubric (Part 1)

Criteria:

	1	2	3	4	5
⚡ Immediate action?	○	○	○	○	○
👁 Sensory details included?	○	○	○	○	○
🔨 Powerful verbs?	○	○	○	○	○

Checklist: Score yourself 1-5 for each criterion

1 = Not yet present → 5 = Excellent implementation

Turn-and-talk:

Which is your strongest criterion? Share evidence from your writing.

Self-Assessment Rubric (Part 2)

Advanced Criteria:

	1	2	3	4	5
Character reaction and dialogue?	○	○	○	○	○
Reader curiosity engaged?	○	○	○	○	○
Concise, compelling opening?	○	○	○	○	○

Metacognition: Which criterion presents the greatest challenge?

Identify specific techniques from slides 10-12 that could help you improve.

Set a target:

Which narrative technique will you focus on enhancing in your next draft?

Model Exemplar—Fully Annotated

Analysis: In Medias Res Excellence

"Whirr... Metal shuddered and a flash of orange burst from the printer. Chairs scraped as pupils leapt back. 'Everyone out!' shouted Miss Clarke, her voice almost lost beneath a spray of sparks."

- **Sound imagery** — Onomatopoeia creates immediate sensory engagement
- **Vivid action** — Strong verbs (shuddered, burst) create dynamic scene
- **Character reaction** — Physical responses reveal emotion without telling
- **Dialogue integration** — Speech reveals urgency and character

Advanced techniques implemented:

- ✓ Varied sentence structure
- ✓ Multi-sensory details
- ✓ Precise vocabulary
- ✓ Emotional engagement

"When readers remember your story, they remember its beginning and end most vividly!" — Philip Pullman

Final Challenge:

Select one technique from the annotated exemplar and incorporate it into your own revised opening paragraph. Highlight your technique with a coloured pen!