

## The First Two Pages of *Dating Death*

Hello. I am Randy Rawls, and I'm an author of eleven published books in three series, plus one historical. The series are all contemporary settings featuring a Private Investigator, two in South Florida and one in Texas. The historical takes place in 1955-1956 in northeastern North Carolina. My latest book is *DATING DEATH*, book three in my Beth Bowman, a South Florida PI, series. I'm blogging with Bonnie and Rachel because I love books and enjoy the opportunity.

There, in 78 words is what I attempt to accomplish with the first two pages of each book I write, and hope the author does in each book I read. I need to pause and tell you I'm an avid reader first and a writer second. If forced to make a choice between reading and writing, it would be no contest—reading would win the day. If I had to establish a library of all the books I've read, I'd have to take over much of the South Florida.

When I start a book, whether as an author or as a fan, I expect the first few pages to give me a firm anchor and understanding of what is to come. Since I'm older than dirt and can remember a couple of basic rules (now frequently forgotten) of journalism and had the opportunity to be an investigator in my earlier life, I am a firm believer in the interrogatives of *who, what, when, where*. There is also *why* and *how*, but those are less important in the opening pages. That's what the rest of the book is about.

As a young investigator, I remember too well having my Agent Reports bounced because I did not answer the basic questions in the first paragraph. And, since I was military, a lecture usually came with the returned paperwork while I was locked at the position of attention. There are stronger military terms than lecture, but this isn't the place to use them.

So, back to my first 78 words. *Who*: Randy Rawls. *What*: Author of a dozen published books. *When*: Contemporary settings except the historical. *Where*: South Florida, Texas, and North Carolina. *Why*: Because I love books. And that in the proverbial nutshell is what I expect in the first two pages (or thereabouts).

The question is, do I accomplish what I preach? Let's find out.

First paragraph, Sentence 1: Beth Bowman, P.I., pulled into a visitor's parking space and killed the engine on her nondescript Toyota Camry. (We learn *who* and *what* — Beth Bowman, a Private Investigator.)

First paragraph, Sentences 2 and 3: She sighed and leaned back in the seat, staring at the building. Not her first choice for a place to be at ten in the morning, but she felt obligated to be there. (We have *when* and a bit of *why*. And introduce another question. Why does she feel obligated?)

First paragraph, Sentence 4: The *invitation* from Chief Elston to meet with him at the Coral Lakes police headquarters could have been declined, but she needed to keep a good relationship with him and his people—or stated differently, she didn't need to make it any worse. (*What* and *why*. She was asked to be there, and she needs to maintain rapport with the police. Is there a hint here that she's had problems with the police in the past?)

Second paragraph: She stepped out of the car and felt the heat and humidity slam into her—South Florida living up to its reputation. But she knew to enjoy while she could. Since it was rainy season, the afternoon and evening could be filled with thunderstorms, lowering the temperature but raising the humidity. (*Where*—South Florida with its unique weather.)

Paragraphs 3, 4, 5, and 6 establish that Beth has good relationship with the police, from the desk sergeant to the Chief, himself. (Important to begin to establish who's on whose team. More of the *who*.)

Paragraph 7: No one there except the Chief and a man she didn't recognize. He seemed familiar though. VIP came to mind, but she couldn't be sure of it. Whatever, he looked like he either had a severe case of heartburn or would prefer to be about anywhere else. (Raises the ante. A new *who* to be introduced and discover the *why* of the situation. And *why* does he look so sour?)

Paragraph 8: Before she could sort through her memory bank, Chief Elston performed as host. "I'm sure you know Roger Adamson, one of our city councilmen. Mr. Adamson, this is Beth Bowman, the lady I told you about." (The new *who* is resolved, but ramps up the *why*. We're intrigued by *why* the Chief has a city councilman in his office and issued Beth an invitation to join them.)

Paragraph 9: "I gathered that when you called her Beth. Now that introductions are behind us, I'm not sure why you're wasting my time. Like I said before, how the hell do you expect a five-foot, hundred-pound piece of fluff to keep me alive?" (Whoa, our new *who* develops a personality, and escalates the *why*. Sounds like a horse's patootie.)

I won't continue the paragraph by paragraph description, but I hope you understand Randy's approach to the first two pages. The above all occurs on page 1. By the time we get to the end of the second page, the situation among the three of them has been established and the story line opened. We learn that Beth and this City Councilman, Roger Adamson, are expected to work together. Adamson, because the Chief needs information that he has. And Beth, because Adamson can't talk if he's dead. Which begs the question, will Adamson's attitude toward Beth improve, or will Beth be forced to have a serious nose-to-nose with him?

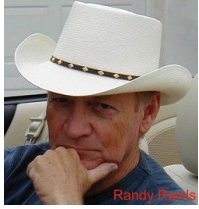
Bottom Line: I opened a setting that answers those basic journalism questions: *who*, *what*, *when*, *where*, *why*, and a bit of *how*. And that's what I attempt to do in every book I write and expect in every book I read.

Many authors are trapped by the simplest, yet most difficult, of questions: Where does the book begin? With **Dating Death**, it starts with Beth pulling into the parking lot. Why not when she knocks on Chief Elston's door? It might, but we'd miss the setting, South Florida during rainy season, and I'm betting you figured out that South Florida is a major character in the story. Also, we'd have to backtrack to discover she received an *invitation* to be there. How about when she meets Abramson? Again, too much left out that would have to be brought in later. No, I think I hit on the right spot. Of course, I should let you know that these opening two pages were at least my fifth attempt to open the story. Seldom does this author hit it the first time. Those first two pages are critical to the future of the book. Open wrong and the book is a loser. Open right and you have a chance in the marketplace.

I teach a class I call, "Where Does Your Book Begin." In that class, I use several examples from well-known authors. Each of those writers has achieved a level of fame that I'll never reach. But the one thing they have in common is the ability to open the story—the first two pages. They answer *who*, *what*, *when*, *where*, and touch on the *why* and *how* in a way that makes the reader want to read on.

If you're a writer and you're shopping a book, stop and look at those first two pages. Be honest. Would you be hooked and read the rest of the book? Did you answer the *who*, *what*,

*when, where,* and touched on the *why* and *how*? If not, it's time to put it back on the drawing board and rewrite, rewrite, rewrite.



I'm Randy Rawls, author of mysteries and thrillers. I grew up in northeastern North Carolina, then did a career in the Army. I've been an avid reader all my life and have tried to incorporate what I learned from the best into my writing. While I live in South Florida, my heart resides in Texas. I'd love to hear from you at [RandyRawls@att.net](mailto:RandyRawls@att.net).