

Prologues and Epilogues

(Courtesy of Jeanne Leach)

Prologues:

The prologue is an introductory part of the novel, usually written in one of the characters' POV rather than in that of the author. It usually establishes setting and gives important background details. This is a good spot for the author to give backstory that ties into the main plot, along with other miscellaneous information. Instead of using flashbacks in the first chapter, authors will simply write a prologue to demonstrate the flashback as if it were currently happening. Then Chapter one starts where the actual story starts—often as much as twenty years into the future from the time the prologue takes place.

There is a recurring discussion in the ACFW as to whether or not prologues are advantageous to a story. Someone once cited that a college study had been done that proved that readers tend to skip over introductions and prefaces in non-fiction books, and they do the same for prologues in fiction books. The mindset is that if it were important, it would be in the actual book. If this is true, then a lot of valuable information is being missed by the readers because prologues are prevalent in fiction.

As an avid fiction reader and writer, I not only read prologues, but I read the copyright pages as well. ☺ It doesn't make sense to me that anyone would skip over such an important part of the book. On the other hand, I have often skipped over large amounts of descriptions and info dumps, so I can understand why some might think a prologue is information that the author just didn't know what to do with.

When editing a work of fiction that includes a prologue, it will be your job to assess whether the information contained in it is actually helpful or pertinent to the total story. I've often deleted prologues because they contained little or no necessary information and suggested other places in the book where the info could be dropped into the story.

Then there are times when a writer opens their book with chapter one, and the information at the beginning doesn't fit with the rest of the book--important, but out of place. I've had to suggest the beginning up to the point where the "real action" begins be put into a prologue.

Either way, make sure that prologue has a good reason for existing.

Epilogues:

An epilogue is a final [chapter](#) at the end of a fiction book. Not all stories have epilogues. They can serve several functions:

1. To reveal the fates of the [characters](#).
2. To hint at a sequel
3. To wrap up all the loose ends from the story.

4. They often show a significant amount of time has passed after the main [plot](#) has ended.
5. Occasionally can be written in first person, even though the rest of the book was in third, to allow the main character a chance to “speak freely.”

An epilogue usually continues in the same tense and style as the story, but it can occasionally be drastically different from the overall story. Have you ever read a story where at the end you wonder whether the hero and heroine got married or if they had any children? The epilogue anticipates these questions and often answers them.

When the author steps in and speaks directly to the reader, this is considered an [“afterword.”](#)

There are times when an entire fiction book series has been contracted for that has already been completed by the author. In some cases, you’ll find the publisher printing a “teaser” at the end of the book that is comprised of the entire first chapter of the sequel to the book. This is not an epilogue and is usually set apart by extra pages advertising the author’s other books or the cover of the sequel.