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A First-page Checklist

- ✓ It begins *to engage the reader with the character*
- ✓ *Something is wrong/goes wrong or challenges the character*
- ✓ The character *desires something*.
- ✓ The character *takes action*. Can be internal or external action: thoughts, deeds, emotions. This does NOT include a character musing about whatever.
- ✓ *There's enough of a setting* to orient the reader as to where things are happening.
- ✓ It *happens in the NOW* of the story. Readers are not interested in the THEN of a story.
- ✓ *Backstory? What backstory?* We're in the NOW of the story.
- ✓ *Set-up? What set-up?* We're in the NOW of the story.
- ✓ One thing it *must do: raise a story question*.

Caveat: a first page can succeed without including all of these possibilities. They are simply tools you can use. In particular, a strong first-person voice with the right content can raise powerful story questions and create a page turn without doing all of the above.

On the other hand, testing pages with the checklist no matter where they are in a story can help identify where a narrative lags and why it does.