

How to Write an Epilogue for a Novel

The plot has reached its conclusion, characters' motives have been addressed and readers are left feeling satisfied. You have finished your book. Or have you? If you feel the manuscript is missing a little something, consider adding an epilogue. It is an effective way to give readers an idea of what happened after the story ended. The tricky part, however, is not to get sucked into the trap of making an epilogue the actual end of the story. Here are some tips to writing an effective epilogue.

Instructions:

1. Decide on a point of view to write the epilogue. Keep it consistent with the rest of the novel, and maintain the same vantage point as the manuscript. For example, if the story was written in the first person, then avoid writing the epilogue in third person. Use this technique only if you want to separate the epilogue completely from the novel as a setup for another book.
2. Decide where to pick up the story. Do you want the action to take place 20 years in the future, a few months later or the very next day? This will help guide the story. Also determine who will appear in the epilogue. You can simply focus on one character, or you can include the futures of any number of your characters.
3. Plot out the scenario. There is a reason epilogues are not always included in a novel. Sometimes the end of the current conflict is enough. An epilogue can help give the reader a sense of what happened after the initial conflict is resolved or recognized. Brainstorm or fine-tune an outline to determine what comes next. This short storyline should flow with the rest of the novel.
4. Avoid the "happily ever after" trap. Happy endings are uplifting, but they should not be used as a way to minimize the conflict that occurred in the novel.
5. Consider using a different structure in the epilogue. For example, the narrator can finish with a short speech, or you can end with a poem.
6. Do you want to write a sequel? If so, an epilogue is a great way to hint at an unresolved conflict, or a new plot twist the characters will address in a future book.
7. An epilogue can be only a few pages long, or it can be quite extensive. It's usually better to keep an epilogue somewhat brief so the reader does not get the sense that a whole new story is starting. Because of this, you need to make every word count.
8. Format the epilogue as a separate section. If the epilogue is especially brief, you may choose to offset it in a font like italics.

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