

Writing Basics → Ending with a Cliffhanger

Level: Middle School

A successful story conclusion leaves the reader feeling satisfied, but if you want to write a sequel to your story, add a cliffhanger to make your reader eager to read more. The term cliffhanger comes from old movies which were serials. The end of each segment left the hero or heroine in a dangerous situation -- sometimes literally hanging off a cliff. Descriptive scenes, dialogue, and questions are all devices that can be used in creating effective, successful cliffhangers.

Read the examples of three types of cliffhangers below.

Question:

From the porch, she viewed the scene through the window. The kids were home again, a family, as if the last few days had never happened. Nora turned away before the lump in her throat could get any bigger. She shouldered her pack and started walking toward the road. It was time for her to go home, too. But where was her home, and was there a family waiting for her there?

Dialogue:

- "How in the world did you find your way home?" Mama asked.
- "Nora helped us. Didn't you, Nora?" Jesse looked around for the girl who'd been their companion and guide.
- "She's gone," said Daddy. "She said she had to go home."
- "But she can't go home," protested Nell. "She doesn't even know where home is."

Descriptive Scene:

The house had been warm, and the night had a chill. Still, Nora let herself out the door. If she stayed tonight, she'd be comfortable and fed, but it would be harder to leave in the morning. She hefted her pack and stepped out onto the road.

Now think of one story you have recently written or read. Write three cliffhanger endings for it using each technique: a question, dialogue, and a descriptive scene. Refer to the example above for guidance.

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Story Title: _____

Author: _____

Cliffhanger Ending # 1 → **Question**

Cliffhanger Ending # 2 → **Dialogue**

Cliffhanger Ending # 3 → **Descriptive Scene**

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