Knowing how to end a novel is an essential skill for fiction writers. Whether you love the open-ended novel or stories that wrap up tidily, a great ending is one that feels apt when readers measure it against the preceding story. Here are novel ending ideas to inspire you to find the best for your own story:

**1. The open-ended novel: Leaving them guessing**

**2. The full circle: Ending where you began**

**3. The shocking twist: Pulling the rug from beneath their feet**

**4. The tidy wrap-up: Creating a feel-good crowd-pleaser**

**5. The new chapter: Building in ‘what next?’**

**6. Combining novel ending ideas: Creating complex resolutions**

**7. How not to end a novel: Story ending approaches to avoid**

Let’s explore each of these story ending types in greater detail:

**1. The open ended novel: Leaving them guessing**

Some genres are better disposed to leaving the story open-ended than others. In a romance novel, readers typically expect that the lovers will be united in the end. Other styles of writing (such as literary fiction) don’t always require such cut and dried endings. An open-ended novel can be satisfying because the reader is allowed to imagine outcomes without being told explicitly how to interpret a last-minute turn of events or revelation.

An example of an open ending: An anti-hero killer ends up relocating and going incognito. The story ends on him returning to his old stomping grounds. It’s up to the reader to decide whether the character is reformed or is back to pursue old vices.

Even though this type of story ending leaves some room for imagination and interpretation, make sure that you:

1. Resolve secondary story arcs so that there is at least some sense of resolution.
2. Don’t mistake an open ending for letting the story peter out – even if there is no decisive conclusion, maintain tension and/or character interest to the end.
3. Have a reason for leaving the story open-ended. Perhaps you want to convey a specific message (in the case of the example above, this could be that sometimes people get away with bad things and that not everything has a satisfying, comforting resolution).

**2. The full circle: Ending where you began**

If you prefer a stronger sense of an ending, the ‘full circle’ story ending can be highly satisfying. This is a particularly effective way to end a book if your story began in the thick of a mysterious, perplexing scenario. The book up until the end then provides the reader a frame of reference for understanding how the book ends as well as begins.

David Mitchell’s novel *Cloud Atlas* is an excellent example of this type of novel ending. Mitchell hops between eras and locations from section to section, then resolves each separate narrative in reverse order so that the book ends with the resolution of the first interrupted story arc. The structure of the book thus returns the reader to the first set of characters, although the information given in the middle chapters of the book change how the reader interprets the first chapters of the book.

**3. The shocking twist: Pulling the rug from beneath their feet**

The plot twist is a typical device of the short story. Famous short fiction authors such as O. Henry mastered the dramatic-revelation-as-story-resolution. Yet this can also be a satisfying ending to a longer work of fiction. Masters of the surprise ending include the authors Kazuo Ishiguro and Ian McEwan.

Alec Worley, in his post ‘[The 5 types of twist ending’, lists the following types of story twists:](http://alecworley.weebly.com/blog/the-five-types-of-twist-ending)

**How to end a novel with a reversal: the 5 types**

1. **The reversal of identity** (in which ‘someone turns out to be someone else’. A character is not who we (or other characters) thought they were.).
2. **The reversal of motive** (in which the reader assumes a character is acting out of the desire for x when what they really want turns out to be y).
3. **The reversal of perception** (in which the protagonist realises their world or their understanding of it is out of step with reality).
4. **The reversal of fortune** (in which a character is brought low or elevated to new highs by a stroke of luck or unforeseen circumstances).
5. **The reversal of fulfillment** (in which a character reaches the goal of their primary character motivation, only for another character to cancel it out through their actions).

A reversal doesn’t *have* to be shocking or surprising. You can set it up from early as something made inevitable by your protagonist’s personality and actions or their society or environment. Yet surprise reversals give readers the uncanny feeling of having been duped, either by the narrator or the author, and this sense of surprise can make a story more dynamic and exciting.

**4. The tidy wrap-up: Creating a feel-good crowd-pleaser**

A twist ending, especially a shocking, discomforting one, carries the risk of angering readers who were looking forward to an expected resolution. Sometimes you’ll simply want to give readers what they expect and desire of a novel in your genre. A tidy wrap-up can be comforting and reassuring – it’s why most childhood tales end with ‘happily ever after’ (or simply the reassuring finality of ‘the end’).

Even if a tidy ending feels a little too predictable, there are ways to make the wrap-up more interesting:

* Create additional tension before the climax that makes resolution seem less likely
* Create an ‘it ended well, but…’ Leave a small part of the story unresolved to make readers curious about your next novel
* Experiment in the way you present your ending (for example J.K. Rowling shifts time period in the resolution to her *Harry Potter* series)

**5. The new chapter: Building in ‘what next?’**

If you want to explore your fictional world further over a series of books, this is a particularly effective ending. Think of how screenwriters handle plot arcs in critically acclaimed TV series such as *Homeland*. While each major plot arc of each season is mostly resolved, there is something left over that leaves viewers hankering for the next season to start. Think of each book in your series as a season. Building the ‘what next?’ into your closing chapter will keep readers on the lookout for your next instalment. It also helps to stop your resolution from feeling too tidy and convenient.

**6. Combining novel ending ideas: Creating complex resolutions**

There’s no reason why you should have to stick to just one of the story ending types listed above. Because there’s no single correct answer for how to end a novel, it is best to find the best resolution for your own original book. A simple return to the beginning can be effective, but the way David Mitchell returns to the beginning in Cloud Atlas with new information that changes how the reader understands the opening is both complex and satisfying. Mitchell combines the classic plot twist with the full-circle ending. A character’s intentions are revealed to be not what they seemed, and this creates more empathy for some characters while making others more ominous and chilling in retrospect.

**7. How not to end a novel: story ending approaches to avoid**

While the novel ending ideas above are effective, there are also story endings that feel hollow and unsatisfying. Here are novel endings to avoid in your writing:

1. **The Deus Ex Machina**  
   This term refers to the ending in which an implausible event provides a quick, tidy resolution that gets the characters (and the author) out of a thorny situation. It usually feels contrived. The term is derived from the ancient Greek for ‘God from the machine’. In the Greek theatre, actors playing Gods would be lowered onto the stage on a rope via a crane-like contraption, usually to resolve primary conflicts.
2. **The abrupt ending**  
   The end of a novel serves multiple important functions: It resolves major questions raised by preceding plot events (or purposefully leaves some unanswered), it clarifies and rounds off important ideas or themes (reinforces the ‘point’ of the novel) and it shapes the lingering impression readers will have of the novel as a whole. Avoid moving your story to an end without sufficient build-up and release. The best story endings weave together all the different threads that have been laid out before the reader, as opposed to simply tying them all up quickly in a clumsy knot.