

## IN MEDIA RES, OR, PLAYING WITH NATURAL ORDER

In his fantastic essay “The Question of Where We Begin,” from his debut essay collection *Praying Drunk*, Kyle Minor begins an essay on his uncle’s suicide with the following sentences:

“We begin with the trouble, but where does the trouble begin? My uncle takes a pistol and blows his brains out.

Now we may proceed to the aftermath. The removal of the body. The cleanup. The reading of the will. The funeral in West Palm Beach, Florida. The woman he wanted to marry, taking the ring he gave her and putting it on her finger after the death.

But this beginning is not satisfactory. The mourners are now parsing their theories of why. Did you know that he was brain damaged when that city dump truck hit him twenty years ago? Look at his children grieving on the front pew of the funeral room. Why wouldn’t they visit him except when they wanted his settlement money?”

This essay is an example of an essay written *in media res*, or, *in the midst of things*. This is a common way to hook a reader quickly, but it’s also useful in creating a more contemplative atmosphere surrounding an event.

In this exercise, we’ll be drafting our own essay that subverts the natural chronological order. To do so, please consider an event from your own—or someone else’s—life. Ideally, this is a person (and event) that you know well. Write down the event in one simple sentence below:

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Now, break the event down as five separate events, placing the primary event as event #3 and filling in events #1, #2, #4 and #5, using as much time between them as you’d like. For example, if I were to write on my earliest memory of pain—a fall from a speeding bike down a steep hill in the Pocono Mountains—the fall itself would be #3. Event #2 might be embarking on the steep downhill ride, and Event #1 might be enjoying my grandmother’s crustless sandwich just prior to going for my bike ride. Or Event #1 might be turning five and deciding I want a bike in the first place. Or it might be being born. We can begin however early we’d like to begin.

Similarly, feel free to allow for as much or as little time as you’d like following Event #3. In my case, Event #4 might be the immediacy of the pain and any additional sensory images, sounds or details I might remember, and Event #5 might be the subsequent trip to the ER *or* it might be a moment ten years later, when I looked at a bike and realized, for the first time, I still held onto that fear.

Write each of the 5 events down on a separate index card. Then, shuffle the order blindly. Try to write the essay in this order, whether as one straightforward essay that employs transitions—as Kyle’s does—or a series of vignettes (isolated moments) with white space in-between.