

CREATE NOVEL SCENE THAT MAKE YOUR READERS GO LIKE OH! WOW!

What is in a [novel](#)? Or a [story](#)? Any story or novel is, in essence, a series of scenes strung together like beads on a wire, with narrative summary adding texture and color between. A work of fiction will comprise many scenes.

Now that I got your attention on the main topic that I am going to be addressing in this article, first things first: **what is a scene?**

“A scene is a where a character or characters engage in some sought of action and or dialogue. Scenes have a beginning, middle and end and should focus on a definite point of tension that moves the story forward.” – Teach yourself how to write a blockbuster, by Lee Weatherly and Helen Corner (page 40, 2006 edition)

“By a “scene” we mean here all that is included in unbroken flow of action from one incident in time to another [...] The action within a scene is ‘unbroken’ in the sense that it does not include a major time lapse or leap from one setting to another – though the characters may, of course, walk or ride from one place to another without breaking the scene, the camera, so to speak, dollying after them” – the art of fiction: Notes on craft for young writers, John Gardner page 59, 1991 edition.

WHAT ARE THE FUNCTIONS OF A SCENE IN A STORY OR NOVEL?

- **Move the story forward:** They keep us engaged, asking ‘what happens next?’
- **Establish characters’ arcs or cause and effect.** This links to the first point. For example, a scene might begin with a character missing a train. As a result, the character may be late for a meeting. The reader wonders what impact this small misfortune will have.
- **Reveal consequences of earlier events.** A subsequent scene following the missed train, for example, might show the consequences for the character when they are late for a crucial meeting
- **Make a story easier to follow.** Scenes chunk what could be a narrative mess into digestible units of action and event. They allow us to play with how we release information to the reader (for example, a scene resolving an earlier subplot might only take place much later in a novel. As writers we can make some plot gratification instant and some delayed

WHAT IS IN A SCENE?

A **Scene** has the following three-part pattern:

1. Goal
2. Conflict
3. Disaster

HERE IS THE EXPLANATION:

1. **Goal:** A Goal is what your main character wants at the beginning of the Scene. The Goal must be specific and it must be clearly definable. The reason your main character must have a Goal is that it makes your character proactive. Your character is not passively waiting for the universe

to deal him Great Good. Your character is going after what he wants, just as your reader wishes he could do. It's a simple fact that any character who wants something desperately is an interesting character. Even if he's not nice, he's interesting. And your reader will identify with him. That's what you want as a [writer](#).

2. **Conflict:** Conflict is the series of obstacles your main character faces on the way to reaching his Goal. You must have Conflict in your **Scene**! If your main character reaches his Goal with no Conflict, then the reader is bored. Your reader wants to struggle! No victory has any value if it comes too easy. So, make your main character struggle and your reader will live out that struggle too.
3. **Disaster:** A Disaster is a failure to let your main character reach his Goal. Don't give him the Goal! Winning is boring! When a **Scene** ends in victory, your reader feels no reason to turn the page. If things are going well, your reader might as well go to bed. No! Make something awful happen. Hang your main character off a cliff and your reader will turn the page to see what happens next.

From the above pattern, I am sure that you can already see that the scene ends with a disaster. A **Scene** ends on a Disaster, and you can't immediately follow that up with a new **Scene**, which begins with a Goal. Why? Because when you've just been slugged with a serious setback, you can't just rush out and try something new. You've got to recover. That's basic psychology. Before you can start another scene and not leave your reader hanging, you will need something in between.

This is what [professional writers](#) will call a **sequel**.

WHAT IS IN A SEQUEL? HERE:

1. Reaction
2. Dilemma
3. Decision

EXPLANATION:

1. **Reaction:** A Reaction is the emotional follow-through to a Disaster. When something awful happens, you're staggering for a while, off-balance, out of kilter. You can't help it. So, show your main character reacting viscerally to his Disaster. Show him hurting. Give your reader a chance to hurt with your characters. You may need to show some passage of time. This is not a time for action, it's a time for re-action. A time to weep. But you can't stagger around in pain forever. In real life, if people do that they lose their friends. In fiction, if you do it, you lose your readers. Eventually, your main character needs to get a grip. To take stock. To look for options. And the problem is that there aren't any . . .
2. **Dilemma:** A Dilemma is a situation with no good options. If your Disaster was a real Disaster, there aren't any good choices. Your main character must have a real dilemma. This gives your reader a chance to worry, which is good. Your reader must be wondering what can possibly happen next. Let your main character work through the choices. Let him sort things out. Eventually, let him come to the least-bad option . . .
3. **Decision:** A Decision is the act of making a choice among several options. This is important, because it lets your main character become proactive again. People who never make decisions

are boring people. They wait around for somebody else to decide. And nobody wants to read about somebody like that. So, make your character decide, and make it a good decision. Make it one your reader can respect. Make it risky, but make it have a chance of working. Do that, and your reader will have to turn the page, because now your main character has a new Goal.

After you are done with writing a scene, then you follow it with a sequel, you can be sure to start another scene that contains a new goal.

HOW TO CREATE AWESOME NOVEL SCENES

We have already agreed that a scene in a novel has three essential things:

- The beginning
- The middle and
- The end

Let's begin with the beginning of a novel scene:

1. THE BEGINNING OF THE SCENE

The word *beginning* is a bit misleading, since some scenes pick up in the middle of action or continue where others left off, so I prefer the term *launch*, which more clearly suggests the place where the reader's attention is engaged anew.

Visually, in a manuscript a new scene is usually signified by the start of a chapter, by a break of four lines (called a *soft hiatus*) between the last paragraph of one scene and the first paragraph of the next one, or sometimes by a symbol such as an asterisk, to let the reader know that time has passed.

Each new scene still has a responsibility to the idea or plot you started with, and that is to communicate your idea in a way that is vivifying for the reader and that provides an experience, not a lecture. Scene launches, therefore, pave the way for all the robust consequences of the idea or plot to unfurl. Each scene launch is a reintroduction, capturing your reader's attention all over again. Start each scene by asking yourself two key questions:

- Where are my characters in the plot? Where did I leave them and what are they doing now?
- What is the most important piece of information that needs to be revealed in this scene?
- Where does the scene take place? Have I made it easy for the reader to visualize this? What role does the setting play in how the scene unfolds?
- When does the scene happen? Is it in chronological sequence with preceding events? Or is it a flashback? Have you made the scene's time-frame in relation to the rest of your story clear through narration or a chapter or section heading?
- Who is in the scene? Do you need more or fewer characters?
- What happens in the scene? What is the scene about? Keep in mind that these are not necessarily the same question. Example: a couple working together on an overwhelming home renovation project might be what is happening in a scene but it could actually be about the widening cracks in their relationship, either literally or symbolically
- Why do the characters behave as they do in this scene? These questions are all related to cause and effect, and this is an important aspect of creating narrative drive.

WHAT YOU NEED IS AN ACTION LAUNCH FOR YOUR SCENE!

Starting the action in a scene, provides the momentum needed in order to carry the reader forward. If you find yourself explaining an action, then you're not *demonstrating* the action any longer; instead you are floating in a distant star system commonly known as your *head*—and so is the reader.

Keep in mind the key elements of action:

- Time and
- Momentum.

It takes time to:

- Plan a murder over late-night whispers;
- To cause an embarrassing scene by drunkenly dropping a jar at the grocery;
- To blackmail a betraying spouse;
- To haul off and kick a wall in anger.

These things don't happen spontaneously, they happen over a period of time. They are sometimes quick, sometimes slow, but once started, they unfold until finished.

The key to creating strong momentum is to start an action without explaining anything.

The lack of explanation for what is happening forces the reader to press on to learn more. This makes sure that your reader sticks with your book till the end of it.

HOW TO CREATE ACTION LAUNCHES:

1. GET STRAIGHT TO THE ACTION. Don't drag your feet here. "Jimmy jumped off the cliff" rather than "Jimmy stared at the water, imagining how cold it would feel when he jumped."

2. HOOK THE READER WITH BIG OR SURPRISING ACTIONS. An outburst, car crash, violent heart attack or public fight at the launch of a scene allows for more possibilities within it.

3. BE SURE THAT THE ACTION IS TRUE TO YOUR CHARACTER. Don't have a shy character choose to become suddenly uninhibited at the launch of a scene. Do have a bossy character belittle another character in a way that creates conflict.

4. ACT FIRST, THINK LATER. If a character is going to think in your action opening, let the action come first, as in, "Elizabeth slapped the Prince. When his face turned pink, horror filled her. What have I done?" she thought."

5. COMMUNICATE NECESSARY INFORMATION TO THE READER BEFORE THE ACTION KICKS IN. Sometimes information needs to be imparted simply in order to set action in motion later in the scene. Opening sentences such as, "My mother was dead before I arrived," "The war had begun" and, "The storm left half of the city underwater," could easily lead to action.

6. REVEAL A CHARACTER'S THOUGHTS OR INTENTIONS THAT CANNOT BE SHOWN THROUGH ACTION. Coma victims, elderly characters, small children and other characters sometimes cannot speak or act for physical, mental or emotional reasons; therefore, the scene may need to launch with narration to let the reader know what they think and feel.

2. THE MIDDLE OF A SCENE

After you have introduced the start of a scene, this is the space that you will have to use in order to tell the reader about the goals that led to the start of this scene.

Will the main character achieve his or her goals?

Will he give up.

What conflict is there?

What disaster befalls the main character in his trials to achieve the goals that are presented in that scene?

3. THE END OF A SCENE

There are various ways that you can use to end a scene. Here are some of them:

- **End mid-action.** Cliffhangers are a time-honored way of wrapping up a scene. For example, in his novel *Cloud Atlas*, David Mitchell ends one scene in the middle of the action as a heroine is rammed off a bridge while driving by the antagonist's henchmen. The scene closing draws us on to learn her fate.
- **End with a character epiphany.** A character's crucial realization makes us wonder what action they will take because of the dilemma or motivation new information creates
- **End with the character discovering a major obstacle.** We want to know, as readers, what solution they'll discover and attempt.
- **End with emotional turmoil.** The events of the scene may be over, but not the fallout for your character(s).
- **End with a promise of further revelation.** The scene ends, but it leaves the reader anticipating what is ahead. For example, in a [mystery novel](#), a scene might end with one character telling another the local constable has been hiding something major from the force, and the scene ends on their arranging a meeting for private discussion

RULES TO NEVER FORGET WHILE WRITING A SCENE

1. IDENTIFY THE PURPOSE OF THE SCENE

You want strong pacing, showing rather than telling, and to create empathy for your protagonist. Plus, you want mystery and conflict in every scene to keep readers turning the pages.

Purpose is key.

In life, things happen, we react, process what happened, and decide on new action. So, it's action-reaction-process-decide-new action.

If you can't identify the purpose for your scene, throw it out and come up with one that works.

2. IDENTIFY THE HIGH MOMENT

This occurs near the end of a scene, maybe even in the last line. Why?

Because most of your scenes should mimic overall novel structure, with a beginning, middle, climax, and ending. Of course, a scene could effectively “hang” at the end, to add tension and propel the reader into the next scene.

3. YOU HAVE TO EMPHASIZE ON THE CONFLICT

A [great novel](#) will have conflict on every page, sometimes inner, other times outer. **Or both.** But you don’t want meaningless conflict, such as two people arguing over what type of coffee to order—unless that specific argument reveals something important that advances the plot or exposes a key bit of character.

Think of ways to ramp up conflict to the [highest stakes](#) possible.

Every scene—even thoughtful, “processing” ones—should convey tension, inner conflict, and high stakes.

4. ACCENTUATE CHARACTERS’ CHANGE

Writing instructor James Scott Bell says, “Every scene should have a death”—of a dream, a relationship, or a plan.

Literary agent Donald Maass encourages writers to consider how main character feels before a scene starts and how she feels when the scene ends.

Your character should be changed by what happens. That change can be subtle or huge. It can involve a change of opinion, or it could be a monumental personality shift.

But change must occur. Why? Because, for the story to advance, decisions must be made and action instigated. Every event in your novel should impact your characters and foment change. But it must be significant and serve the plot.

5. DETERMINE THE MAIN CHARACTER

Who is the best character through whom the reader should experience this scene?

You may find it easier to choose your main character when you determine the purpose of your scene.

Or the main choice may become obvious.

In romance novels it’s common to alternate between hero and heroine, so each gets a turn filtering the scene through their point of view.

To decide whose main to choose, ask yourself:

- Who has the most to lose or gain in the scene?
- Who will react strongest emotionally?
- Who will change the most?
- Whose reaction would most impact the plot?

6. LEAVE OUT THE BORING STUFF

And the on-the-nose stuff no one wants to read.

Start your scene in the middle of the action, a bit before you build to the high moment, and you'll avoid pages of unimportant narrative.

Inject important backstory but not at the expense of the present action. Cut anything that doesn't serve your scene's purpose. Make every word count.

7. INJECT TEXTURE AND SENSORY DETAILS

While some writers stuff scenes with too much detail, most tend to [underwrite](#) sensory specifics. This step in this scene-crafting process involves combing through your draft and bringing scenes to life with vivid detail that engages your reader's senses.

Your goal is to paint enough of a picture to help your reader see the scene as if on the big screen. Too much detail is boring, as are details that don't reveal anything important.

WRAPPING UP

That is all you will ever need to read online in order to be able to create awesome scenes for your next story, short story and novel.

Got an honest comment? Let me know about that in the comments.

Would you do me a favor and spread the knowledge through sharing it on your social media by the use of the social media buttons down below? Yes? I greatly appreciate you sharing. It means the world to me!