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## Lesson One: What is a Scene?

Simply put, a scene defines a goal, presents conflict, ends in disaster, thus driving the story forward. The sequel ties that scene to the next, gives the reader and your hero a bit of a rest. It's much like inserting peaks and valleys in your writing. In the scene we climb to the peak and descend to the valley which is the sequel, then we climb up to the next peak or conflict that is going to fall into the valley on the next disaster. Others relate the sequel to the bridge between scenes.

### The three things a scene should include are:

- **Goal:** A hero wants to possess something, wants revenge for something or wants to be relieved of something. Thus she wants to achieve something or she wants to resist something.
- **Conflict:** Not argument between characters as some might believe, but rather is what happens in opposition to what hero wants.
- **Disaster:** Something happens to prevent the hero from reaching her goal. It need not be disastrous in the strict sense of the word. It might simply be someone showing up she did not expect with information she did not know that puts an entirely new light on her struggle to achieve her goal. Or it can simply be a dark hint of what may happen if she pursues her goal, rather than a specific disaster.

Some scenes will be extremely huge in definition, while others may be smaller, but all will be important because they define the character, strengthen her and enforce conflict. And most important, each scene must drive the story forward. Regardless of what you might hear, there is no set rule on the amount of scenes to a chapter, etc. It takes how many it takes, and you as the writer feel the rhythm. You may only put in the bones of a scene, bridge it in sequel, and go on to another, knowing that you will go back and flesh out those bones with dialogue, a sense of place, etc., later.

Remember, rules stifle creativity. Build your scenes as they occur to you, you can edit later and make sure each one contains all the elements for a good scene. At first, write them, putting your characters in deep trouble and letting them dig their way out. In editing use dialogue extensively, and show don't tell. Add a sense of place effectively as the scene progresses.

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**Lesson Two: Sequels and the role they play.**

The sequel is simply a transition from one scene to the next. It lets the hero pull back and reevaluate her goal, makes her take a quick look at reality and most importantly lets the reader take a breath. If you race as fast as you can to the end of your book, you may exhaust your reader. So control the tempo, and take a rest occasionally. Don't run your horse to death.

Among other things, the sequel will show the hero's reaction to the previous scene, allow her to mull her dilemma and discover motivation for the next scene. Besides controlling tempo, a sequel turns the disaster into yet another goal and anchors the hero in reality. So: Reaction, Dilemma and Decision become the job of the sequel.

Only when your hero decides where to go from here can your next scene begin. I also like to use these rest spots for BRIEF flashbacks (occasionally), but only if they lend to the forward motion of the story, and only if they relate directly to the scene that has just occurred.

Suppose your previous scene foiled the hero's goal, but presented new choices. In the sequel she will decide which one to choose. This effectively bridges one scene to the next. You can also take advantage of a sequel to allow large chunks of time to pass which you would not want to write scene by scene. As someone wiser than I once said, fiction is life with all the dull parts left out.

Don't go easy on your characters. As you pile scene upon scene, don't endlessly rehash the same old issues. Introduce additional external difficulties, more developments, other disasters or difficulties and complications. Introduce new information that increases the hero's difficulties. Something unexpected introduced in a scene builds tension. Avoid flashbacks in scenes, unless it is something like, "A vision of her mother's stricken expression when she learned about Sam's betrayal momentarily set her back." Though short, this reestablishes her relationship to others, reminds the reader of something she may need to know before the scene is finished.

Some things to be careful to avoid in both scene and sequel: Conflict for the sake of conflict rather than a natural progression that fits within the bounds of the story; motivation that does not suit the particular character; dull and predictable disasters that make no sense or have no connection to the story; same problem same solution; not enough at stake to cause hero to keep fighting.

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Make your villains powerful, put your characters in deep trouble and have strong motivation and an important goal. That will make your scenes and sequels exciting, and keep your readers reading because they care what happens next.

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**Lesson Three: Using the Six Senses in scenes.**

First, you must learn to use several of the five senses in every scene. Keep the senses enclosed within the action. Skip long descriptive phrases. Never stop action to describe feelings, rather include them within the action. Think of the difference in sounds. A sonic boom, the purr of a kitten, the blare of a car horn, the soothing tones of a loving mother's voice, the grating shout of an abusive parent.

Touch the bark of a tree, close your eyes and think what it feels like, let your character do the same. Think of the feel of a splintered board, a slimy fish, the cool skin of a snake, a child's cheek. Lift your face into the wind and smell the day, sort out the variety of aromas. Think of ways to describe tastes. Sweet, bitter, oily, gritty. Use all these senses to set the mood of your scene.

These are the five senses that should be sprinkled throughout scenes, but subtly, and not every one must contain them all, just keep them in mind for where they can be used to add reality.

But there is a sixth sense, isn't there? No, not that one. I don't see Dead People. I like to call emotion the sixth sense. Just my idea, but it makes me deal with that sixth sense. Both internal and external emotion certainly belongs in our writing. Without emotional reactions your characters fall flat. If your hero doesn't show emotions when that conflict stops her dead in her tracks, then your reader won't care. And don't forget that in every scene there's action and reaction, both emotional and physical.

In some scenes your hero may not be present, but there will still be a focal character with motivation, goal and conflict. In other words, there is a POV character in every scene. Yes, we've had some discussion on this matter lately, and I'll put in my 2 cents worth. My first four books were written in multiple viewpoints, sometimes two in one scene. My editor liked it fine. Then I found myself with a new editor, and he (the first was a she) did not. He wanted one viewpoint, one scene and spaces when viewpoint changed. GRRRR. I hated that. Writing seems to flow better without such breaks. I think it's worse than a little head hopping, if you do it well and clearly. (I notice Katherine does some in Darkling I Listen and I can't put that book down, nor am I ever confused.) However, if you're writing in the romance genre, there may be more restrictions and you will have to bow to your particular house and editor.

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Remember, a book is repeated denial. An appealing character struggles against great odds to achieve a worthwhile goal.

Questions to ask yourself when you have written a scene:

- Does the reader know where they are?
- Who is there?
- Why they are there?
- Have a sense of place?
- The purpose of the scene?
- Do they move through the transition (sequel) easily without confusion or boredom?

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**Lesson Four: Some wisdom from Mark Twain**

Mark Twain wrote these 18 rules for writing, and many touch on scenes and sequels, so I thought I'd reproduce them here. No, I didn't get lazy today, just really liked most of these and thought you would too. See how many of them reinforce what we've already talked about in scene and sequel.

1. The tale shall accomplish something and arrive somewhere.
2. The episodes of a tale shall be necessary parts of a tale, and shall help develop it.
3. The personages in a tale shall be alive, except in the case of corpses, and that always the reader shall be able to tell the corpses from the others.
4. The personages in a tale, both dead and alive, shall exhibit a sufficient excuse for being there.
5. When the personages of a tale deal in conversation, the talk shall sound like human talk, and be talk such as human beings would be likely to talk in the given circumstances, and have a discoverable meaning, also a discoverable purpose, and show of relevancy, and remain in the neighborhood of the subject in hand, and be interesting to the reader, and help out the tale, and stop when the people cannot think of anything more to say.
6. When the author describes the character of a personage in his tale, the conduct and conversation of that personage shall justify said description.
7. When a personage talks like an illustrated, gilt-edged, tree-calf, hand tooled, seven dollar Friendship's Offering in the beginning of a paragraph, he shall not talk like a Negro minstrel in the end of it.
8. Crass stupidity shall not be played upon the reader as "the craft of the woodsman, the delicate art of the forest" by either the author or the people in the tale.
9. The personages of a tale shall confine themselves to possibilities and let miracles alone; or if they venture a miracle, the author must so plausibly set it forth as to make it look possible and reasonable.
10. The author shall make the reader feel a deep interest in the personages of his tale and in their fate; and he shall make the reader love the good people in the tale and hate the bad ones.
11. The characters in a tale shall be so clearly defined that the reader can tell beforehand what each will do in a given emergency.
12. Say what the character is proposing to say, not merely come near it.
13. Use the right word, not its second cousin.
14. Eschew surplusage.
15. Don't omit necessary details.

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16. Avoid slovenliness of form.
  17. Use good grammar.
  18. Employ a simple and straightforward style.

Whew, I could've given another long lesson easier than typing all that, but there you have it.

Actually, I have some suggestions in this lesson and then I thought I'd throw it open to everyone. Write how you handled a particularly difficult scene or ask any questions you might want and I'll get back to you during the day with answers to your pithy questions.  
GRIN

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**Lesson Five: Scenes & Sequels**

I'd like to devote this last day to discussions of what has gone before, suggestions from any of you on how you handle scenes and sequels, and questions that if I can't answer perhaps someone else can.

If you're interested in reading a good book on building scenes and sequels, try *Techniques of the Selling Writer* by Dwight Swain. I think some of us have already discussed this book and its value. He wrote the Bible on writing, and the section on scenes and sequels spells it out clearly. Any bookstore can order it for you, if you don't already have it. In our critique group, we recommend it to all who darken our doors.

Another exercise you might try if you're not real sure yet about writing scenes and sequels, is take a paperback, a well written one please, and try to pick out a scene, its sequel, the next and so on. Highlight conflict in one color, goal in another, disaster in another, then use another color to highlight the bridge or sequel into the next scene. Open the book in the middle so you don't get caught up in the story. Note how the author uses the five senses and internalization and emotion and POV. Sometimes, when we do this, we see bad examples rather than good, but we can learn from that, as well. Seeing how not to do something is often valuable too.

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