

POWER UP YOUR SCENES by Alicia Rasley www.aliciarasley.com

1. What is a scene? **A scene is a unit of action and interaction taking place more or less in real-time and centering on some event of plot development.**

The important elements are:

Action- Something is happening! There is movement and progress and change during this time. Where there is action, there is danger of some kind.

Interaction- The viewpoint character is interacting with other characters and/or the environment. This will cause sparks. The interaction will force more action on the viewpoint character.

Real-time- A scene usually takes place in a continuous span of time, with a starting point and an ending point. This sounds basic, but it's essential. Unless the reader sees the action unfolding (that is, not in retrospect or summary), she will lose that important sense that this event is really happening.

Event- Every scene should center on an actual event, something that *happens*- not a dream, not a flashback, not a passage of introspection. A character is doing something, experiencing something, not just in her own mind, but in the external reality of the story. That can mean she's taking an action, discovering a secret, encountering another character, having a conversation, creating something new, enduring a trauma- but you should be able to identify what event has taken place in this scene.

Plot development- Events are important because they are concrete and real and have consequences. Most important, they have consequences on the plot. This event, this scene, should cause a development in the story.

All this adds up to **CHANGE**.

SCENE-BUILDER QUESTIONS :

1. What is going to change in this scene? How will the world of the story be different when it's done? (In a romance, also, how will the relationship be different?)

2. What is the central event of this scene? How does it affect the

overall plot?

3. Who is the protagonist of this scene? That might not be the protagonist of the entire book. Who drives this scene? Whose viewpoint does the reader share? Who has the overriding goal and encounters the conflict?

4. Think of the overall external plot conflict. How does it manifest in this scene? (For example, the external conflict is the murder, and she's trying to trap the murderer.)

5. Think of the overall internal conflict. How does it manifest in this scene? (For example, she is obsessed with the past, so she is prejudiced against Wanda who injured her in the past.)

6. When the scene opens, what is this character's goal? What does he/she hope to accomplish during this period of time? What's the *agenda*? Example: "I want to trap Wanda into confessing to the murder. So I'm going to meet her in a public place so she can't murder me, and I'm going to ask her a bunch of leading questions, and confront her with my evidence, and then she's going to break down and confess-- on my hidden tape recorder."

7. What external obstacles can character encounter in trying to fulfill this agenda? Look for obstacles in the setting, in the antagonist, in allies who won't cooperate, cars that won't start, etc.

8. What internal obstacles is this character likely to encounter in trying to fulfill this agenda? For example, she's a terrible liar, and she's going to have to lie during this scene.

9. What goes wrong with the agenda? What happens that he/she doesn't anticipate?

10. Does he/she achieve the goal? Bickham's answers:

Yes, but....

No...

No and furthermore...

11. What is the setting of the scene? Can you strengthen that? (For example, a face-to-face confrontation is likely to be stronger than a phone conversation. An encounter in the middle of the state fair as a storm is building might be more powerful than one in a nice restaurant.) How can you use the setting to increase the tension/conflict of the scene?

12. Assemble the basic events of the scene into the most powerful sequence. Think of "greater risk"-- the events should require the character to take greater and greater risks. (For example, Meggie has to say more and more inflammatory things to get Wanda to confess; she has to surreptitiously fiddle with the tape recorder to keep it running; she has to enlist Mike in her mission even though he's a dangerous ally....)

13. Plot the emotional arc of the scene.

- Where does the character start emotionally? (Example: nervous but hopeful.)
- How does that manifest in her actions? (She checks the tape recorder three times; she starts to imagine the police dragging Wanda away. She speaks cockily when Wanda appears.)
- How does her emotional state change in response to the events of the scene? **Any emotional change should be preceded by some event or action or realization that happens within the scene.**
- How does this character end up emotionally? It should be different than how she started. (Now she feels deflated and foolish.)

14. When you finish the draft, how can you revise for greater power? Try reorganizing the events for ascending risk. Find new ways to use the setting to increase the danger. Make things harder on the character- try the "near-miss" disaster to create more tension (that is, she almost gets caught; he almost knocks over the Ming vase but catches it just in time).

15. At the end of the scene, what has changed:
- in the plot?
 - in the character?
 - in the relationships?

In this workshop, we'll be talking about The Magic Rule of 3 (to escalate in the middle of the scene).

For a comprehensive and deep exploration of writing great scenes, check out my [Building Bolder Scenes course](#).

Building Bolder Scenes



*A Blueprint Your Story course with Alicia Rasley
Get more information at:
<https://bit.ly/scenes-course>*

[Building Bolder Scenes with Alicia Rasley](#)

Module 1: Scene Basics – Scene Selection, Structure, Sequence

Lesson 1: Inside and Outside Scenes

Here we'll discuss the purpose of the scene within the overall story.

Lesson 2: The 9 Major Turning Point Scenes

These are the big scenes that serve as the pillars of your plot, and we'll talk about how each might be developed.

Lesson 3: The Three S's of Scenes - **Selection, Structure, Sequence**

Here we'll discuss how you can select the events of this scene, and how to embed story elements into this scene's "mini-story".

Lesson 4: **3-act Structure to Organize Scenes**

Just like your overall story, a scene can be broken into 3 acts, and we'll discuss how to structure those three parts for greatest drama.

Lesson 5: **Sequence Scenes to Build a Theme**

Your story probably has (or will have!) a theme or overall message. We'll talk about how this scene can help contribute to that theme and deepen the experience.

MODULE 2: Scene Design – Designing Scenes from the Inside Out

Lesson 1: **Scene Purpose-**

If you know ahead of time what you want to accomplish in this scene, you can design the scene to achieve that!

Lesson 2: Central Character and Scene Goal

This lesson can help you center on a character and that character's scene goal to start the scene off with purpose.

Lesson 3: Rising Action and Conflict in the Middle

The middle of the scene is where the action and conflict rise as the character strives to get the goal. Here you can learn how to define the conflict and use it to power the character forward.

Lesson 4: The End

What happens in the end of the scene? A surprise or disaster—something disruptive that forces the audience into the next scene. Here you can determine that ending event and also—what happens to the character's goal.

Module 3- Scene Propulsion: Openings and Endings and CHOICES

Lesson 1: Point of View in Scenes- Who Are You?

The "POV character" is the one who experiences the events of the scene for the audience. This lesson will go over the major point-of-view approaches and how to maximize your chosen approach in this scene.

Lesson 2: Setting in Scenes- The Where and When

An essential element to make the scene come to life is the setting—the time and place. Here you'll learn how to integrate the setting into the action and mood of the scene.

Lesson 3: Opening the Scene with Intent

Here we'll dive deeper into the all-important scene opening, including the first sentence and first paragraph, which are often so hard to get written!

Lesson 4: Scene Middles: Continuity and Transition

Another deep dive—this time into the middle, where you'll learn how to escalate the tension and emotion with the Magic Rule of 3.

Lesson 5: Scene Endings- Crisis and Culmination

The ending doesn't have to be a cliffhanger to be exciting and propulsive. We'll discuss how to craft the ending to complete the questions set up in the opening, and yet leave something unresolved to impel the audience to read into the next scene.

MODULE 4: Inside Scenes: Presentation and Prose

Lesson 1: Dynamic Dialogue

Here's a sharp lesson in how to create conversations that change the plot and change the characters, and yet sounds authentic and vivid.

Lesson 2: Emotion

“If the character cries, the audience doesn’t have to.” Here we’ll discuss how to use restrained prose and physical “language” to make the audience *feel*.

Lesson 3: Comedy (and also Suspense, which is practically the same thing!)

Comedy and suspense might seem opposites, but in terms of scene design, they’re very close. Both depend on postponement and anticipation. In this lesson, you’ll learn some practical techniques to create dread and amusement through design and detail.

Lesson 4: Paragraphing

Paragraphs are kind of the stepchild of prose—no one pays them much mind... except for Alicia! Here you’ll learn how to use paragraphing to create unified experience of the scene and supple flow from one moment to the next.

Lesson 5: Sentencing

Yes, we’ll end up with those very basic building blocks of scenes—the sentences! We discuss how to construct sentences that replicate the action of the scene and the emotion of the characters. You’ll end up with useful techniques you can use to revise the scene. And I might sneak in a few (fun!) grammar lessons. ☺ You will be encouraged to contact me with knotty sentence issues.

[You can learn more and enroll here! Building Bolder Scenes with Alicia Rasley](#)