

Scene: The Key to the Castle

Defined: From Jennifer Lauck: Scene is a **moment** in time where **something** happens to move the story forward. A way to understand scene is to remember you live in one in every moment of your life and when time changes and/or location, you are then in a new scene. Your embodied, sensual life is composed of moments, not thoughts.

From *Story Engineering* by Larry Brooks: A scene must present a dramatic scenario with something at stake. Scenes thrust the story forward and have a beginning, middle and end.

From *Tell it Slant* by Brenda Miller and Suzanne Paola: *Scene is the building block of creative non-fiction...Scene is based on action unreeling before us, as it would in a film and it will draw on the same techniques as fiction—dialogue, description, point of view, specificity, concrete detail. Scene also encompasses the lyricism and imagery of great poetry.* (NOTE: Concrete detail defined in *The Elements of Style*: specific, definite, and concrete. From *Tell it Slant*: Concrete detail appeals to the senses.)

What is found within the body of scene? See the scene recipe card (below). Cut out, paste somewhere near for ease of reference

Scene Recipe Card (SRC):

___ **Location closest to protag:** Think of this as a stage, or set, you build with words in order the reader can conjure the images in their own mind. Look up, down, right, left, in front and behind you. This is practical, concrete, sensual location in space and time.

___ **Wider location around protag:** Name your specific city, state, country, streets, stores, restaurants. Describe the specific geography/topography of this place.

___ **The natural world:** Reference the natural happenings in/around your scene (set/stage). Specifically the seasons, weather, birds, sky, sun, wind. Note how the natural world becomes a metaphor or echo of events/mood in your scene.

___ **People and personality:** Include the names of everyone (even a study of name origins). Include description of mannerisms, speech patterns, attitudes, what people (including protag) wears, what they carry with them in the form of jewelry, purses, bags as well as their desires, hopes, dreams.

___ **Dialogue:** Make sure your characters speak and sound like real human beings. Dialogue is an extension of characterization. Does it act in that way in your scene?

___ **Sensory detail:** Touch, smell, sound, sight, movement of mind*, taste. **See note below for specifics on each scene.

___ **Verticality:** Loading several concrete details into many of the above means to “go vertical” or write into the image rather than remaining at the stage of the liner plane that reads more like an inventory list.

Additional thoughts on scene and SRC: You will not find all of these ingredients in every scene but you will find several. The SRC is merely a relatively comprehensive listing of what can go, and often should go, into a scene. When doing your own research to see this in published work, note that you find a good deal of exposition (flashback, mental machinations, explanations) in a scene but we are not concerned with all that now. The scene can be thought of as a frame to hold exposition, but exposition is never required for a scene to exist.

A scene can be found by a time marker (specific): That day, Sunday, one day. (Note: Grab a novel, memoir, essay, or short story and see for yourself. Scene is there. I guarantee it.)

How scene is often marked on the page: Space break, symbol (~*), or a new chapter.

What's at stake: You will, eventually, want your scene to contain (and all scenes in published works will do this) an "action line" that develops what's at stake in the scene. This action line can be developed, over revision, by asking and answering the following questions: What does my hero/heroine want in this scene? What's at stake if he or she doesn't get it? What are the antagonistic forces blocking him or her?

*Movement of mind describes thoughts: associations, future, past, memory. Mind, or ordinary mind is considered a "sense."

**What each sense evokes taken from Moira Allen's posting on Setting. Notated credit below.

...visual information tends to be processed primarily at the cognitive level. We make decisions and take action based on what we see. When we describe...visual inputs, we are appealing to the reader's intellect.

Emotions...are often affected by what we hear. Think of the effects of a favorite piece of music, the sound of a person's voice, the whistle of a train. In conversation, tone of voice is a more reliable indicator of mood and meaning than words alone. Sounds can make us shudder, shiver, jump -- or relax and smile. Scenes that include sounds -- fingernails scraping against blackboard, the distant baying of a hound -- are more likely to evoke an emotional response.

Smell...evoke (s) memories. While not everyone is taken straight back to childhood by "the smell of bread baking," we all have olfactory memories that can trigger a scene, or a recollection of an event or person. Think of someone's perfume, the smell of new-car leather, the odor of wet dog. Then describe that smell effectively, and your reader is *there*.

Touch evokes a sensory response. Let your reader feel the silkiness of a cat's fur, the roughness of castle stones, the prickly warmth of Dad's flannel shirt. Let your heroine's feet ache, let the wind raise goosebumps on her flesh, let the gorse thorns draw blood.

Finally, there is taste, which is closely related to smell in its ability to evoke memories. Taste, however, is perhaps the most difficult to incorporate...it simply doesn't belong...your heroine isn't going to start licking the castle stones, and it isn't time for lunch. As in real life, "taste" images should be used sparingly and appropriately.

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