



Scene Rubric

Revision Wizards

Version 1.3 2022-02-23

Author:
Project Title:
Chapter or Scene:
Length:
Date:

In three sentences or less, what is happening in this scene?

Why is this scene important? AND/OR What are you trying to say about life?

How do you want the reader to feel when they read the scene?

What's wrong with the protagonist's personal world? What is the disruption?

Who are the characters in the scene?

<i>Character Name</i>	<i>Voice</i> <i>How does a character sound? What words do they use? How is their speech paced? How do they modulate their voice in different situations? How do they sound different than other characters?</i>	<i>Emotional State</i> <i>Is your character sad? Happy? Angry? Anxious? Excited?</i>	<i>Physical Condition</i> <i>Is your character healthy or ill? What is their current state of well-being that is manifested physically?</i>

+ protagonist
 - antagonist

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What does the protagonist want (external pursuits)? Do they get it?

Want:

Acquired: Yes/No

<i>Underdeveloped</i>	<i>Fair</i>	<i>Good</i>	<i>Excellent</i>
The want or external pursuit of the protagonist is unclear or undefined. Readers perceive the character's want as flat.	The want or external pursuit of the protagonist exists, but it is unclear or inexplicably inconsistent throughout the scene. Readers understand the character's motive in the scene, but it often defies logic.	The want or external pursuit of the protagonist is easily identified. Although it is defined, the protagonist does not always act consistently on the want. Readers understand the character's motive in the scene, but it is often too predictable.	The want or external pursuit of the protagonist is well-defined. Their external pursuit is obvious to the reader and understood by the other characters in the scene.

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What does the protagonist need (internal desires)? Do they get it?

Need:

Acquired: Yes/No

<i>Underdeveloped</i>	<i>Fair</i>	<i>Good</i>	<i>Excellent</i>
The need or internal desire of the protagonist is unclear or undefined. Readers perceive the character's need as flat.	The need or internal desire of the protagonist exists, but it is unclear or inexplicably inconsistent throughout the scene. Readers understand the character's internal desire in the scene, but it often defies logic.	The need or internal desire of the protagonist is easily identified. Although it is defined, the protagonist does not always act consistently on the want. Readers understand the character's motive in the scene, but it is often too predictable.	The need or internal desire of the protagonist is well-defined. Their internal desire is obvious to the reader and understood by the other characters in the scene.

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What does the antagonist or force of antagonism want (external pursuits)? Do they get it?

Want:

Acquired: Yes/No

<i>Underdeveloped</i>	<i>Fair</i>	<i>Good</i>	<i>Excellent</i>
The want or external pursuit of the antagonist is unclear or undefined. Readers perceive the character's want as flat.	The want or external pursuit of the antagonist exists, but it is unclear or inexplicably inconsistent throughout the scene. Readers understand the character's motive in the scene, but it often defies logic.	The want or external pursuit of the antagonist is easily identified. Although it is defined, the antagonist does not always act consistently on the want. Readers understand the character's motive in the scene, but it is often too predictable.	The want or external pursuit of the antagonist is well-defined. Their external pursuit is obvious to the reader and understood by the other characters in the scene.

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What does the antagonist or force of antagonism need (internal desires)? Do they get it?

Need:

Acquired: Yes/No

<i>Underdeveloped</i>	<i>Fair</i>	<i>Good</i>	<i>Excellent</i>
The need or internal desire of the antagonist is unclear or undefined. Readers perceive the character's need as flat.	The need or internal desire of the antagonist exists, but it is unclear or inexplicably inconsistent throughout the scene. Readers understand the character's internal desire in the scene, but it often defies logic.	The need or internal desire of the antagonist is easily identified. Although it is defined, the antagonist does not always act consistently on the want. Readers understand the character's motive in the scene, but it is often too predictable.	The need or internal desire of the antagonist is well-defined. Their internal desire is obvious to the reader and understood by the other characters in the scene.

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What is the Conflict? (What single moment or circumstance pushes the protagonist out of the status quo?)

Conflict:

<i>Underdeveloped</i>	<i>Fair</i>	<i>Good</i>	<i>Excellent</i>
The protagonist does not face an initial Conflict. The event pushing the character out of the status quo is missing.	The initial Conflict is present but lacks the intensity to make a reader care. The protagonist can avoid or defuse the obstacle presented by the Conflict.	The initial Conflict propels the protagonist into a situation that forces a Choice. The character cannot go back to the previous state and cannot do nothing.	The initial Conflict catches the protagonist and reader by surprise. The event creates an unavoidable situation and should logically set the stage for a Choice.

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What is the Choice? (Best Bad Choice or Irreconcilable Good?)

Choice:

Type: *Best Bad Choice/Irreconcilable Good*

<i>Underdeveloped</i>	<i>Fair</i>	<i>Good</i>	<i>Excellent</i>
The protagonist does not face a Choice. The character is completely passive or reactive, acting without agency.	The Choice is too easy for the protagonist. The stakes for all the consequences are not equally positive or negative.	The Choice posed to the protagonist is difficult. The character struggles to determine the best path forward.	The Choice becomes incredibly difficult for the protagonist. The character cannot see a way out of the predicament, and neither can the reader, which should set up a surprising but inevitable Consequence.

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What is the Consequence (What event occurs because of the protagonist's decision?)

Consequence:

<i>Underdeveloped</i>	<i>Fair</i>	<i>Good</i>	<i>Excellent</i>
Because the protagonist is passive or reactive, the Consequence is dull and one that the reader anticipated, creating an unsatisfying ending to the scene.	Because the Choice is too easy for the protagonist, the Consequence is obvious and easily predicted by the reader, but there is minor satisfaction when the reader correctly guesses the outcome.	When the protagonist struggles to determine the best path forward, the Consequence is often unexpected, which delights the reader.	With an incredibly difficult Choice for the protagonist, the Consequence strikes the perfect balance of surprising but inevitable. The reader never sees the end of the scene coming, but once it does, they realize they should have seen it all along.

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Mechanics

Showing vs. Telling

Telling the reader what happens to a character is often unsatisfying and leads to poor engagement, while showing credits the reader with the intelligence to pick up what's happening from the setting, emotion description, dialogue, facial expressions, and other cues in the text. For example, the author can tell the reader that the protagonist is angry, or the author could show it by describing clenched teeth or fists, a snarl, sharp words, having the protagonist lash out physically, or any other way that shows the anger through context clues and nonverbal signals.

<i>Underdeveloped</i>	<i>Fair</i>	<i>Good</i>	<i>Excellent</i>
The story contains too much info-dumping, back story, or general telling.	The story contains large sections of telling. Some narrative contains dialogue, although readers are still being told, not shown, how a character feels.	The story contains minimal telling with substantial use of “exposition as ammunition,” where readers receive important information through dynamic and good dialogue.	The story contains almost no telling, and then only when appropriate. Readers can experience the story by being shown the emotional journey of the characters.

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Passive Voice

Passive voice kills sentences and reader interest, while active sentence structure engages readers in action and character development. Reducing the use of the words “was,” “were,” and “had” are fantastic ways to work on eliminating passive voice.

Active voice means that the sentence has a subject (for example, a character) who acts upon the object, while in passive voice, the verb acts upon the object. For example:

- **Passive:** The ball was thrown by the pitcher.
- **Active:** The pitcher threw the ball.

In the passive example, the ball receives the action of the verb (thrown) and “was thrown” is in the passive voice. In the active example, the subject of the sentence, the pitcher, acts directly on the object, the ball.

As an exercise in eliminating passive voice from a narrative, take any two or three chapters from the *Harry Potter* series by J. K. Rowling, and rewrite them without the words “was” and “had,” and see how it changes the voice.

<i>Underdeveloped</i>	<i>Fair</i>	<i>Good</i>	<i>Excellent</i>
Mostly passive voice.	Many instances of passive voice.	Minimal passive voice.	Almost no passive voice.

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Sentence Structure

Proper sentence structure, word order, and punctuation are critical to successful writing. While the story may be fantastic, the world amazing, and the characters well-rounded and engaging, if the manuscript is filled with punctuation errors and unclear sentences, the reader is ripped out of the suspension of disbelief as they try to interpret poorly written prose. Examples of issues include comma splices, missing, overused, or misused punctuation marks, run-on sentences, unbroken paragraphs, incorrect homophones that fly past a simple spell check, and other mechanical issues not related to the story.

<i>Underdeveloped</i>	<i>Fair</i>	<i>Good</i>	<i>Excellent</i>
Structure and punctuation errors are common throughout the manuscript, and significantly detract from the reader's experience of the work.	Structure and punctuation errors are less common, but still far too numerous, such that a native English-speaking reader will consistently notice them.	Structure and punctuation errors are uncommon, such that when they occur, they might be recognized by a native English-speaking reader, but the fact of their presence would also be a surprise.	Almost no structural or punctuation errors.

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Changelog

2022-02-23 1.3 Fold in a new section on grammar and mechanics based on the V.E. Griffith Story Rubric.

2022-02-08 1.2 More formatting changes.

2022-02-01 1.1 Initial release, including formatting changes.

1.0 J. Thorn's initial version of the Scene Rubric. His version is always available at <http://www.scenerubric.com>

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