



The Scene Book: A Primer for the Fiction Writer

Sandra Scofield

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A treasure-trove of scene-writing wisdom from award-winning author and teacher Sandra Scofield To write a good scene, you have to know the following:

- Every scene has an EVENT
- Every scene has a FUNCTION in the narrative
- Every scene has a STRUCTURE: a beginning, middle, and end
- Every scene has a PULSE

The Scene Book is a fundamental guide to crafting more effective scenes in fiction. In clear, simple language, Sandra Scofield shows both the beginner and the seasoned writer how to build better scenes, the underpinning of any good narrative.

The Scene Book: A Primer for the Fiction Writer Details

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Rachel says

I've never understood beats within a scene as well as I do after reading Scofield's chapter on this. She is clear, has interesting exercises at the end of each chapter, and uses examples from literary novels rather than commercial fiction. I love the way she talks about "Big Scenes" -- those with many characters, which I am juggling in my book right now. She recommends focusing on your POV character as your life jacket in jumping into deep water. I find her guidance clear and compelling, and she has changed the way I structured many scenes in my book, helped me tighten their focus and -- yes -- diagram and clarify the beats. A book that should be on the shelf of every fiction writer and dramatist.

Angie says

I've always considered good writing an art, something that can't really be taught or learned. This book showed me how wrong that idea was. Talent is important to good writing, but so is form and technique. Scofield teaches how pulse, events, beats, point of view, scenarios, and several other tools add up to create a story that really works. She also gives some really good tips for revising your own writing. I would recommend this book to anyone who is seriously considering writing a novel.

Elizabeth Felicetti says

Had feedback that my CNF needs to be more scenic. This book is enormously helpful.

Aditi Chopra says

This book was recommended to me by a colleague. I was lost on scene writing skills and this book has given me a few important elements to consider when writing scenes. I haven't read any other book on scene writing so I can't compare. I found myself skipping over a lot of material in this book, perhaps it is the writing style that didn't work for me. None-the-less, I am more equipped with scene writing skills than I was before reading this book.

Mark O'Bannon says

The Scene Book
by Sandra Scofield

If you want to be a writer, you need to master the art of writing the scene. Scenes form the basic building blocks of any story and this book explores them in great detail.

Writers need to think in scenes. There is a difference between narrative summary and a scene.

Narrative summary is a way to quickly cover a lot of ground in a story, without getting bogged down in the details. Narrative summary is a great technique to use between scenes, but some writers don't seem to understand the difference between them.

What is a scene?

A scene is ACTION. Every scenes contain a clear goal, actions, emotions, a pulse, tension (conflict), a focal point and a revelation, which will lead into the next scene.

The Scene Book breaks down every scene into its essential elements. Then it shows how to get to the heart of the scene and this will allow you to put meaning into everything you write.

The book also shows you how to handle scene openings and the first lines of your book. The book shows how to handle multiple characters within a scene without fragmenting the story, and how to create big scenes.

The Scene Book

This book is essential reading for every writer. Another great book on scenes is, "Make a Scene" by Jordan Rosenfeld."

Mark O'Bannon

www.BetterStorytelling.Net/Blog

Ellayne Shaw says

Scofield's approach to fiction writing is very accessible. She includes multiple examples from various texts to illustrate the different principles she discusses in this book, which I enjoyed because there were so many different styles of writing included.

I read the book for a class I'm currently enrolled in called "Fiction Fundamentals." I think the title of my class is actually a good way to describe this book--it is full of the fundamentals of fiction. Scofield covers all the basics of fiction writing in this book, so if you're new to fiction writing or aren't really sure how to tighten up your prose, this is a great starting point.

I would recommend this book to newer writers or to prolific writers who have yet to really focus on their craft. I did learn through the book, but it left me wanting more. Again, a good book for the basics, which I needed help with, but probably not for a more advanced writer? I will most likely continue to refer to it in the future.

Ann says

This was my craft book pick for my second term at the Seton Hill Writing Popular Fiction master's program.

One of the things I often struggle with in my fiction, especially in long fiction, is the meandering scene. Sometimes things just draaaag in my writing. I've come to realize that part of that is sometimes a lack of focus in my scenes. They're just *there*.

I'm somewhat of an organic writer. I don't tend to plot much and while I do have an idea of where things are going, and several scenes in my head that I would like to hit, it can change without notice. So the idea of sitting down and planning scenes kind of scares me.

But I chose this book to get an idea of what a scene should have in it. And thank goodness, it's not about sitting down and plotting out your scenes a head of time. Sure, there are things you should think about when sitting down to write a scene, but it gives more tips about how to fix scenes (or just get rid of them) once you've written them. It'll come in handy when I sit down to revise my thesis.

And it did improve my writing already. I ended up going back over a scene that felt flat in the pages I'm working on this month and make it serve the story.

So, what's a scene? Ms. Scofield defines a scene as follows:

Scenes are those passages in narrative when we slow down and focus on an event in the story so that we are "in the moment" with the characters in action.

Scenes are blocks of action that serve the telling of the story. This is one thing that I have to remember--every part of the story should be there to serve the story. Sometimes I end up with scenes that flesh out a character--for me as the author--but does the story no good. Those are the scenes that need to be ripped out or summarized.

There are four basic elements to a scene:

- 1) event and emotion
- 2) function
- 3) structure
- 4) pulse

Yes, the first element there is two things. It's because they're intertwined. In a scene your characters act on and react to events. Characters do and feel. And there should be a reason behind what the characters are doing/feeling that furthers the story (that's element two).

Scenes have structure: beginnings, middles, and ends. In a way, they are little stories themselves, though connected to a much larger piece.

Now, the fourth element, I had heard bantered about, but never understood. Scenes have pulses. What's a pulse? It's a bit more fuzzy than the other elements. It's what makes the story stand out on the page, the heartbeat that keeps it moving forward. It's the tension.

The book goes into describing each of these elements in detail, provides examples and exercises, as well as questions to ask when it comes to your own work.

The most useful section I found was the section on beats. That's another writing term I heard a lot, but didn't understand. What the heck is a beat? It turns out that a beat is a little piece of action and reaction in a scene. All the beats add up to the event of the scene. It's the physical actions of the character that drives the event forward.

Ms. Scofield also talks about conflict and tension, which I'll admit to skimming over a bit. We got the Big Tension Primer from Donald Maass my first term at Seton Hill, so much was repetition of what he focused on. What was useful was a section called Negotiation: An alternate view of conflict. This part of the book talked about tension arising not from characters being in angry conflict all the time, but in character negotiation:

[...] an exchange of character desires and denials and relenting, until some sort of peace is carved out, or else the whole interaction falls apart

It's a slightly different way at looking at conflict--that of a process of change and resolution.

Ms Scofield also has a section of the book devoted to reading for technique, that is, studying other writer's scenes, as well as studying your own scenes with an eye to improve them. She condenses the tips in the book down to a few pages of questions to ask as you look at your own writing. This is a goldmine of revision-fodder. I'll certainly be using her tips and questions on one of my revision passes. It's all good stuff, but if I try to implement it while writing, my writing will grind to a halt.

The trick to using much of the knowledge in craft books is to know when to use it. I'm more aware of needing to have a purpose for my scenes, and more aware of the need for tension, as well as weaving in beats of action, but I'm also trying to balance that awareness with just getting the story out. Bones first, then I can flesh the rest out.

Certainly, the Scene Book is one craft book I'll be picking up again, and applying to my work once I'm at the stage where it would make the most sense to do so. In the mean time, I'll take what I've learned by osmosis, and it'll come out in the writing I do now.

It's a very useful book and I recommend the it if you have issues with meandering scenes or scenes that just seem... flat. There's a lot of good advice on how to deal with those issues.

Don says

Ever get that writing book that you wish you would've had *before* you started the project you're currently working on? This is that book.

Matie says

I don't really like this, this was a textbook that I used for my short story class. Scofield uses way too much of her own writing to explain her points and explains points that most people already understand in a way that is confusing at best and at worst downright stupid. I really disliked this and think that you could find a much

better book on writing craft than this one.

Michael says

Although there is some very helpful information here in a structural, editorial way, the fact that she doesn't ever stop mentioning her own work, or quoting from it, or using it as a good example, made me never want to read her again.

Ninette says

I found this book on a reading list for a college writing course, and I must say it is one of the very few craft books I've seen that I would recommend to any writer.

Though it is definitely fit for a college level writing course, it thankfully doesn't drone on about theory. Instead Scofield takes a more hands on approach with helpful exercises, questions to ask, and sample scenes. This really did manage to demystify the process and gave me a greater sense of control in my work - and thus delivered what the blurb promised.

Kathy Karch says

To be honest about it, there are better written books about writing scenes in fiction. The author dropped sample excerpt after sample excerpt in rapid fire, and each was taken from some obscure piece of work. It felt as if the author was trying to prove that she knew what she was talking about just by loading the pages with as many different excerpts as possible. It didn't work for me. She would have done better to rely upon two or perhaps even three pieces of work and reference them only to make her points.

Chance Lee says

This book is okay, but I only got a few good tips out of it. As with any writing guide, YMMV depending on what you want to focus on and your level of experience. This book is about scenes, as you can tell from the title, and while the author uses a lot of examples from novels (waaay too many from her own novels, which, judging the examples, seem insufferably dull), I think this book is of the best use to a short story writer.

The back of the book is really all you need to read: Every scene has an EVENT. every scene has a FUNCTION in the narrative. Every scene has a STRUCTURE: a beginning, middle, and end. Every scene has a PULSE. If you want to learn more about these ALL CAPS terms in depth, check out this book.

Hannah Goodman says

I read Sandra's book (she teaches at The Solstice Program at Pine Manor where I am currently a student) out of curiosity but found her ideas helpful. It was more of a workbook, which wasn't what I was looking for. I think this is a nice craft book to have on hand when trying to fine tune your stories and make sure you have all the elements of scene. What I really liked was Sandra's little bits about her own writing life and how she created her own self-study of books. The other nice part about the book is that it isn't too technical and very user-friendly for beginner or advanced.

Shari Fox says

This is the best instructional book on writing I have ever read. I highly recommend this to other beginner writers of fiction or memoir. I underlined liberally and will go back to these pages frequently. Sandra Scofield is a great teacher.
