

Bonus Content: Scene Development Checklist

Scenes and chapters are the building blocks of story. The better prepared you are to write each one, the stronger they are likely to be. Before you write a scene in your script, here is a helpful checklist to follow. Think of this like a pilot carefully working through a checklist before take off:

1. What is your story's Central Dramatic Question? With this in mind clearly articulate the sub-dramatic question. For example, Will the cop get the witness to talk (sub dramatic question) so that he can catch the killer – and answer the Central Dramatic Question.
2. Where is the scene set? Be specific. Use all five senses.
3. How does the location (noise, smell, artwork on walls, textures, colors, light, etc.) impact the characters?
4. What does each character need - from the other? Knowing this adds purpose to each line of dialogue.
5. What happened to each character right before the scene? For example, a character who just took a serene walk on a majestic summer day is in a different mental state than one who just stepped in a puddle, ruined an expensive shoe and found out her dog is terminally ill.
6. What do the characters expect to happen? How do they expect the other character to respond to their needs? Consider how differently you act when you expect to get what you need and be treated with warmth and respect vs. when you just know the other person will resist you, even insult you.
7. Given what they expect to happen and what just happened to them prior to the scene what is their game plan? How do they plan to get what they need? What exactly do they plan to do?
8. Why is this scene critical to your story? If a scene *could* be cut it *must* be cut. Every scene or moment in your story should feel like an essential part of the whole.
9. What is at stake? It could be things like life, money, status, a relationship. What does the main character stand to lose if she fails to get what she needs?
10. How does the last moment relate to the first? Exactly what changed?
11. At what point in the scene do things change direction and why? For example, if a band is playing a big gig and they suck but they pull it together, how did this happen? Why did it happen?

By knowing these core things your scenes will take on depth, resonance and push you to explore your subjects and ideas in greater depth. They are tools that should inspire your curiosity as they force you to go places you've never been. This should be fun, intriguing, interesting work. The idea here is to use the principles of structure to drive deeper into your characters, situations, themes and above all, yourself.