

Reaching Youth with Your Fiction

CCWC 2016 Tim Shoemaker

Almost everything I'm sharing is opinion, not hard and fast rules. The things we'll talk about are things to consider when writing. Things that may make your writing stronger. This workshop is about sharing tools to do that. Tools, not rules.

The Power of Fiction

Sometimes people discount stories ...

FOUR TIPS for ZEROING IN on WHAT to WRITE

1. "Write what YOU KNOW" . . .

2. "Write who YOU ARE" . . .

If you write not just about *what you know*, but include WHO YOU ARE, your writing will ring true & resonate with readers. This will add great INSIGHT to your writing.

3. "Write for YOU" . . .

-What is *ON YOUR HEART?* -What do you feel *PASSIONATE ABOUT?* -What is it you *WANT to TELL OTHERS* or *SHARE* with them? "*Some of the PASSIONS of YOUR HEART may have been PUT THERE BY GOD.*"

4. Write for the FAMILY . . .

"When you write for your family or for those you love, you're putting all your heart and passion into it... and that makes for some great writing."

SIX TIPS TO FOCUS YOUR IDEAS . . .

1. - Jot down IDEAS you ALREADY HAVE . . . as you get them . . .

2. - BRAINSTORM to BROADEN what you have to work with . . .

3. - Do RESEARCH to add DEPTH . . .

4. - Develop a THEME . . . what are you really TRYING to SAY?

5. - Do some sort of OUTLINE

OFTEN it helps to OUTLINE with a PROVEN FICTION FORMULA . . . to make sure you're considering all the ELEMENTS for a GOOD STORY . . . this is a matter of style—some outline very little, others outline extensively

6. - START WRITING . . .

Reaching Boys with Your Writing

We're living in a FAMINE when it comes to great writing for boys...

Boys are very different from girls in more than physical ways...

Our writing for boys must differ from writing for girls...

Often a writer writes for boys EXACTLY the SAME WAY THEY'D WRITE for GIRLS...they LUMP THEM TOGETHER. But THAT WON'T WORK... boys don't think the same way.

If you want to write for boys—WRITE for BOYS. TARGET THEM.

If you want to write for boys & girls—WRITE for BOYS.

*Good writing for boys will CROSSOVER to girls easily
-Generally girls will read it.*

*BUT BOYS won't want to be CAUGHT DEAD
reading something they think is written for girls.*

Target the boys & you've got a chance at getting both markets.

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WORDS are a BROAD WAVELENGTH/channel OF COMMUNICATION for GIRLS

AGGRESSION is a BROAD WAVELENGTH/channel OF COMMUNICATION for BOYS

BOYS are HAMMERS... and HAMMERS are ROUGH...

Girls can be MORE SOPHISTICATED when it comes to COMMUNICATION.

BOYS are NOT SO SOPHISTICATED with COMMUNICATION

BOYS are MORE PHYSICAL...

BOYS are DOERS...

BOYS DON'T WANT TO SHOW FEAR

*Boys want to be perceived as being MORE GROWN UP than they feel inside.
The POWER OF THE GROUP is a HUGE FACTOR on boys*

The Gotta Haves 10 essential elements when writing for boys

1. Great cover

-The *FIRST THING* a boy is going to look at is *the COVER*.

2. White space

-The *SECOND THING* a boy may look at is *how much text* is on a page.

3. Powerful Opening

-*Not the first page*... but the first line... and PARAGRAPH

4. Action

-Boys need *something GOING ON* or *ABOUT to HAPPEN*
if you're going to hold their attention.

5. Show the Story— and from the Character's POV

-*You don't want to TELL a story, you want to SHOW it.*

6. Likeable Main Character

-If they don't *QUICKLY IDENTIFY* with *the main character*, if *they don't like him*, what happens?

7. A Clear Goal

-What does the character want—*bad*?

8. Strong conflict

-*WHAT or WHO* is going to *GET IN HIS WAY... MAKING IT TOUGHER THAN EVER* to *ATTAIN HIS GOAL*?

9. Cliffhangers

-If you're writing a book, *you want your chapters to end with something* that will make them *want to TURN the PAGE, not CLOSE the BOOK.*

10. Short chapters

-If you're writing a book, *short chapters may not be essential, but they're a really good idea.*

***The Kisses of Death* 10 areas to avoid when writing for boys**

1. Kisses

-Lose *the romance* if writing for MIDDLE GRADE BOYS.

2. Preachy

-Using *a portion of a sermon* your character hears . . . or a “timely” word from a youth pastor that amazingly addresses their problem can seem *manipulating*.

3. Flawless Characters

-You want your readers to relate to the main character in your story, not be INTIMIDATED by HIM.

4. Model Material

-This is a HUGE FAULT with FICTION for ADULTS, and sadly, many writers do it when WRITING for KIDS.

5. Protagonist Too Young

-They tend to LOOK UP to OLDER BOYS. They try to ACT OLDER than THEY ARE. They DREAM about what they'll do when they're older. So, if you're writing for 10-12 year old boys, give them a protagonist that is 13, one they can look up to and accept easier.

6. Problems Solved by Others

-In most cases, the book WON'T be TRULY SATISFYING if the problem is NOT solved by the protagonist.

7. Unreal

-If the situation is JUST TOO BIZARRE, too unbelievable, you cause the reader to COME BACK to REALITY.

-If they think, “This could never happen,” you've just hurt the chance of them finishing the book or you may have limited its impact if they do.

-Yes, it's “just a story”, but to the reader it must stay real.

8. Too much Description and Detail

-The descriptions you slave over, thinking they will bring the book to life are more likely going to be the death of your story if you overdo it.

9. Unfamiliar Words and Phrases

-When you use WORDS BOYS DON'T UNDERSTAND, or terminology that is TOO DATED, you can lose your reader.

10. Avoid slang, trendy words, cliché's

It can be very REGIONAL—apply to one area of the country, leaving other areas of the country CONFUSED. It also tends to CHANGE TOO QUICKLY.

3 TRAPS WOMEN must AVOID when WRITING for BOYS

1. MAKING BOY CHARACTERS TOO GIRLY.

-They COMMUNICATE TOO WELL.

-They RELATE TOO WELL.

You're MAKING BOYS the way you WISH THEY WOULD BE... not the way they really are.

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2. MAKING THE BOYS TOO STEREOTYPICAL.

Always LIKING GROSS THINGS. Sure, some boys like gross things... but that is more juvenile.

3. Deep down THINKING BOYS HAVE IT EASIER than GIRLS.

-The truth is *EACH GENDER has their own set of hardships.*

-What you *BELIEVE DEEP DOWN will COME OUT in your writing...*

MY PERSPECTIVE when WRITING for BOYS

If you think of kids as JUST KIDS... *YOU'RE IN FOR TROUBLE.*

IF YOU THINK of THEM as Kids... your writing will take on the *TONE of a PARENT.*

HERE'S HOW I THINK of KIDS...

-I think that they're just about *AS SMART AS ME... and SMARTER in some ways.* (math... technology)

-*BUT they're MORE IMPULSIVE.*

-*AND their JUDGMENT isn't always so good... and they make BAD DECISIONS as a result.*

-*THEY ARE SMART... but not nearly as EXPERIENCED as I am.*

-*With their LIMITED EXPERIENCE and LACK of JUDGMENT they LACK WISDOM.*

Boys need good writing.

-*They need to be SHOWN THINGS ABOUT LIFE through the experiences of your characters...*

-*They need to be shown how to COPE with complicated life.*

-*They need to be shown what it means to MATURE.*

-*They need to be shown how to PERSEVERE through hardship,*

-*They need to learn how to GROW in their faith.*

-*They need to be WARNED about TRAPS IN LIFE... and INSPIRED TO AVOID THEM.*

-*They need to be shown what it means to BECOME a MAN...by GOD'S DEFINITION.*

Writing for boys, is a very WORTHY and NOBLE GOAL.

LET'S write in a way so that THEY'LL WANT to READ IT . . .

so they'll get the MESSAGE God has PLACED in OUR HEARTS!

CHARACTERIZATION

The characters we CREATE are going to be CRITICAL to the success of our story.

Unless our readers find a reason to LIKE our main character, they really WON'T CARE WHAT HAPPENS TO THEM. If they don't truly care what happens to them, they probably WON'T KEEP READING YOUR STORY.

19 Tips to Build Stronger Characters

1. LOOK IN THE MIRROR

Include elements of YOU in your characters. -Your PASSIONS. -Your OPINIONS. -Your FEARS.

-Your SECRETS. -Your EMOTIONS. -Your HABITS, FLAWS, STRENGTHS, etc.

2. LOOK IN THE FAMILY ALBUM

You know family. RECREATE them to use in your stories. Not intact or whole—but elements of them. Apply the same principle to friends, co-workers, etc. -Their little TICS. -The THINGS THEY SAY— and the WAY THEY SAY IT. -FACIAL EXPRESSIONS. -The way they ACT and REACT. -Their PERSONALITY. -The way they DRESS. -The way they THINK. This will help you make your characters more real. It will help you—“Okay, what would Uncle Jack do if that happened?”

3. OBITUARIES

Reading summaries of people's lives may spark an idea for a colorful character.

4. WRITE A LETTER

Ask your character a question, and let them write their response. You'll get to know your character—and find out QUIRKS about them that you never knew. This will help you build a profile of your character. You'll get to UNDERSTAND your character—why they do what they do.

5. PICK UP BOOKS ON CHARACTERIZATION

They'll go through all kind sorts of helpful things ...Lists of facial features, habits, etc. This is where SOME PEOPLE START. It should be the END POINT, in my opinion. Start with someone real—or a compilation of real people. Then use a book like this to give them a makeover—a new look.

6. CHARACTERS NEED TO BE LIKEABLE

If readers don't like your main character—they won't care what happens to them. If they don't care what happens to them, all the things you do to try to add TENSION and CONFLICT won't fully work. The reader doesn't really care how bad life gets for them. They probably won't finish your book—and neither will an editor.

7. SHOW YOUR CHARACTER ... DON'T TELL

Don't tell us what your character is like or what they look like. Show us. Put them in action and let the reader draw their own conclusions. -Show how he reacts with the neighbor kid. -Show how he treats his dog, or his mom, etc.

8. CHARACTERS NEED FLAWS

They can't be perfect. I think the flaws should be big enough, that if unchecked, they could destroy them. We all have them. But we use self-control to keep them in line. And we have the Holy Spirit to help change our heart. *GOOD GUYS CAN'T BE ALL GOOD. THEY MUST HAVE THE CAPACITY FOR BAD.*

9. CHARACTERS NEED STRENGTHS

Everybody has strengths. Don't settle for cliché. (great looks, athletic ability, etc.) Go deeper. Go for strength of character. A strong sense of loyalty, honesty, etc. If you write fantasy—consider NOT giving your character a magic sword, a special ability, etc. In my opinion, once you give your character something like that—your book has taken one step away from being able to truly impact the reader. It has taken a step closer to just entertaining them.

10. STAY TRUE TO YOUR CHARACTER

Be sure the things your character says and does are the things your CHARACTER would really DO and SAY.

11. FORCE YOUR CHARACTER TO DO THE UNTHINKABLE

What is something your character would NEVER do or say? How can you put them in a *position where they MUST DO IT?* The character still RINGS TRUE, but you will put them in CONFLICT that the reader can totally IDENTIFY (and sympathize) with.

12. GIVE YOUR CHARACTER A STRONG GOAL, DESIRE, or NEED

So strong—it will be believable that he KEEPS FIGHTING to get there.

13. GIVE YOUR CHARACTER OPPOSITION/OBSTACLES STRONGER THAN HE/SHE IS

However strong your character's drive is to get the goal, the opposition must be that much stronger.

14. GIVE YOUR CHARACTER AN INNER GOAL OR DESIRE

This is goal not so obvious. You may not even see it at first. But as you write, often you find there is a deeper need that the character has that they aren't even aware of. At the end of the story, you must bring resolution to both the *obvious goal*—attained or unattained. And you must bring resolution to the *inner goal*—and the most satisfying endings happen when they at least attain their inner goal.

15. GIVE YOUR CHARACTER A CHANCE TO GROW

Your character needs to CHANGE, GROW, DEVELOP, MATURE, or LEARN in some way that will be satisfying to the reader. -A NEW UNDERSTANDING. -A CHANGE OF HEART.

16. BAD GUYS HAVE MOMS

Don't let your bad guys be so BAD, so VILLAINOUS, that they appear stereotypical. Bad guys have moms who found something to love in them. So give them some REDEEMING QUALITIES.

17. DON'T LET YOUR LEAD CHARACTER BE A WIMP

We can't respect wimps. We don't want to be one. So if you want readers to like your character, or aspire to be like your character—don't let them be a wimp. Or if they are a wimp, don't let them stay there long.

18. CAREFUL OF THE CUTOUTS

Some like to select and cut pictures out of magazines, newspapers, photos on the internet—so they have a photo of their character to look at. This can be helpful—but use caution. Often people pick the BEAUTIFUL PEOPLE. The handsome, chiseled men. The gorgeous, shapely woman. Instead, pick the average person.

19. RESIST THE URGE TO BECOME A CHRISTIAN NAZI

"The Nazi's horrified the world with their desire to make a super race ... and writers have been doing it with their protagonists ever since." Tim Shoemaker

This is a HUGE FAULT with many writers—Christians, too. The main character doesn't have to be MODEL MATERIAL. BOYS DON'T NEED TO BE ...BLONDE HAIR, BLUE EYES, BIG, STRONG, and HANDSOME. GIRLS DON'T NEED TO BE ...GORGEOUS, SHAPELY, etc. Most readers don't look like that, which means they can't fully identify with your character. If they don't identify, they won't care as deeply. If they don't care, they may not finish your book. MODEL CHARACTERS—with GREAT LOOKS or ABILITIES, may FAIL to INSPIRE readers to learn the deep lesson of the book. -May actually DISCOURAGE readers. *"If wish I could be like that person—but I can't change how I look."* They will attribute part of the character's success to their great looks or abilities, and as a result, may not be inspired to grow like your character did.

POINT-OF-VIEW (POV)

- The VIEWPOINT CHARACTER is the person telling the story or the person through whose eyes or perspective we see the story.

Three reasons why getting Viewpoint right is so critical

1. POV (point of view) mistakes CONFUSE your readers.
2. POV mistakes DESTROY part of the story experience for the reader.
3. EDITORS don't like to see Viewpoint problems.

There are 2 main viewpoint problems people wrestle with.

1. "HEAD-hopping"—switching viewpoint characters in mid-scene. Seeing, hearing, thinking, feeling, etc., from the perspective of someone other than the viewpoint character.

2. "SORTA-psychic"—relaying information that the viewpoint character couldn't possibly have seen, heard or known, unless of course they're *psychic, a time traveler, or having "out-of-body" experiences.*

Sample A- "Head hopping" *Nate is our POV character*

"Skinny jeans. White top. 2 o'clock." Nate barely nodded toward the group of girls. Howie slung his arm over Nate's shoulder. "Oh yeah." Nate didn't want to stare—but couldn't help watching her. There was something different about her. Good. Clean. Fresh. No makeup—or very little. But she didn't need it. She was perfect just the way she was. Not that she was the prettiest girl in the group. But there was something about her. "Who is she?" "My next girlfriend," Howie said. "Her name is Beth." "Beth." Nate whispered her name. "She looks so . . ." He struggled for the right word. "Wholesome." "Wholesome?" Howie snickered. "Sounds like a loaf of bread or something. What I wouldn't do to get a slice of her." Nate jammed him with his elbow. Beth turned at that same moment and saw Howie double over. *Why would a guy do something like to his friend?* She watched him straighten up, rubbing his ribs. Howie noticed her watching him. "Hey, look—she's got her eyes on me already." He held his side and winced, hoping it looked real enough to get him a little sympathy. "Maybe she'll offer to kiss me to make it better." Nate could feel his face getting warm. Beth turned and tried to focus on the other girls talking. The last thing she needed right now was attention from another boy. She'd switched schools to distance herself from the last one. She shuddered and silently thanked God she'd ended things with Brad. But things weren't over in Brad's mind. Even though she had no way of knowing it now, tomorrow she would find out just how obsessed he still was with her.

-Do you see the head hopping problems?

-*NATE'S* POV, his thoughts (he couldn't help watching her), -*BETH'S* POV, her thoughts (why would somebody do that), -*HOWIE'S* POV, his thoughts (notices her watching, etc.) -*NATE'S* POV, his feelings (could feel face get warm)-*BETH'S* POV, her thoughts (tries to refocus, thanks God)

-Then what happens in the last paragraph?

-A viewpoint problem—a *sudden jump to the future, (omniscient)*

-What we're calling a "*Sorta-psychic*" problem. ("time traveler")

-*Author is giving information instead of it coming from the POV character.*

Sample B-*Mark is the point of view person. He's wearing the hat with the GoPro.*

Mark stepped up to the coach's desk and tried not to look as shaky as he felt. He squared his shoulders, standing as tall as he could. "I'd like to sign up for basketball tryouts."

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Coach Ferguson sized him up in a quick glance. No way was this kid going to make the basketball team. Not unless he had some kind of massive growth spurt before next week. *Too much rice and not enough spaghetti.* He chuckled to himself. He liked that.

"Clipboard's on the wall. To the right of the door." Nice and high. By design. It was a way of sending a message to short guys with tall dreams. He watched to see if the kid would grab a chair or ask for help.

-Where are the POV problems? (the coach's thoughts.)

-Why? (Mark can't know them. He is POV character)

-What type of POV problem is it? (Head-hopping)

Coach Ferguson can't rip the POV Finder away from Mark. *Only one person can hold the POV finder in a scene at a time.*

Let's try this again, but staying in Mark's POV this time.

Mark stepped up to the coach's desk and tried not to look as shaky as he felt. He squared his shoulders, standing as tall as he could. "I'd like to sign up for basketball tryouts," he said.

Coach Ferguson glanced up.

Mark could feel him sizing him up. Already cutting him from the team before he'd even seen him handle a ball.

"Clipboard's on the wall. To the right of the door."

Mark looked at the clipboard. Obviously out of reach. Just like his hopes of making the team if he didn't think of something—fast.

Sample C *Hanson is the viewpoint character. He's wearing the hat with the GoPro.*

Hanson ran like a kid being chased after breaking a window. Only it wasn't an angry homeowner on his heels. It was *him*—and he had a knife. Vice-like cramps tortured Hanson's right side. He couldn't go much longer. Hanson's shoes churned up the gravel under his feet. He didn't dare look back. The man was too close. The sound of his commando boots in the loose stones behind him made his gut twist.

"Give it up, Hanson!" The voice sounded strong, mocking. "You're finished!" The man's lip curled in a hideous sneer.

Gotta keep going. Hanson leaped across the ditch and scrambled up the embankment. *Can't stop now. CAN'T!*

-POV problem? (man's lip curled) **-Why is this a problem?** (Hanson is clearly looking straight ahead) **-What type of POV problem is this?** (Sorta-psychic) **-How can we fix it?** (Drop the lip part or have him imagine the guy's lip curling.)

Sample D-*Susan is the viewpoint character. She's wearing the hat with the GoPro.*

"I hate you. I'll always hate you."

Little did Susan know that she would long to take those words back in just two days. There were problems brewing on the horizon for both of them, but only in time would they realize just how those problems intricately connected them to one another.

-POV problem? (When we get insight into the future.) **-Why is this a problem?** (The viewpoint character can't know this.)

-What do we call this? ("sorta-psychic") **-How do we fix it?** (Use foreshadowing if you want, but it must be subtle.)

POV isn't just a mistake to avoid, but a tool to make my writing stand out.

The key is to stay DEEPLY ENTRENCHED in your character's POV.

Rob is our viewpoint character & has the hat with the GoPro.

The scene opens with Rob on a cruise ship, entering the buffet dining room.

Rob crossed the hall and lined up behind other passengers just inside the Baja Buffet. The dining room totally fit the image of the Caribbean-bound cruise ship. Aqua blue carpet with rich coral swirls invited hungry tourists to the buffet.

Windows lined the entire length of one side of the room, giving an endless view of the ocean. The other side was papered in a faded cocoa. Brightly painted plaster casts of life-sized dolphins, giant seahorses, and other happy looking sea creatures danced along the wall.

Rob hoped to get a table along the windows, but they were filling fast.

There are no obvious POV mistakes. -Head-hopping not an issue. No "sorta-psychic problems.

What's the problem with this?-The opening of the scene describes the room—but is this the way Rob sees it?

Let's try it again—but more deeply entrenched in Rob's POV this time.

Rob stepped into the dining room and inhaled. Roast beef. Maybe prime rib. He picked up the pace and headed straight for the start of the buffet. Why did cruise ships put the food all the way in the back of the room?

A couple ahead of him strolled down the carpeted aisle like they couldn't decide if they were hungry or not. Each of them held a small child by the hand, effectively monopolizing the entire width of the walkway.

Rob put on the brakes and stretched to see past them. He caught a glimpse of the gleaming stainless steel pans heaping with spaghetti, mashed potatoes, gravy.

"Where do you want to sit?" The woman in front of him glanced at her husband and slowed to a stop. "We've got to get a table along the windows." She pointed to a row of booths with an endless view of ocean. The mom seemed totally oblivious to the traffic stacking up behind them.

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Rob wasn't going to let it bother him. He was on vacation for Pete's sake. He was supposed to relax. His stomach growled in protest.

He tried to skirt around them twice, but both times junior got in the way. He looked ahead at the food and cleared his throat. Loudly. The window shoppers still weren't moving.

Rob dug in his pocket and fished out a handful of change. Glancing over his shoulder once, he tossed the coins ahead of him and off to one side.

Squealing in delight, the kids tugged free from their parents grip and pounced on the rolling money—allowing Rob to squeeze past.

Smiling, he bee lined his way to the start of the buffet and grabbed the biggest dinner plate he'd ever seen.

FIVE THINGS to CONSIDER to HELP YOU WRITE IN A DEEPER POV that is CONSISTANT and TRUE to your POV CHARACTER

1. PERSPECTIVE -What is the perspective of my character? How does he see THINGS? How does he see LIFE? He likely sees things in a very SUBJECTIVE WAY... *not objective*. So we must be careful not to open scenes in too much of an objective way when our POV character is not objective at all.

2. PERSONALITY -His approach to things—the way he *WALKS INTO A ROOM*... his *REACTIONS*... the *way he TALKS*...his *INTERNAL THOUGHTS should REFLECT his PERSONALITY*.

3. PRIORITIES -What does he WANT RIGHT NOW at this moment? What is he FOCUSED ON? Everything you write must run in perfect tandem with his priorities... what he wants at this moment. Don't add any other details.

4. PREDISPOSITION -*What kind of mood is he in JUST BEFORE* the scene opens? *How can I show that* or be *true to his predisposition* as the scene opens?

5. PANDORA'S BOX -What is his or her PERSONAL PANDORA'S BOX? What are they AFRAID WILL GET OUT and cause them ALL KINDS of TROUBLE? *When appropriate, this needs to surface... a FLEETING THOUGHT he shoves down into the box again*.

FOUR AREAS to specifically look at to DEEPEN POV in your manuscript

1. DESCRIPTION... of people... of places. Only describe it as the POV character *sees it in their FRAME of MIND at THAT MOMENT*. If the details are NOT NOTICED or IMPORTANT to the POV character AT THIS MOMENT... *it is not important*. Period.

2. BACKSTORY -Another place we can slip out of deep POV and give details we need the reader to get. If you write smart, you can get the backstory in and do it in their POV.

3. DIALOGUE -We bring in deep POV in several ways...
The *WAY* our POV person says things (their personality)
The *THINGS* our POV person says (their perspective)
The *BIG THING* on his mind at the moment (their priority)
The *ATTITUDE* or *MOOD* they convey (their predisposition)
The *WAY THEY HEDGE* or *COVER UP* (avoiding Pandora's box)

4. INTERIOR DIALOGUE -The interior dialogue should reflect their personality, priorities, perspective, etc.—and *all in an UNINHIBITED WAY*.

"There are NO FILTERS in interior dialogue. None." Tim Shoemaker

SHOW DON'T TELL

To write well... we need to **SHOW A STORY... NOT TELL IT**. Readers want the FULL EXPERIENCE of a good story— NOT a QUICK SUMMARY of what is going on. Think of your readers as BLIND... they can't see the GREAT STORY in your HEAD.

Example A: Let's look at SHOWING someone is COLD versus just telling.

Telling: *Katy was really cold while she waited for the bus.*

Showing: *Katy rubbed her hands together, then cupped them over her mouth and blew on them. It didn't help. She drove her hands in her pockets and jumped in place. She had to get her blood circulating. She looked down the block. Still no bus. If she'd known the driver was going to be this late she'd have brought her gloves—or maybe some hot cocoa.*

Example B: Lets look at showing someone is ANGRY versus just telling the reader they're angry.

Telling: *Kyle's Dad found out what he did and grounded him. Kyle's Dad was really angry.*

Instead, show them what happens—and let the reader figure out Kyle's dad is angry.

Showing: *Kyle's dad slammed his fist on the table so hard that coffee burped out of his cup and splattered onto the floor. "How many times have I told you not to hang around that kid?"*

Kyle kept his eyes on the floor and his mouth shut. Did Dad really want him to answer that?

"Look at me when I talk to you."

Kyle forced himself to look up. There was something almost funny about his Dad's face—so incredibly red—with that vein popping out in his neck like he'd swallowed an extension cord.

"So what am I supposed to do with you—huh?"

Kyle raised his hand. "Give me another chance?"

Dad leaned in close. "Go to your room, smart guy."

Kyle didn't wait to be told again. He bolted from his chair and stomped out of the kitchen.

"And you're going to stay there... all weekend."

Terrific. Kyle took the stairs two at a time.

"Did you hear me?"

How could he not? Everybody in a three-block radius probably heard him.

Example C: Lets look at an example of SHOWING someone is HELPFUL and STRONG.

Telling: *Carlos was the kind of guy who was really helpful. And not only that, Carlos was really strong.*

Showing: *Anthony struggled to lift the plastic storage container while Matthew slouched in his chair, watching. "What does Mrs. Blair keep in here, bricks or something? Give me a hand."*

Matthew grabbed the other end. Together they raised the box a few inches off the floor, shuffled a few feet—and let it drop. Matthew put his hands on his hips and arched his back. "This thing weighs a ton. Maybe we can slide it."

Carlos walked into the room and set his backpack on his desk.

"I got a better idea," Anthony whispered. "Let's make somebody else try to move it."

Matthew grinned.

"Hey Carlos," Anthony said. "Mrs. Blair needs someone to grab this box for her."

Carlos hustled over, snapped the container off the floor and hefted it onto his shoulder in one smooth move.

"Where does she want me to put it?"

If you want the reader to KNOW WHAT SOMEONE IS LIKE... DON'T JUST TELL THEM... put them in ACTION and LET THEM SEE IT.

WHAT ABOUT ACTION?... often we TELL what happened... we SUM IT UP, when we should SHOW THE ACTION.

FOUR TIPS FOR "SHOWING THE MOVIE"... For SHOWING INSTEAD of TELLING.

1. SHOW THE READER WHAT IS HAPPENING... Let them INTERPRET WHAT IS GOING ON. If you want to say someone is angry, or cold, or scared, or nervous... don't use that word... SHOW IT.

2. CHOOSE THE WORDS THAT SHOW THE PICTURE BEST...

WALKED out of the room... versus STOMPED out of the room...

3. SHOW ME ONLY WHAT IS IMPORTANT TO THE CHARACTER at THAT MOMENT.

Is SHOWING just putting MORE DESCRIPTION in your writing? NO. Showing is your character reacting to what is happening around them. It is letting the reader see what is going on inside their head. Only describe what is important to your character at that time. And only give me LITTLE BITS of DESCRIPTION at a TIME.

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4. For REALISTIC... MOVIE-LIKE WRITING...

show me what is going on OUTSIDE your character...and then show me how your character REACTS. Just a little of each. Alternate back and forth.

Example D: Lets look at a sample of SHOWING someone LOVES her dog versus TELLING... BUT then we're going to break it down and see how we are careful to alternate what is going on OUTSIDE MY CHARACTER with HOW MY CHARACTER IS REACTING.

Telling: Cheryl's Golden Retriever walked over and lay down next to her. Cheryl loved her dog.

Showing:

The Golden Retriever padded over to where Cheryl sat on the top step of the porch.
Cheryl smiled and reached for her "Hi, Candy-girl."
Tail answering happily, Candy curled up on the warm deck and snuggled close.
Cheryl cradled her dog's head on her lap. "I'm going to tell you a secret, Candy-girl," she whispered.
"Something I haven't told anyone."
As if eager to hear, Candy raised her head slightly.
Gently working one hand behind Candy's ears, Cheryl stroked and caressed the soft folds. Glancing over her shoulder, Cheryl leaned in close. "I think I love him."
Candy looked at her with an unblinking, almost dreamy gaze.
"And I think you like him too." Cheryl kissed the top of her retriever's head. "I just wish Mom would see him like you do."

Breaking it down...

Outside of our character:

The dog approaches.

Reaction:

Cheryl smiles (feelings) reaches (action) greets her (speech).

Outside of our character:

Dog is happy, lays next to her.

Reaction:

Cheryl cradles dogs head. Starts to share her secret feelings.

Outside our character:

Candy raises head, appears to listen.

Reaction:

Caresses her dog, tells her the secret.

Outside our character:

Dog looks at her with dreamy gaze.

Reaction:

Kisses dog and talks to her.

We show a little of what is going on OUTSIDE our character...

Then a little of how our character REACTS...

-What they DO

-What they THINK

And we end up giving them writing that SHOWS a story instead of just summing it up.

Make your reactions REALISTIC!

You need to make them realistic as far as the order in which they occur.

-Writing the reaction out of order will come across as fake—not authentic.

Generally, the order of your reactions are ... **A. Feelings B. Actions C. Speech**

You don't always have to show all three (feelings, actions, speech), but whatever you show generally follows that order or it won't read right.

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Avoiding the “telling” traps!

Common areas in a manuscript where we often tell instead of show:

A. What a character senses- (sees, hears, smells, touches, tastes, and feels) the trap is when we limit our descriptions to using words like “nervous”, “angry”, etc. -Try not to even use the “telling” word. (Diane was nervous, scared, cold, etc.) -Instead, find a way to show it and let the reader conclude they were nervous, etc. Use action and dialogue to show how someone feels.

B. Back-story or other information the author wants to tell the reader. -Avoid adding back story details as an author or as one character telling another one something they BOTH already know for the sole purpose of informing the reader.

C. Descriptions of people, a scene—when described by the author vs. POV character.

SCENES

In this session we’ll look at How to pick which scenes to write, how to write more powerful scenes, how to transition from scene to scene. Like a watercolor set with six colors, we’ll look at 6 elements to create better scenes and transitions in your writing.

Setting versus Scene The **SETTING** is simply where the SCENE takes place. The **SETTING** can be used over and over again in a story. The **SCENE** is only used once. It is never repeated.

Scene Defined

“A scene is a unit of event which has a beginning, a middle, and an end, and it contains nothing except characters in action.”
The Craft of Writing by William Sloane

“A scene is a unit of conflict, of struggle, lived through by character and reader. It’s a blow-by-blow account of somebody’s time-unified effort to attain an immediate goal despite face-to-face opposition.”

Techniques of the Selling Writer by Dwight V. Swain

Think of a theatrical play . . .

A scene begins when the curtain goes up or a character comes on stage.

A scene ends when the curtain goes down or the cast on stage is changed.

A story is a string of scenes often with a bit of transition between them.

Two things you must know if you’re going to pick the best scenes.

1. Know what your book is about—your destination. -Where is the story going? What does your protagonist want? -What is the theme, the lesson or your story? Each scene needs to move the story forward.

2. Know what happens in the book—how you plan to get there. -Don’t have to outline it in detail—but need to have a general sense. Otherwise no way of knowing if you’re on track with each scene. Knowing what your story is about—your destination. Knowing what is going to happen along the way—your route.

Three elements essential to every scene

1. –A beginning—Start with A CLEAR GOAL

2. –A Middle—Move into STRONG CONFLICT

3. –An End—Accomplishing goal or better yet DISASTER

1. A Clear Goal. What does the character want—bad? -A scene goal may be the same as the book goal, but more likely it’s -Something related -Something shorter term—more immediate -Something measurable and specific -Something that builds toward the goal of the book -Something achievable in this scene without a break in time.

A clear goal, made evident right up front, -helps engage your reader in the scene -keeps them interested in the scene -keeps the scene on track with the story as a whole

But it does two other critical things for you. -It helps you know where to start the scene -It helps you know when to end the scene

Starting a Scene

-Knowing my goal for the scene, apply this rule of thumb by William Sloane in *The Craft of Writing*. Start the scene ...

“at the moment it becomes necessary to the action of the story.”

-Once I start a scene, I want it to be one continuous flow of time without breaks.

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2. **Strong conflict.** What/who is going to *get in his way*?

-Man vs. man -Man vs. nature -Man vs. himself -Man vs. supernatural

For good, powerful, effective conflict . . .

-You need to be sure the scene goal you picked is really *strong*.

-You need to be sure it's something your character wants—*BAD*.

3. **Disaster.** What goes wrong—makes the goal harder?

Ending the Scene

-End the scene when the point is made. -When the goal is attained or lost. -Don't drag it out.

Five Other Tips for Stronger Scenes

1. **Know whose POV you want to be in for the scene and stay there.**

2. **Scene must be about showing, not telling.**

With that in mind . . . -*Avoid flashbacks in your scenes.*

A. It's unrealistic. -If conflict is intense, who has time to reflect on some event from the past?

B. It slows your story. -Flashback takes away the forward movement—you're going backwards!

C. Save flashback for the SETUP between scenes.

3. **Keep the scene moving.**

A. -We've already looked at GOALS, CONFLICT, and DISASTER.

B. -Also use ACTION. Effective DIALOGUE. C. -A CHANGE in character or circumstances

D. -Use TIME. -Urgency of time—the "ticking clock"

4. **Vary the scenes to avoid too much of the same thing.**

A. -Length of the scene—some longer, some shorter B. -Number of characters in the scene

C. -Level of action or intensity from scene to scene (pacing).

D. -Setting for scene—don't use the same place too often

5. **Milk the payoff scenes for all they're worth**

-Don't cut these short—reader has been waiting for this.

Transitions –setting up for the next scene

We need a little setup to transition or bridge to the next scene.

The Setup is needed to do *three major things*.

1. **Reaction** -How does your POV character *react to the disaster at the end of the last scene?* -What is his state of mind?

2. **Dilemma** -*What to do?* -Here's the situation POV character is in—*what options does he have?* -Readers learn about the character in the SETUP. Is he worth caring about?

-Readers want to see our character *fight for something*. -*If they don't put up a good fight, what does that say?*

A. The goal or motivation isn't strong enough. B. The character isn't strong enough.

3. **Decision** -Our main character needs to make a decision.

-He's had a GOAL -He's run into CONFLICT -The scene ended in DISASTER

-We saw his REACTION -He mentally worked through his DILEMMA -Now he makes a DECISION

-And this decision leads us right to the GOAL for the next SCENE.

A couple of other things about this SETUP portion

1. This is more of a summary section.

-*Not necessarily in real, continuous time* like the scene. -*If you need to use flashback*, it is much more appropriate to use it in the SETUP portion vs. the SCENE portion. -The sorting out and decision process may be quick, or it could take days or weeks—maybe years.

2. So while there may certainly be *“showing”* in the SETUP, there will likely be a lot of *“telling”* going on. *-This is the place to do it—not in your scenes.*

3. This is also a chance to affect the *mood of the story*, and the *pacing*.

-It *gives the reader a breather* after they've just gone through some real conflict and a disaster.

This is how you're going to do it.

SCENE—SETUP—SCENE—SETUP

Your SCENE will include- A GOAL - CONFLICT- DISASTER and then the scene ends.

Then move into the SETUP section where you show –REACTION –DILEMMA -DECISION

Writing good scenes is *not a formula*, but we can use these elements *as a pattern*.

TIPS FOR STRONG ACTION SCENES

1. Use the setting to maximize the action scene

-What type of mood do you want to create in the action scene?

Think about that when you choose the location where the action is going to take place. Pick a time of day, or location that will enhance the mood you want to portray. That will help the action and make your story more gripping.

-Can you make the setting a character of sorts . . . with it's own personality?

How can the environment, room, or whatever seem to work against your protagonist?

-How can the setting . . . the environment, room, or whatever already be such a force of intimidation that it strikes fear in your character's heart?

Can you set the action in a place where your character really doesn't want to go? The secret to making this really work is to set this up in advance. Take your character to that spot earlier in the story. Point out all the things you need for them to picture it. But only the essential stuff.

2. Don't cut the section short . . . but do keep sentences short.

The readers are waiting for the action, so don't cut it short. Resist the urge to TELL or to SUMMARIZE. But do keep the SENTENCES and PARAGRAPHS SHORT. Your reader will be reading faster—or it will seem like it. The action pages will fly.

3. Add to the conflict . . . and take away the time.

We need the tension or conflict on every page, and that is especially true for action scenes. *Don't expect the action will carry the scene all by itself.* The conflict does, and the action simply adds to it. For good conflict we need strong, clear goals—and something or someone in the way of your protagonist reaching those goals. But take away the available time or resources your character has.

4. Stay in deep POV.

For good action, good suspense, good writing on every level, stay deep in the head of your POV character. Resist the urge to slip in extra details or descriptions that we want the reader to get—but that our character wouldn't normally notice in that scene—at that moment.

5. Actions speak louder than words . . . sometimes.

Good dialogue or interior monologue IS action—and often better than the stereotypical action scene.

Don't think you need to add a car chase just to step up the action in your writing.

WHEN ACTION MEANS FIGHTING

Often an action scene involves some kind of fight. The story of Goliath, 1 Samuel 17:20-51

1. Make your Adversary a Goliath . . . give him key advantages.

A. Make your opponent bigger or stronger.

Skill—an experienced warrior. Highly trained.

Strength—definitely the stronger of the two. But don't overdo this. Goliath was 9 feet tall, not 90.

B. Give your adversary the superior weapons.

Goliath had more armor and weapons than he could carry.

C. Give your adversaries accomplices or allies.

Goliath had an armor-bearer. Another warrior with him—and an army behind him.

D. Make your opponent more confident. More intimidating.

Goliath was the original trash-talker. So make your opponent confident, too.

2. Make Your Fighter, Your Protagonist a David.

A. Take away his support network.

B. Give him a source of unseen strength.

David had an inner self-confidence . . . "I can beat him" rooted in his faith in God.

C. Give him a cause . . . he's fighting for more than just his own survival or honor.

D. Give him at least one more advantage. David was good with a sling. And the reader knows it—which gives the reader a spark of hope. They know what David did to the BEAR, and to the LION.

E. When at a disadvantage . . . strike first, strike fast, strike to kill.

David didn't wait for Goliath to strike first. HE RAN at Goliath. He attacked. Struck the first blow.

3. Getting a fight right.

Randy Ingermanson lists a number of elements of a good fight. Lets look at five of them along with some of my own thoughts mixed in here and there.

A. SHOW, don't tell—and deep POV

A fight is action, and action is generally more powerful, more captivating to your reader if you show it instead of summarizing it. This is also a chance to reveal your character. Are they strong? A quitter?

Don't give me every detail of the fight . . . just the ones that count

-We don't tell everything we see. He blinked. He breathed.

You want to make the fight happen in REAL TIME. This is how you're showing it instead of telling it. Show the punch—and then immediately show the reaction.

In a fight, your reader must only see through your POV character's eyes.

Keep in mind the types of things *your* character will be focused on.

-Weaknesses of their opponent. -Continual damage assessment—their own and their opponent.

-How to win. -How to escape. -How to end this. -How to survive.

B. For every ACTION show a REACTION

Be careful of lumping too many things in without showing the reaction from your POV person. Show the fight in the proper order. Cause and effect. Action and Reaction. Don't let your reaction show up first.

Hudson dropped back and raised his forearms to protect his face after Zatora slugged him in the face.

When your protagonist is hit, show the reaction to it. Keep everything in the order as it happens.

C. Show SEQUENCE, not Simultaneity

Show me only the important things, and then one at a time. If you try to show more than one thing, the timing will feel off—often because different actions take different amounts of time.

Hiro was calling Lunk names like “pig-headed chauvinist”, “bozo boy”, and “first class jerk” while she gave him a punch in the arm and a couple of quick shoves at the very same time. The whole time Lunk acted like it was a joke.

When you DO have a bunch of things going on at roughly the same time, show the faster things first, followed by the slower things.

Hiro hauled off and punched Lunk in the arm. (fast) “Pig-headed chauvinist!” she shouted. “Bozo boy!” (talk is slower)

Lunk acted like the whole thing was a joke. (assessment is slower)

Hiro gave him a chest-shove. “You’re a first class jerk.” She pushed him again.

D. Use COMPLETED VERBS over continuing action verbs.

Use simple, past tense verbs such as punched, kicked, and shouted rather than punching, kicking, and shouting.

Cooper looked out the window to see what all the shouting was about. Hiro and Lunk were at it again. Hiro was punching Lunk in the arm.

If we say she was punching—and punching is such a quick thing—it is easy for us to think she is hitting him over and over again. Better to say . . .

Cooper looked out the window to see what all the shouting was about. Hiro and Lunk were at it again. Hiro punched Lunk in the arm.

E. Use INTERIOR MONOLOGUE and DIALOGUE to set the pace.

It's unrealistic to show a fight continuing on at full speed without breaks. Fighters may kick, wrestle, throw punches. Then they back off. Catch their breath. They size up their opponent to look for weaknesses.

Ideally, when you show a fight scene, you want it to take about as long to read it as the actual fight would take.

F. SLO-MO really happens—but use it sparingly

DIALOGUE

11 THINGS an EDITOR CAN SPOT QUICKLY THAT MAY HURT YOUR BOOK

1. Not enough dialogue.

When they turn page after page of narrative, description, or whatever. Full margins left to right of copy—not a good sign.

SOLUTION: *You need to break it up with more dialogue.*

2. Too much dialogue—a real motor mouth.

If one character is talking too much your readers won't like it as much as you think.

SOLUTION: *Right-hand margin should be ragged, totally irregular in a section of dialogue. Some lines of dialogue only partial. Others a line and a half. We need to see some white space. If not, characters are probably saying too much at a time. You don't want a long spiel by any one character.*

3. Too much dialogue—let 'em up for air.

When two or more characters are talking back and forth without any breathers to break it up and balance it.

SOLUTION: *Break up your dialogue with a little action or description. What does your POV character see, smell, sense, feel and think?*

4. Slow start in dialogue.

Ramping up to the "good stuff"—too slow a start. Polite exchange of greetings or small talk is realistic and normal in real conversations, but it is boring in print.

SOLUTION: *You want to get into the good stuff quicker with written dialogue. Forget the small talk—the family, the weather, how you're doing, etc. You're pulling onto the highway, not into your drive. Step on it.*

5. Misuse of identifiers and tags.

Identifiers or tags need to let us know who is speaking without drawing a lot of attention to themselves. If our readers get confused as to who is speaking, we need to fix that. Too much use of "he said" or using the speaker's name can be a distraction and take away from the story.

SOLUTION: *Stick to the accepted rules of thumb and limit the need to use the speaker's name or "he/she said" by using action or markers.*

Rules of thumb When a person first speaks, use his/her name to identify them. Then just use he/she.

Where there are multiple people speaking, you may need to use their proper name more often.

Using Action Linking some kind of action to the dialogue to make it clear who is speaking.

Martin swung open the door for her and smiled. "It looks like you changed your mind, eh?"

Using Markers Linking some kind of personal characteristic to the dialogue is another way to make it clear who is speaking. If your characters are truly unique, and the readers know your characters, they can often identify the person speaking by **how** they speak. Here is a partial list... **vocabulary, motor mouths, sarcasm, poor grammar, jargon**

A note on using "said" Most of the time you'll use a simple tag like "he said"—and that's OK. It is so commonplace that it is almost transparent. Careful not to overdo it with words other than "said".

A note on using names Be careful not to overuse personal names.

6. Misuse of adverbs.

Telling them "how" something was said or sounded should be obvious from the way you write it.

SOLUTION: *If you really feel you need the adverb to make it clear, you probably need to work at "showing" a bit more instead of "telling".*

7. Dialogue is fake—conveying info for author.

When we use dialogue to insert background information, research or other details we think the readers need, the dialog can be unrealistic.

SOLUTION: *If both parties know it, don't put it in there. Don't have one person remind the other person of something they both know. Be very careful with this—you can always find another way.*

8. Dialogue is fake—stating the obvious.

The author is restating, through dialogue, what they've already shown.

Example:

Bruno staggered into the room clutching a liquor bottle in his hand.

"You've been drinking again, Bruno," Marian said. "You promised me you'd never do that again."

"Marian?" He stood a bit taller. "I only had a little."

He took a shaky step closer and reached for the back of a kitchen chair to brace himself.

"You can't even walk straight," she said. "You're drunk." Marian snatched the phone from the counter and backed away.

"Marian." His voice sounded hard. Steady. He held the bottle like a club. "Put your cell phone down. Now."

Using the edge of the table like a railing, he moved toward her.

Hand trembling, she punched the speed dial on her cell. "I know you just threatened me, but I'm not going to let you get away with it. I'm making the call, just like I warned you I would if you broke your promise again."

I'm getting redundant. We've shown he's drunk, etc. and now she's rehashing the same information with dialogue.

SOLUTION: *Avoid dialogue about what the reader can see. Don't talk about what's happening, show it, or show the reaction to it.*

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Example:

Bruno staggered into the room clutching a liquor bottle in his hand.
Marian felt her stomach tighten and she balled her hand into a fist. “You lied to me.”
“Marian?” He stood a bit taller. “I only had a little.”
She eyed the bottle. Empty. *Just like your promises.*
He took a shaky step closer and reached for the back of a kitchen chair to brace himself.
Marian snatched the phone from the counter and backed away.
“Marian.” His voice sounded hard. Steady. He held the bottle like a club.
“Put it down. Now.” Using the edge of the table like a railing, he moved toward her.
Hand trembling, she punched in the speed dial number on her cell. “I warned you what would happen if you broke your promise.”

9. Dialogue is fake—too much like Hollywood.

Trying to be too cool, melodramatic, or using clichés. Characters need to relate to each other, not just recite flashy lines.

SOLUTION: *Instead, use body language or other ways of expressing emotion rather than dialogue that is too dramatic. Also, avoid clichés unless that type of talk is what characterizes the person talking.*

10. Dialogue Doesn't Fit the Character

If my character is a child or a teenager, be sure writing is the way they'd say it.

SOLUTION: *Let target audience read it, or ask “how would your friends say . . .” **Be Careful**—not talking about making the dialogue trendy, though.*

11. Dialogue too close to real life conversations.

Many times writers strive to make dialogue **REALISTIC**—Just like real conversations. That's exactly where you can make a mistake, if you're not careful.

SOLUTION: *Dialogue needs to be different from real conversations. We don't want our dialog to be “true to life” realistic.*

FIVE ways real conversations fall short of good dialogue.

A. Random—there isn't a real goal to it. Two people can spend an hour on the phone talking about their day, catching up on news, rambling on and on. If you try that with your dialogue, you're going to **bore or frustrate** your readers. **You want to have a conversational goal with your dialogue. A point.**

B. Boring and slow—if you're really trying to be realistic. Eavesdrop and listen to how people really talk. It's often filled with “um” and “ah”, or “Gee, I just forgot what I was going to say”, or “Now, where was I?” **Dialogue can't bog down in our writing. It must make us—curious, tense, excited, interested, laugh**

C. Avoids conflict with the person they're talking to. Not always, of course, but as a general rule when you're talking to a friend or acquaintance you don't look to start a disagreement. **On the other hand, when you're writing dialogue, you want to create conflict.** You want two people talking who have **different or opposing goals.**

D. Don't generally end in a disastrous way. Most of the time in real life conversations, you want to have a peaceful conversation with whoever you're talking to. **Misunderstandings and hard feelings** are exactly the kind of disasters you want in written dialogue.

E. Dodges real feelings. Often guys don't want to share their true feelings. They don't allow themselves to be that vulnerable. **Exposing true feelings** is all part of good dialogue.

OTHER DIALOGUE PRACTICES to AVOID

1. Slang/Trendy- using slang or trendy words and expressions can be dangerous.

A. It can be very regional. It may apply or make sense to only one area of the country.

B. It also tends to change too quickly and will date your story.

C. When slang changes, it can take on an entirely new meaning.

2. Oddball Spellings/Ethnic pronunciations- words misspelled, letters dropped and apostrophes added or some other variation of that to indicate a particular pronunciation or mispronunciation.

A. It can slow down and irritate readers and editors.

B. It can be offensive to ethnic groups, etc.

Better way to handle it:

-Use sentence structure to help differentiate. Maybe faulty grammar.

-Possibly use an occasional word to give it the feel, but not the frustration.

3. Dirty words- avoid even for “bad” characters. Ephesians 4:29 is clear ... so using bad language isn't an option for us.

IMPROVING YOUR DIALOGUE

1. Have Conversation Goals

- What is the point of this conversation? -How does it help reveal a character to the reader?
- How does it move the story forward? -How does it create an emotional response in the reader?
- Does it set a mood necessary for the story? -Does it intensify the story conflict?
- Does it remind the readers just how desperate your character is to achieve their goal?

2. Cut the Chatter—keep dialogue short & snappy We can have a tendency to write more dialogue than is really needed.

Example: "I think this is the way." Martin took the corner slow, scanning the street for anything he recognized. The trouble was everything looked familiar. Maybe he'd already been down this street with all the circling he'd done. "Yeah, this looks right."

Ryan strained to see the street sign. "Are you sure about that?"

"As sure as I'm going to be."

"That didn't sound very convincing." Ryan picked up the map again. "The fact is I think we're lost and you're not willing to admit it."

Try to weed out unnecessary words...

"This looks right." Martin took the corner slowly, scanning the street for anything he recognized. The trouble was everything looked familiar. Maybe he'd already been down this street with all the circling he'd done.

Ryan strained to see the street sign. "You sure?"

"Pretty sure."

"Great." Ryan picked up the map again. "We're lost."

3. Cut the Chatter—save some for later. Don't let characters beat every subject to death.

4. Keep the Sequence Right When You Portray Reactions

- You need to make them realistic as far as the order in which they occur.
- Reactions can be complex, but here's the rule of thumb.

The order of your reactions must generally be A. Feelings B. Action C. Speech

5. Keep Your Dialogue Between Two People Whenever Possible

When you have **three or more people** in a conversation, identifying who is speaking will take more work for you **and** the reader. *Try to get the conversation to one-on-one.*

6. Ping Pong Principles

*Sol Stein in his book **How to Grow a Novel** says this;*

"... dialogue is not an exchange of information but a kind of game in which the opponents try to gain an advantage over each other."

Think about the game of ping pong. The routine part of the game, where one person hits the ping pong ball and another returns it, is much like dialogue. -You work with a stimulus/response type basis. -One person says something. That is the stimulus. -The other person responds or reacts. -When two people play ping pong, the game gets more exciting when each player is trying to win.

In order for someone to win at ping pong, they need to gain an advantage over someone. They'll **smash it down**, put a **spin on it**, or try to return the ping pong ball in a **different direction**, off to the corners, to catch the other player off guard.

When writing dialogue, we're going to use ping pong techniques. The idea is to surprise the reader with the direction of the dialogue. That keeps it interesting.

A. SLICE it. Like putting a spin on a ping pong ball so when it lands it veers off unpredictably, the speaker suddenly goes in a different direction than they were just going in the same conversation.

Example:

Ryan has just finished auditioning for a small part in a local play. He goes back to sit next to his friend, Martin, in the front row while others in the audience cheer, whistle and clap.

Ryan sat down in the front row next to Martin and smiled. "Can you believe this?" He turned and waved at the crowd. "They loved me."

"RY-AN, RY-AN, RY-AN, RY-AN." The crowd broke into a chant.

Ryan shrugged. "My performance must have been brilliant." He stood and faced the crowd. Raising both hands over his head, he did a little victory dance.

The chanting and cheering thundered through the auditorium.

Martin motioned him back to his chair. "Sit down, idiot."

"Idiot?" Ryan pumped his fists in the air. "I'm a natural. Why else would they cheer like this?"

Martin pointed. "Your zipper is down."

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B. SLAM it. Like smashing the ping pong ball for a spike, *a normal conversation takes on a fierceness.*

Example:

Robbie didn't even look up when his mother entered the room. He studied the crossword puzzle like it held the key to life.

"You're up early." Mom threw open the drapes. "And why not? It's a beautiful day."

It wouldn't be for long, now that his mom was up.

"I'm so happy you're back from college," his mom leaned over and kissed the top of his head, "things can get back to normal around here."

Robbie tried to focus on the puzzle. "Normal?"

"Absolutely." His mom picked something off his collar and flicked it away. "You'll talk to your old boss at the plant about getting your job back. And we won't let him put you back on the night shift either."

Robbie tapped the newspaper with his pencil. "What's a three letter word for 'overbearing'?"

"This is no time for games." She straightened the pillows on the couch. "I'm only concerned about you getting your job back."

Robbie put his pencil down. "I'm not going back to the plant." He took a deep breath and let it out slowly. "I signed up with the recruiter before I left school."

"You *what*?" His mom swayed just a bit, but recovered quickly.

"I'm going to be a marine." He sat a little straighter.

"You're too good for that."

Robbie did his best to smile. "They're looking for a few good men, right?"

"Dumb men is more like it." His mom walked to the picture window and stood there for a moment with her back to him. "I've got big plans for you."

"I've got some plans of my own."

She turned to look at him. "Your father will have something to say about this."

"He already has. Signing up was his idea."

Her mouth opened slightly, as if she were about to say something but thought better of it. She smiled, but it looked forced. "What about your friends? Why would you want to leave them?"

Standing, Robbie tucked the crossword into his back pocket. "I don't want to leave my friends. I just want to get away from you."

We took a fairly normal conversation and WHAM, propelled it into a certain fierceness.

Notice they came into the conversation with opposing goals, although Robbie's mom wasn't quite aware of how different her son's goals were.

-Mom is the manipulator. She wants to maintain control.

-Robbie wants to break free. He's going to end her reign over him.

Like a ping pong game, he slams one at her, and slices it at the same time.

"I'm not going back to the plant." -I'm calling that a slam.

"I signed up with the recruiter." -I'm calling that a slice.

(Whether it is a "slam" or a "slice" isn't important, just that you use it.)

We go back and forth. In the end Robbie is back one more time.

He winds up and slams it and maybe even slices it at the same time.

"I just wanted to get away from you."

C. SLASH it. Like hitting off to one corner or the other in ping pong, the conversation seems to be going one way, but one or both characters keep *heading it in a different direction other than where it was expected*. This is often done to keep the other person off balance or to get the upper hand.

It may be an indirect response.

-A question is asked, but not answered.

-A direct answer is avoided. This adds to the interest of the dialogue.

-An indirect answer is often more interesting than a direct one.

Example:

Brad jogged across the courtyard to catch up to her. "Hi Katie. Why didn't you return my call last night?"

Katie didn't slow her pace. "I'm running a little late for class."

Brad fell in step alongside her. "I was hoping we could go out tonight."

"I must be in a daze," she said. "I didn't even see you coming."

Brad is asking a question that she isn't answering. She's hitting the ball off to the corners. This makes you wonder what's going on here.

-Is she totally distracted? Is she really trying to avoid Brad? Is she afraid of him? This creates interest.

Example:

"Hi, Honey." Allan set his laptop on the table and put his arms around his wife. "You know what I'm thinking about doing later, after the kids are in bed?"

Helen gave him a peck on the cheek and slipped out of his arms. "You're home early. How was work?"

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We're hitting the ping pong ball to the sides of the table.

- Indirect answers
- Questions asked but not answered
- Answering a question with a question.

Another variation of slashing, of hitting to the corners, is where one or both parties try to control the conversation.

- Often they do this by verbal sparring.
- They're trying to get the upper hand in the conversation.
- We also might do that with a clever response. It isn't a slam, and it doesn't spin unpredictably, but it keeps the other person off balance.

Example:

Neil sauntered over. "You know how close you are to getting clobbered?" He held his hand up with his forefinger nearly touching his thumb. "About this close."
Andy smiled. "And that's about how scared I am."

BELIEVE IT OR NOT Plausibility and Fiction

OUR STORIES NEED to be BELIEVABLE.

Anybody can write something that doesn't seem believable.

It takes a skilled writer to take something that is not real, is not true, and **make it seem both real and true.**

READERS WANT STORIES to be BELIEVABLE.

They want a **break from their own reality.**

Readers want a story that will help them **suspend belief.**

"But while there is unlimited range of where we can take readers, and an unquestioned desire on the part of our readers to believe in the story world, it must be done right. ***Everything we write must seem totally and completely believable.***"

**IF WE FAIL to MAKE EVERY ASPECT BELIEVABLE ...
there will be a disconnect in the readers mind.**

We **rip them out of their story world** and tell them **this is just a story.**

Or we **insult their intelligence** ... "Do you really expect me to believe this?"

"We never want readers ripped out of the story experience any more than Disneyworld has signs around reminding you that work and bills and problems await you when you leave their grounds. They don't want anyone ripped out of the Disney experience before they leave the park."

And you don't want anyone to get ripped out of your story experience while they're still reading your book.

It can be enough to cause them to **stop reading, give it a bad review,** or miss the **deeper lessons you hoped to convey with your story.**

So what are some things to watch for?

A. Timelines -Could this really happen given that amount of time. Should it be quicker or slower?

B. Reactions -Is that what that character would say/do in this situation?

C. Non-reactions -How could he not react to that? (Interior thought/verbal comment/action)

D. Impossibilities -They could not physically do that.

So about every detail, action, reaction, dialogue, interior thought ask yourself ...

-Is this BELIEVABLE? -Could this REASONABLY HAPPEN the way I have it written?

-Would my character do it THIS WAY, given the circumstances? In other words, am I being true to my character?

-Is it POSSIBLE? -Is it PROBABLE?

What are some ways to overcome plausibility issues?

1. Let a character in the story question the things that might seem unbelievable.

"This is crazy. This is insane. This kind of stuff doesn't happen in real life." And since the character is challenging the issue that stretches the believability, the reader doesn't have to. And as the character accepts the bizarre truth, the reader does as well.

2. Anticipate the areas that will be harder for a reader to swallow, and give subtle explanations, very brief, and not obvious, that will help them over those hurdles.

3. Trust your gut. If you think an area might be off, trust that instinct. Find a way to make it believable.

Avoiding Hokey Christian Fiction

Often Christian fiction can be downright hokey.

-Stories seem forced, unrealistic

-Stories are incredibly predictable and often come across as trite

-Agenda driven ... abortion, salvation, racial reconciliation, human trafficking

-Things too conveniently get all worked out with a simple prayer

-Sacrificial death There is nobody like Jesus, yet so many try to write in a “Jesus figure.”

All of this comes together or comes across as hokey. Predictable. Ho-hum. Substandard. Unrealistic. Agenda-driven.

“Like cheesy Christian movies, hokey Christian writing will fail to move the reader. As a result, the reactions you’re hoping to get in the readers won’t likely be there.”

Suggestions for better, more believable Christian fiction

A. Write with excellence. We want our fiction to be great in the marketplace, not just the Christian marketplace.

B. If self-publishing, pay for a good edit from an excellent author or skilled editor. I’m not talking about a friend who will look for typos. It goes deeper than that. They must look for the hokey elements, the disconnects, the plausibility, the writing skill, etc.

C. Don’t think you must have a Jesus figure. There was only one Jesus. Sometimes we have to stop trying to make any one character like Jesus.

D. Don’t imagine you need a conversion scene in order for the book to be an effective tool in the Lord’s hand. Bring them to the point ... but not necessarily the conversion scene.

It is very hard to write a conversion scene that comes across as natural, believable, and not agenda-driven. Consider a note from the author at the end of the book if you think you must have it.

E. Characters should be real in every way.

- Not gorgeous/handsome but ever-so-slightly flawed
- They need flaws. Worries. Doubts.

F. Be real, but not real stupid. Some Christian fiction authors seem intoxicated with a sense that they are being real. Edgy. Gritty. So they add language. They add sex.

That’s not being real. That’s being real stupid.

Keep it clean. You don’t need sex in your fiction.

Keep it clean. You don’t need foul language to be real. Eph. 6:29

It is the real characters—who make the story “real”, not foul language or sex.

It is the plausibility of the story that makes the story “real”, not foul language or sex.

“Give them truth. Give them wisdom. Give them treasure ... not trashy writing.”

G. For characters opposing Christianity or Christian stands, make their arguments strong and compelling. It will identify with skeptics more. Argue both sides of the issue, and the truth will likely win out as the story plays out.

Are you writing a great Christian story? It will likely be agenda-driven.

Are you writing a great story, and one or more of the characters are Christians?

Likely it will be real and powerful. Do you see the difference?

PLOTTING and CHARACTERIZATION

Your fiction is about characters & what happens to them

VERY EARLY in your story your PLOT needs to come out. In his book, *Plot and Structure*, James Scott Bell lists FOUR QUESTIONS in the minds of readers ...

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| A. What is this story about? | B. Is anything happening? |
| C. Why should I keep reading? | D. Why should I care? |

Our PLOT addresses these things ... to keep them reading we need to do it in an outstanding, compelling way.

The Three Act Structure

In it's simplest form, most good fiction plots fit into a 3-act structure.

Act 1- Beginning- We are introduced to a character and confronted with a problem or a goal to which the character reacts.

Act 2- Middle- The character struggles with how to handle this problem or attain this goal, experiencing success and failure.

Act 3- End- The character wins or loses, resolution results and the character likely changes or gains insight in some way.

There are many fiction formulas available. Often they take the THREE ACT STRUCTURE and expand it to include more elements.

The HERO'S JOURNEY . . . a classic plot model or structure for fiction.

ACT 1

1. The ORDINARY WORLD

-Introduce your hero in their REGULAR LIFE.

-*Sound of Music . . . Maria's life in the convent.*

2. The hero is CONFRONTED with a CALL

-A CALL to ADVENTURE. A CHALLENGE. A PROBLEM. A CONFLICT.

-*Maria challenged to leave the convent to be a Governess.*

3. The REFUSAL of the CALL

-DENYING IT. I don't know if I can do this . . . or want to. But it is FORCED on the Hero.

-*Maria doesn't want to leave this world . . . BUT SHE IS FORCED TO GO.*

4. CROSSING the THRESHOLD

-Stepping into the OTHER WORLD . . . deciding to take it head-on.

-*Maria seeing Von Trapp's estate, but with determination sings and runs to the door.*

ACT 2

5. TESTS, ALLIES, & ENEMIES

-They're on the journey, but the road has trials & trouble. Villains are met. Enemies.

-Allies are met and formed. Things keep the hero from getting what they want

-*Maria, some of the kids START as enemies. Captain & Baroness, too. Allies form.*

6. The APPROACH TO THE INMOST CAVE

-The ENEMY RAMPS UP THEIR GAME. Truth revealed that rocks the hero's world.

-*Maria confronted by Baroness . . . and runs to the convent*

7. The ORDEAL

-The BLEAKEST MOMENT. All SEEMS LOST. The hero hits ROCK BOTTOM.

-*Maria returns to the family . . . only to find the Captain & Baroness are engaged.*

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8. The REWARD

- Out of the ordeal comes a REWARD. (May not be THE reward)
- Maria learns the Captain broke off the engagement with the Baroness & he loves Maria.

9. The ROAD BACK

- The hero makes a DECISION resulting in a change to the new ordinary world.
- Maria & the Captain marry, honeymoon, and expect to start a new "normal" life together

10. SUDDEN THREAT

- Something that can UNDO it all—just when all seemed right.
- The Nazi's have occupied—and the Captain is being forced to join the German Navy.

ACT 3

11. The RESURRECTION

- The hero fights back and finds another way.
- A bold plan put in motion to defy the Gestapo and defect using the music festival.

12. The RETURN

- Finding home, all is well, & the hero attains a new-found treasure or lesson.
- Escape to Switzerland. You can't run from your problems . . . but must run them down.

There are other FICTION MODELS with proven effectiveness-(check book table). But this is a STARTING POINT to help you AVOID MISSING SOMETHING in your story.

PLOTTING TIPS

1. Make your plot PLAUSIBLE

- IF UNBELEIVABLE the reader may get pulled out of the story experience

2. Make your plot UNIQUE

- Yes, you may be following a formula, but make it your own story.

3. Think of your TRANSITIONS from ACT 1 to ACT 2, from ACT 2 to ACT 3 as DOORWAYS.

That is how James Scott Bell refers to these transitions in his book, *Plot and Structure*, and I think it makes it really clear.

ACT 1 –Our lead character is in their normal world. But if they stay there, there is no real story. It is BORING.

We must make our character pass through a DOORWAY into ACT 2.

So something happens to disturb this normal life. It could be small. A letter with troubling news. Or it could be big. A robbery. Murder. Something that will CREATE READER INTEREST. But this is the START. We are thrusting our LEAD CHARACTER, our PROTAGONIST through a DOORWAY into some kind of conflict that will carry them through the story. IT MUST BE A "NO TURNING BACK" DOORWAY.
"Can my Lead walk away from the plot right now and go on as he has before? If the answer is yes, you haven't gone through the first doorway yet." James Scott Bell

Moving our lead character from ACT 2 to ACT 3.

Our character can be in ACT 2 forever with endless challenges. At some point we need to move to ACT 3. This is something that will OPEN THE DOORWAY to the CLIMAX. A crisis, setback, discovery. This is about our main character mustering everything they've got for that last-ditch effort, or that difficult choice that **once initiated—cannot be undone**. Once they pass through this DOORWAY, there is no going back. Usually this happens about ¾ of the way through the book.

I wish you the very best! Thanks for attending the workshop!

-Tim Shoemaker