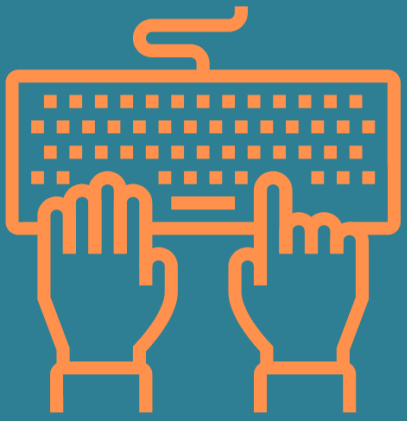
Page-Turner Fiction Series

Scenes

Master Techniques from Bestselling Authors to Keep Readers Enthralled



Meg Leader

Page-Turner Fiction: SCENES

MASTER TECHNIQUES OF BEST-SELLING AUTHORS AND WRITE SCENES THAT KEEP YOUR READERS ENTHRALLED WITH YOUR STORY.

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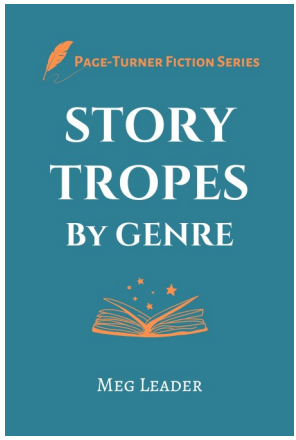

All genres have tropes—standard characters, situations, or events that readers love. Do you know the tropes for *your* genre? No? Maybe you should.

Why should authors use tropes? Does that mean your stories are doomed to be trite? Not at all. If you understand tropes your readers love, you can take two or three, mix them up, and give them a fresh look—and end up with a story that readers will fall in love with!

Find out about story tropes by getting an absolutely FREE book

Page-Turner Fiction: Story Tropes by Genre. here:

MegLeader.com

Dedicated to Caro. The sister I always needed. Thanks for always having my back!

The trouble with writing fiction is that it has to make sense, whereas real life doesn't.

—Iain M. Banks

It's hell writing and it's hell not writing. The only tolerable state is having just written.

—Robert Hass

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Let me tell you a story. Many years ago, I was a published writer in nonfiction but struggling to figure out how to write a decent novel. I wrote. And wrote. And wrote some more. Nothing I did seemed to help. I read widely in my genre (romance novels at that time). I came up with what I thought were innovative and interesting characters and clever plot ideas. Still...no agent was interested. Nobody was pounding on my door to beg me to let them publish my work. I was part of a great critique group—all of us knowledgeable but unpublished—but none of us seemed to make any headway in establishing our careers.

Then I learned about scenes. I learned about why they were important. I learned about how they were structured. I learned what their purposes were. I learned how to write a story by using scenes as my building blocks. My whole critique group started critiquing our manuscripts based on those scene concepts. We made sure that every single scene was well constructed and performed the purposes of scenes.

And within 18 months, every single active member of my critique group had their manuscripts accepted by a publisher. EVERY ONE OF US.

This is why understanding how to write quality scenes is so important.

And this is why I wrote this book. To help you also learn about scenes. What they are. How they are structured. Why they're important. And most of all, how to write them. I sincerely hope that if you learn this material and apply it to your own writing, that you will find great success in attracting readers to your story.

I know some folks really want to get right down to the nitty-gritty as quickly as possible, so to accommodate those people, at the end of each chapter I've listed the key points from that chapter as a kind of checklist for you to use.

Why You Should Read This Book.

I've spent more than 30 years writing professionally under a wide variety of pen names and in various genres. I've published fiction and nonfiction with a number of traditional publishers. I've also been judging writing contests, mostly for beginning writers, for well over 20 years. In that time, I've seen the kinds of problems writers encounter as they struggle to get their stories down on paper.

I also realized that one of the "secrets" to writing professionally is to understand the concept of SCENES. Scenes are extremely important to writing bestseller quality stories. As I already explained, when I and my critique group started critiquing ourselves based on good

scene structure, within months every single person in my group was able to get a contract with a New York publishing company. While readers may not be able to pinpoint that poor scene structure is an issue, they still can tell the difference between a story with poor scenes and one with great scenes—and they'll put down the poor scene book and gobble up the one with great scenes.

So, this is why you should read this book. I will explain exactly how scenes work, and how you too can start to write bestseller-worthy scenes. While I can't guarantee you'll get a lucrative publishing contract, if you learn these Page-Turner Techniques™, I can assure you that your readers will love your stories even more. You'll be able to turn your story into a true page-turner!

CHAPTER 2

SCENE BASICS

What do you think is the most important component of a novel, the element of the story that keeps the reader turning page after page until they get to the end? Is it the cast of characters and the relationships among those characters? Is it a specific set of events—the plot? Is it the story world, i.e., the location where the story happens? How about the thrills and chills of non-stop action? Is it the combination of all those things?

Depending on what specific kinds of novels you prefer, you might have answered any or all of those. For example, romance readers tend to think the romantic relationship between hero and heroine is the single most important aspect of the book. A science fiction reader often tends to prefer the story world—enjoying the exploration of a world different from our everyday time and place. Those who like mysteries best often say the puzzle—the plot events that mystify and confuse—are the most important part of the novel.

Truly all those elements, character, plot, story world, and more are extremely important aspects of any novel

that aspires to capture the reader's interest and keep it for four hundred or so pages.

Nevertheless, I'm here to tell you those readers are all wrong. Well, okay, actually they're sort of right. A romance novel won't satisfy readers if there isn't a great romantic relationship to vicariously enjoy. Mystery lovers will get bored if there isn't a challenging puzzle to solve. Science fiction readers want to have world to explore to better understand how it differs from and challenges our everyday reality. Horror lovers want to be scared, well... to death. Similarly, thriller readers want a lot of action, while adventure novel readers want non-stop fistfights, chases, and frantic danger.

That said, however, those necessary story aspects are not why readers keep turning the pages of novels with compulsive glee. Nope, the reason the readers gobble up novels from their favorite authors is because those stories have beautifully written, page-turner scenes. They don't read from chapter to chapter (except with some authors—I'll explain more in a bit). They read from scene to scene.

> *"Readers read books from scene to scene not from chapter to chapter."*
>
> *— Meg Leader (Page-Turner Fiction)*

Defining A Scene

So, what is this mysterious element called a "scene" anyway?

Basically, a scene is an individual event that happens in the course of the story. It takes place in one location—if the action moves to a second place, it's generally a second scene. It takes place in a limited period of time. And it takes place usually with a fairly stable number of characters present, though individual characters may come or go as part of the scene.

> *"The scene is the basic large building block of the structure of any long story."*
>
> *—Jack Bickham (Scene & Structure)*

You can think of a scene as a pearl on a pearl necklace. It's a little gem of an event that acts as a steppingstone to the next pearl (event) on the string that makes up your complete novel. It is the most fundamental unit of action that takes place in the novel, and it is the brick from which the construct of the entire structure is built.

You write a novel by stringing together scene after scene after scene from the opening event to the end of the story. You don't write chapter by chapter—you write a novel scene by scene.

Dwight Swain was one of the most influential writing teachers in the 20th century. His book *Techniques of a Selling Writer* is an absolute classic, though not always the easiest to read. He defines scene a little differently than Jack Bickham:

> *"A scene is a unit of conflict, of struggle, lived through by a character and reader."*
>
> *—Dwight Swain (Techniques of a Selling Writer)*

So, Jack Bickham and Dwight Swain together provide a great definition of a scene and how it builds stories. Scenes are building blocks that construct a great story, and those building blocks must contain conflict and struggle as experienced by a character in the story—and the reader.

Don't forget the idea of conflict because we'll talk a lot about that later.

What Is the Function of a Scene?

Really, scenes do two things. First, they're interesting to the reader. That means whatever is in the scene must capture the reader's interest. Otherwise, the reader yawns, her eyes droop, and pretty soon all we hear are snoozy sounds coming from a reader we've lost forever.

> **So, the first mandate of a scene is to BE INTERESTING.**

The second thing scenes have to do is to make the reader keep turning pages. Now, if the scene itself is interesting, that purpose is accomplished pretty easily. But the point is not just to keep the reader entertained for the few pages that the scene lasts. The whole point of a scene is to **move your story forward**.

> **This is the second mandate of a scene: ADVANCE YOUR STORY.**

It doesn't help your story if you write a perfectly wonderful, beautiful, flat-out gorgeous scene about the time your hero went camping and encountered a grizzly bear that ultimately saved his life when he fell off a cliff.

(Wow. Sounds interesting, doesn't it?) But if that scene is tossed in the middle of a romantic novel where the hero and heroine are having tea with the heroine's family... nope, probably not gonna work there.

Unless the heroine's family are shape-shifters who turn into grizzly bears? Well...maybe then. Okay, it might work under those circumstances, but still...the scene has to be **relevant** to its location in the story.

> *"Remember that your story is a pearl necklace, and a scene is a precious pearl of action and conflict that is going to entice your reader to move from this pearl to the next, to the next, to the next..."*
>
> *—Meg Leader (Page-Turner Fiction)*

Bottom line, that's the whole purpose of the scene: to lure the reader into turning the page and reading more.

Ultimately, your scenes have to do two things:

- Be wildly interesting to the reader
- Move your story forward

Every single scene you write in your book has to do both of those two things. Let me say that again:

> *Every single scene has to do both these things: be interesting and advance the story.*
>
> *—Meg Leader (Page-turner Fiction)*

No exceptions allowed. None. Zero.

How Long Is a Scene?

Now in some ways, writing by scenes is a lot easier than writing by chapter. For many if not most novelists, a chapter is a big chunk of text. Often, it's about 5,000 words, give or take, or about 20 pages of your manuscript. That's...well...it's a lot. If you say you're going to sit down and write a whole chapter, it can feel pretty intimidating.

But a scene is different. It's small. Contained. A scene is usually somewhere around 3 to 5 manuscript pages. It's only a single event. It's a lot easier to keep a whole scene in your head as you're writing than it is to keep a whole chapter in your head.

There are exceptions to these length guidelines, of course. Some authors split their books up into individual scenes and call each scene a separate chapter. Dan Brown does that. So does Gini Koch—at least when the action in her books starts kicking in. There is nothing at all wrong with doing it that way if you like. Keeping chapters shorter and with only one scene per chapter tends to keep books fast-paced and exciting—which no doubt is why authors of thrillers and high-action stories tend to do it that way.

But for many if not most novels out there, a chapter consists of, oh, about three to five scenes generally. There's no hard and fast rule about that, of course. But that typically will leave you with about 5,000 words (give or take) per chapter. And if you're writing a 90,000-word novel, that means you have about 18 total chapters in your book.

Does any of that mean you're wrong if you have scenes that run 10,000 words? Not if you can maintain reader

interest in that scene for that long. Does it mean you're doing things wrong if your scenes are only 500 words? Again, no way. If you can pack the key elements of a scene into 500 words, go for it. (We'll go over those elements in a bit.) I've actually seen very effective scenes that are only one short sentence long.

So, here's another key point:

The information I present in this book should be viewed as *guidelines* not hard-and-fast, never-break-them rules.

In other words, these are rules of thumb, not mandates. It will help you as a beginning writer if you follow them. But if you don't, and if you manage to tell a great story—well, kudos to you! I'll be clapping madly on the sidelines.

People always tell you to first learn the rules and then learn how (and when) to break them. So, this is me, explaining the rules. And once you understand them, it's also me giving you full permission to break them—*as long as you have a good reason to do so*. Don't break them just because you can. Break them because telling your story a different way makes your story a better read. That's the only good reason to break the rules. ANY rules.

Scene Basics Summary

- Readers read novels from scene to scene, not from chapter to chapter.
- The basic building block of a novel is the scene.
- A scene is a unit of conflict or struggle lived through by a single character (the Point of View, or

POV, character) in a single location in a limited time frame.

- Each scene must achieve two things: keep the reader interested and advance the story.
- While there is no hard-and-fast rule on scene length, most writers write scenes about 5 to 8 manuscript (ms.) pages long.
- Most chapters consist of 3 to 5 scenes. Making each scene a separate chapter is often used for fast-paced, action-filled storytelling.
- While this book presents the most common guidelines, it's important to understand these are guidelines, not never-break-'em rules.
- Know the guidelines, and when you break them, do so thoughtfully and with good reason because doing so makes your story a better read.

CHAPTER 3

ELEMENTS OF A SCENE

In this chapter we're going to look at the nitty-gritty structure of scenes, understand why they're structured that way, and figure out some of the most common mistakes writers make in that structure.

And...the very first thing I can hear some of you say is that "I'm an organic writer. I write to my muse! I can't build a novel like I would build a bridge."

And my response is, if you're a "pantser"—someone who sits down and writes as your muse takes you—and *if you want to write a publishable novel,* you still need to structure your scenes. Sure, today's writing session may not have been pre-ordained in any grand outline of your book, but that doesn't matter. The small-scale, gonna-write-it-in-this-writing-session piece you sit down to work on today still needs to have good scene structure.

You may (or may not) know what happens after this particular scene, but unless you want to doom yourself to endless (and often pointless) revisions of your story, you'll still make sure that every scene in your book has good scene structure.

And the cool thing is, having this structure in hand may in fact help you to connect with your muse and make your writing flow easier. Maybe. Perhaps. And...you won't know until you give this a solid try.

On Point of View (POV) and Writing Sins

In modern fiction, each scene is generally built around the perspective of a single character. This character is the "Point of View" (POV) character, and the reader experiences the scene from that character's perspective. Most often, scenes are from the hero or heroine's POV.

In general, you will be better off if you write the scene from a single character's POV. Yes, there are wonderful writers who violate this all the time. (A couple of them are favorite authors of mine, as a matter of fact.) But beginning writers tend to commit the ultimate sin of **head-hopping**, that is, skipping among the perspectives of multiple characters within a single scene.

Why is that a bad thing?

The problem is two-fold. First, constantly skipping from one person's perspective to another's perspective is deeply confusing to readers. And the second worst single biggest sin a writer can do is exactly that.

> *Ultimate Writer Sin #2: "Never, ever confuse the reader."*
>
> *—Meg Leader (Page-Turner Fiction)*

A confused reader is a reader who will throw down your book and/or pitch it against the wall. And they will

never want to read another word you write for the rest of their lives.

You think I'm joking? I'm not. This is one of two ultimate sins that writers—even big-time, best-selling writers—can commit.

What, you want to know the first ultimate sin—the one which is the single greatest sin a writer can commit? Well, that particular sin is not specifically relevant to scenes and their structure, but I'll share it with you. It's important that you know it. It's this:

> *Ultimate Writer Sin #1: "Never, ever violate readers' expectations based on the genre you're writing in."*
>
> *—Meg Leader (Page-Turner Fiction)*

If you're writing a romance, you need to, as Debra Dixon says, "throw the reader a bone" and give the reader a happy-ever-after (HEA) ending.

If you're writing a horror novel, you need to scare the reader to death.

If you're writing a mystery or thriller, you need to solve the mystery.

Let me tell you another story. A number of years ago, a very famous best-selling writer wrote a mystery about little boys being abducted in a big city. The writing was great. The main character was a cop who was determined to find the latest abducted little boy—the young son of a politician—before the child turned up horribly killed like the previous abductees had.

This was a long book, something over 400 pages as I recall. And I raced through it because the story was compelling and well written.

And at the end of the book, there were only a very few pages left and no solution in sight. I couldn't figure out how the author could possibly answer all the story questions in the few remaining pages.

And then in the final couple of pages, the little boy, still in the pajamas he wore when abducted, walked up to his parents' home early in the morning and rang the doorbell.

Wait! What? What? WHAT???

(Does that sound like a Sirius XM TV commercial? Yeah, it should.)

That was all??? No solution? No abductor/child-killer? Just the little boy mysteriously home safe all by himself? I couldn't believe it. I read that ending several times and then here's what I did:

- I got enraged. My expectations of a mystery/thriller/police procedural were that the bad guy would be caught/named/killed/or at least stopped from future crimes. None of those options happened.
- I quite literally threw that book against the wall so it bounced into my trash can.
- Since that time, I have never read another word that author has written. NOT. ONE. WORD.

Nor will I. Violating the reader's trust by not meeting genre expectations when you're writing a genre novel is the number one biggest writing sin you can commit. You can warp and twist and bend those expectations. You can be all slithery about how you meet them.

(Obviously, if you're writing a more literary, non-genre novel, you can do whatever you like. Readers may or may not appreciate it. But just as a hint: Genre novels in general sell way more than literary novels. You may not be considered for a Pulitzer Prize by writing horror or science fiction or romance or mystery, but you're more likely to sell a lot more books!)

Assuming you plan to write in a specific genre, you ignore reader genre expectations at your own peril. You may sell that first book, but you will alienate readers everywhere. And you may never sell book 2. Ever. Readers everywhere may well end up tossing your book as I did and making a perfect air-ball into the circular file. NOT a desired outcome, is it?

Okay. Back to POV within a scene. The key is that every scene has one character who experiences that scene's events. This allows the reader to get into the head of that character, see what's happening through that character's eyes, feel their emotions, and understand their responses to the scene events.

When you bounce back and forth between characters, the reader is distanced from the situation. The reader never gets the chance to feel the events as profoundly as the characters do. And that means the scene will "read shallow" and be perceived as poorly written, even if readers can't quite explain why they think that.

What If You Need Multiple POVs in Your Story?

Generally speaking, since your main character is (or should be) the driver of the overall story, for most scenes (and for many, many books for all scenes) the main character will be the POV character for the scene. That

way the reader will go along for the ride as the hero or heroine suffers all the slings and arrows of trying to achieve his or her goal.

With that said, there are times when you need to write a scene in some POV other than your main character. This happens a lot in romance novels, where writers often write some scenes in the hero's POV, and others in the heroine's POV.

It also happens a lot in stories that have major villains, mysteries for example, or thrillers. In those cases, the alternate POV character in some scenes is the hero's most important opponent. This allows the reader to know what traps lie in wait for the hero or heroine. And knowing that there's a booby-trap waiting at the end of the long, dark hallway means that as the hero strides down that hall, ignorant of the booby-trap waiting, the reader is mentally yelling, "Don't go there! Don't! It's a trap!"

And that, my friend, dramatically increases the reader's involvement in the story.

If you're not sure who to choose as your POV character for a particular scene, especially if your story has an ensemble type cast with lots of POV characters throughout, choose the POV character as the one who has the greatest response to the scene events, or the person who is most deeply affected by the scene events. That will keep your reader more emotionally engaged, and thus more interested in that scene.

Just make sure that each individual scene is in one POV only, and don't change POV within the scene.

There's another caveat too: Don't try to give every character a POV scene. You really need to restrict the

POV characters to the most important characters in your novel. Most often that's the hero and/or heroine. It sometimes includes the primary villain (sometimes as a mysterious, unnamed person until said villain gets unmasked at the end). It rarely includes a sidekick to the hero. Though if you have read any of Agatha Christie's Hercule Poirot mysteries, they're nearly all written by Poirot's sidekick, Hastings or a similar character.

Too many different POV characters can result in reader confusion. Have you ever read any Russian novel, with their enormous casts and vast numbers of POV characters? Yep. Confusion city.

And remember:

> *Ultimate Writer Sin #2: "Never, ever confuse the reader."*
>
> *—Meg Leader (Page-Turner Fiction. Again.)*

So, don't go there. Choose POV characters carefully and thoughtfully and limit them to only those who are essential to tell your story.

When You Cannot Change POV

There are times when you absolutely cannot change to another POV. One of those is if you're writing your story entirely in **first person POV**—telling it from the "I" point of view instead of the "he/she" point of view. For example, in my novel *Tyger's Claw*, I write it in first person, from the point of view of Kylie Tyger. She's the narrator and we see, hear, and experience everything through her perceptions. For example, consider this

scene. Kylie is waiting for her target—she moonlights as an assassin—and is perched in a tree.

Her weapon of choice for her kills is a *bagh nakh*, something like a set of metallic knuckles where each knuckle ends in a long, razor-sharp claw similar to a tiger's claw. This is set in a future world where animals are different from today's breeds. While she waits for her human target, however, something else is targeting her:

> I waited...waited...waited...
>
> He was coming. I heard as well as smelled him now. He was only a few minutes away...
>
> That's when the fang cat swooped down on me, going for the kill.
>
> <CHAPTER BREAK HERE>
>
> The slightest whiff of moving air was enough to start my reaction to the attack. I didn't manage to get completely out of harm's way, but I jerked to the side. The fang cat knocked me off my perch, but it was better to take a fall than let it maul me. Her claws, similar enough to the ones I wore, still managed a swipe down my thigh.
>
> We both tumbled from the precarious tree limb. I hit the ground awkwardly, and immediately rolled away. This fang cat was a smallish one, only three or four times my weight, and she got slightly tangled on the way down. Struggling to my feet, I spotted a sling-vine tree close by. A vine hung down, low enough to grab.
>
> I couldn't spare a glance at my leg. At least it was claws and not a bite. The saber-like teeth of a fang

cat were venomous. I'd have been dead already if she'd bitten me.

My leg was a little shaky, but I ignored it. The instant the cat landed almost broadside to me, and before she could turn to attack, I kicked and jumped. I grabbed the sling-vine up high and propelled myself toward the cat. The vine lifted me above the reach of her fangs and toward her back. At what I hoped was the perfect moment, I dropped.

It wasn't the perfect moment.

The cat reacted faster than I hoped she would, and her body was half-turned to where her prey—me—was. I wasn't there, of course, but it meant instead of landing square on her shoulders, I was half-canted at an awkward angle.

The fang cat wasn't happy with having my slight weight added to her back. She leapt and snarled, bucking like an untamed horse. It was all I could do to hang on. My grip on her back was slippery and the smell of my blood streaming down my leg added to her fury. I hung on desperately, while groping for a better hold.

After what felt like hours, but was likely only seconds, I found a decent grip, my legs wrapped as far around her torso as they would go, my arms circling her neck in an embrace I hoped would turn lethal. For the fang cat, of course.

In an instant's pause in her bucking, I edged forward, reaching as far around her neck as I could. My arms weren't long enough to fully encircle her neck, so I slipped down one side, and brought my bagh nakh to bear on her leathery throat. Hoping for one lethal strike, I raked the talons across the cat's throat, digging deep and hard to penetrate her skin. Blood gushed out over my hand along with the familiar resistance of cartilage tearing.

> For the first time in this near-silent struggle, the fang cat let loose with an enraged howl, one that ended in a bubbling gurgle as she started to drown in her own blood. I swiped again and again, trying to shred her throat, making good and sure she was fatally wounded.
>
> It didn't take long for her to collapse to the ground. I barely managed to jump off and avoid being crushed when she did. The whole battle, though it seemed like long minutes, probably took only thirty or forty seconds.
>
> —Meg Leader (*Tyger's Claw*)

Notice that everything that is written are things that Kylie herself perceived. She's telling this after the fact (so in that sense, the reader is reassured that she survives this attack), but it's written only from what she sees, hears, smells, tastes, and understands. That's the key.

I also should note that this is only the first half of this scene. There's more. Want to know what Kylie does next? Keep reading because later on I'll show you the last part of this scene. (This is what we writers call a "cliffhanger"—something I'll talk more about later.)

Whether you're writing in first person (I/me/my) or third person (he/him/his or she/her/hers), each scene should have that limit of presenting only information that that POV character knows or senses or intuits.

One other thing to notice about this scene from TYGER'S CLAW. There's a chapter break that you might think is in the middle of the scene. Well, it's not really. The previous scene that ends the previous chapter is about her setting up to prepare to attack her human

target. The scene presented here, however, is about Kylie being attacked by an unexpected opponent.

Notice, however, that the previous scene ended in a failure:

> "I heard as well as smelled him now. He was only a few minutes away... That's when the fang cat swooped down on me, going for the kill."

She didn't notice the deadly fang cat perched above her about to attack her. She was so focused on preparing to make her own attack she didn't see the danger to herself. I'll say more about scene failures as we delve into overall scene structure.

The Structure of a Scene

Which leads me back to the whole issue of what is the structure of a really good scene?

Basically, scenes have three (or maybe four) key components:

- A stated **GOAL** that the main character in the scene is trying to achieve right now.
- Someone or something that opposes the character reaching that goal and thus creates **CONFLICT.**
- An end result in the scene where the character does <u>not</u> achieve the stated goal and thus experiences **FAILURE.**

Some writing gurus, specifically Debra Dixon (in her classic writing book *Goal, Motivation & Conflict: The Building Blocks of Good Fiction*), notes that in addition to

those three elements, at least one often unstated element has to be:

- The character has to have a reason for that GOAL—there must be a good **MOTIVATION** for him or her to go after the GOAL.

So that's what all scenes must have: GOAL, MOTIVATION, CONFLICT, FAILURE.

Wait! What? What's *FAILURE* doing on that list? These people are supposed to be our heroes and heroines, right? They can't fail! Or as Yoda famously said:

> *"Do. Or do not. There is no try."*
>
> *— Yoda (to Luke in The Empire Strikes Back)*

Sorry, Yoda. In novels, there's a lot of try. Not to mention a lot of do-not going on.

Let's consider each of these elements, one at a time.

Goal

All stories start with a character who wants something. And can't get it. The story is about what that character has to do to get what he or she wants.

Sometimes the character wants to save the world from an alien invasion. (As an aside, Gini Koch, one of my all-time favorite authors, uses this a lot in her Aliens books. Which are fun, entertaining reads, I might add. Her heroine, Kitty Katt-Martini, manages to, um, let me see, save the world from killer alien parasitic fuglies, save the world from alien invasions (um, three or four times, I think), save the worlds of another star system from a

destructive civil war, save the galaxy from destruction due to the actions of some super-beings...and that's just part of her "save the something" achievements over 16 or so novels. Yeah. They're fun. Just don't argue with Kitty over the merits of the Rolling Stones over her favorite Aerosmith, cuz you'll lose.)

Sometimes the character wants to find someone to love.

Sometimes the character wants to take over the world as a vicious despot.

Sometimes the character wants to stop a serial killer. Or maybe *be* a serial killer.

Whatever it is the character wants, that is the character's **story goal.** The story starts when the character decides to take action to achieve that goal. The story ends when the character achieves the goal, or fails to achieve it, or achieves (or fails to achieve) the goal and realizes they wanted something else all along.

For example, a romance novel generally has some external something or other that the hero and heroine are trying to achieve, but their ultimate goal—what they need to achieve—is to create a strong loving relationship with another person. That is the story goal for virtually all romance novels ever written. Since romance novels almost always have an HEA ending, the story ends when the reader realizes that the hero and heroine (or these days, the hero and hero, or heroine and heroine, or, if you're Gini Koch, the heroine and alien) have achieved that strong relationship and will in fact be happy ever after (barring alien attacks). It is a satisfying ending.

The story of a romance novel is about the bumps and problems the pair encounter along the way. If you pick up a romance novel, you already know that the story goal is to achieve the HEA ending. The fun of reading it is the reader's experience of how they overcome their problems to achieve that HEA. Will they be together forever at the end? Sure they will. How they get there is the fun of reading it.

Will the detective in a mystery novel solve the crime and (usually anyway) capture the killer? Sure he (or she) will. How they do it is the fun of reading it.

Will Gini Koch's Kitty Katt-Martini (16 books and counting) save the world or the solar system or the universe from whatever nasty is out there? Sure she will. How she does it (and her snark while she does it) is the fun of reading about her adventures.

Will Janet Evanovich's Stephanie Plum (up to 26 books and counting!) bring in her latest bond-skipper? Of course she will, or she'll go one better than that, solving whatever the crime-du-jour may be. How she does it is the fun of reading about it.

Will Andy Weir's astronaut Mark Watney in THE MARTIAN survive being abandoned alone on the surface of Mars with not enough food and other resources to sustain him for the four or more years until help can rescue him? Well...in this case we're not sure. But the fun is watching him "science the shit" out of his situation to try to make it back to Earth alive.

Those are giant story goals. They're the ultimate **spine** of your book the great question that you ask at the beginning, usually in chapter 1, often on page 1. That story goal is what makes the reader want to start reading

your book. The spine is the supporting column of events that holds your story together from the decision to go after the story goal to the end where the goal is either reached or abandoned forever. to finish.

That is so important, I need to repeat that:

> *"The spine is the supporting column of events that holds your story together from the decision to go after the story goal to the end where the goal is either reached or abandoned forever."*
>
> *—Meg Leader (Page-Turner Fiction)*

But that story question can't be answered in individual scenes. The **scene goal** is the small scale, what does she do right now as the next step in her plan to survive/take over the world/kill the alien invaders/whatever?

For example, when Mark Watney in *The Martian* decides he should burn hydrogen in the habitat unit to create the water needed by the plants he wants to grow, his decision to do that is his scene goal. (As a side comment, you'll notice that his first attempt wasn't exactly, you know, a stellar success.)

The scene goal is a small-scale next step that the character takes. Mark Watney at the end of the film *The Martian* (which you should really see if you haven't already) explains how he (SPOILER!) survived being marooned on Mars: He took one problem at a time. Applied his science to it. Solved that problem, sometimes after multiple attempts, then solved the next problem. And the next. And the next.

One problem solved after another. One scene trying to achieve one scene goal at a time. One after the other.

Same thing.

Be aware that the scene goal cannot be so small as to be completely insignificant to the overall story goal. For example, if the character needs a particular piece of equipment to accomplish the story goal, then a scene goal cannot be "signing the credit card slip to buy the equipment." Yes, that's a key step to accomplishing the overall story goal, but it's so insignificant that it is meaningless—which, translated, means B-O-R-I-N-G.

On the other hand, there could be a great scene goal of having your heroine buy the equipment she needs to, I dunno, take over the casino at Monte Carlo, especially if the salesclerk doesn't want to sell to her because "girls don't buy Uzis." Well, if your lady needs an Uzi for some specific reason, and if that Uzi and only that Uzi can move her forward in her plan, that means there's another point in the scene structure: **CONFLICT**. But before that, we need to address Debra Dixon's addendum to scene structure: **MOTIVATION**.

Motivation

The reason a character has a goal, whether it's the overarching story goal or a small scene goal, is really important—so important that you don't want to forget that aspect in your scenes. This is the **MOTIVATION** for their actions.

Motivation is what pushes the character to take action. Debra Dixon reduces page-turner writing (she's mostly talking about the overall story structure) to three key elements:

- Goal

- Motivation
- Conflict

It probably shouldn't be surprising that her classic writing book is titled *GMC: Goal, Motivation & Conflict.*

But we're focusing on motivation and here's what she says about the importance of giving a character a solid motivation for what they do—and don't do:

> *"Motivation is probably the most important of the three elements of GMC because you can do anything in fiction. There are no limits. Everything is possible as long as you help your reader understand why your characters do what they do."*
>
> *—Debra Dixon (GMC: Goal, Motivation & Conflict)*

Motivation provides the readers with the answer to the "Why" question: WHY did Kitty ram her Mont Blanc pen into an alien parasite? (That's in *Touched by an Alien*, by Gini Koch.) WHY did Mark Watney burn hydrogen in the habitation module on Mars? (*The Martian* by Andy Weir) And in the excerpt from *Tyger's Claw* above, WHY was Kylie perched up a tree and ignoring the fang cat about to pounce?

Those why questions are essentials to allow your readers to understand your characters and relate to them. When the reader knows why an action is done, it can be reassuring—if the action is one the reader would have at least considered taking in a similar situation. It can also be surprising—if the character does something a little strange, or very brave, or even very cowardly.

Whatever that character's actions, the more we understand why they do them, the more we relate to the character as a real person and the more we're drawn into the story.

In other words, as Debra Dixon says:

> *"Think of motivation as the magic that helps the reader empathize with your character."*
>
> *—Debra Dixon (GMC: Goal, Motivation & Conflict)*

Bottom line here is to make sure the reader understands **why** your characters want to do whatever they want to do, both at the large-scale story goal level and at the smaller scene-goal level. If you do that, you'll pull the reader deeper into the story and help them stay engaged with your writing.

So how did I do that with Kylie? I mean, really, she may be the heroine of the story, but she's (gasp!) an assassin for goodness' sake! How do I make her likable enough that the reader stays with her for the duration of a whole book?

I do this by giving her a strong **motivation** for why she does what she does. It turns out that Kylie can see and speak to the recently dead—and ghosts too. She does her best—after she's killed them—to shepherd them smoothly into the afterlife. So, after she kills her first target, Harlan, (on page 1!) she waits by his corpse for his astral spirit to rise so she can get answers to a few questions. (Harlan's astral spirit's response appears in italics here.)

> "Why did you do it?" I asked.
> *Do what? What are you talking about?*

> As if he didn't know. "Why'd you kill that girl? Melly Jo? She wasn't out of her teens. What did she do to deserve a death like that?" I could picture the crime scene photos in my head, and I started to get angry. As comfortable as I was with death, what was done to Melly Jo was purely sinful. It merited retribution. Not to mention that her family deserved to know she received justice that the cops couldn't give her. They needed to know her killer couldn't repeat his heinous crime.
>
> Still, with him lying dead on the ground, I tried not to be too harsh. He'd paid for his murdering ways, with a little help from me. If he hadn't irritated me so with his attempts to play innocent, I'd have been ready to shepherd him into the light—or the depths of hell. Not my call.
>
> —Meg Leader (*Tyger's Claw*)

There we have it. Kylie is an assassin trying to gain some peace and retribution to the family of a young girl who was heinously murder by Harlan, the man Kylie has just killed. She's not out murdering people willy-nilly. Nope, it turns out she tries to get justice from murderers and other criminals who the local cops cannot, for whatever reason, bring to trial. We're about three or maybe four pages into the novel and we know the bottom-line motivation for Kylie. She administers justice when officialdom cannot.

Now don't you feel a lot more empathetic toward my little Kylie? I sure do!

Motivation matters. It matters a lot. Don't neglect providing powerful motives for your characters. Your readers will love you for it.

Conflict

Every scene—***every single scene***—must include conflict or it's just dull. Blah. Not worth reading. Conflict is what makes a novel interesting.

Consider this story:

> Sam decided to buy a diamond ring so he could propose to his girlfriend Eunice that evening. He entered a jewelry store where the clerk showed him a tray of rings in his price range. He looked them over, asked for advice from a friendly customer nearby, and selected a specific ring. He handed the clerk his credit card and signed the sales slip. He watched as the clerk carefully placed the ring into a lovely box and handed the box and receipt to Sam, who left the store with a smile.

How interesting is this story? It has a beginning when Sam decides to buy an engagement ring. He went through all the steps of that purchase—that is, he acted. He concluded the sale by paying for the ring with his credit card. Done.

We see his motivation—he wants to marry Eunice. We know his goal—to buy a ring for his big proposal that evening. What's missing? **Conflict**. There's no reason we couldn't condense this story to:

> Sam bought a diamond ring because he wanted to propose to Eunice that night.

There's no reason to walk the reader through all the steps of the purchase process. It just delays the story—and bores the reader.

But we could fix this. We could add in some **obstacles** to that ring purchase. Here are some ideas on how that might be done:

- He gets to the store, and it's closed.
- While he's there, robbers come in and steal all the engagement rings.
- When he asks for advice from the nearby customer, she is so beautiful that he asks her out to lunch and leaves the store, ring unbought.
- When he asks for advice from the nearby customer, he tells Sam that he saw Eunice dancing at the local strip club. And turning tricks with the customers there.
- When he gives the clerk his credit card, the card is rejected.
- When the clerk gives Sam the ring box, it's empty! The clerk palmed the ring!

You can likely think of a bunch more ideas to pep up this scene. The point is that these obstacles are **conflict** because they are obstacles to what Sam wants to achieve: buy a ring and propose to Eunice.

Dwight Swain has this to say about the conflict in a scene:

> *"What is conflict? It's opposition. It's two forces striving to achieve mutually incompatible goals."*
>
> *—Dwight Swain (Techniques of a Selling Writer)*

In the list of examples above, the two forces can be described in each case:

- Sam wants to buy a ring, but no one is at the closed store to sell it.
- Sam wants to buy a ring, but the robbers want to steal that ring.
- Sam wants to marry Eunice, but the nearby customer wants him to take her out to lunch.
- Sam wants to marry Eunice, but the nearby (male) customer wants him to rethink marrying Eunice.
- Sam wants to buy the ring, but the credit card company doesn't want to make the money available to him to purchase it.
- Sam wants to buy the ring, but the clerk wants to steal it.

Conflict can mean a fight, or a chase, or a battle, and that's often the case in high-action stories. But it can also mean a battle of wits, an argument, an evasion, a struggle for survival. Those are in fact the elements that make up our lives.

Your scene ***must*** include conflict. Without that, it's just a bland narration of all the details of Sam buying an engagement ring—details that the reader can imagine on his or her own, and that are boring in the extreme.

Failure

Earlier I promised to show you the last half of Kylie's scene where she killed the fang cat that stalked her while she waited for her human prey to walk into her trap. Now is the time to reveal how that scene ends.

Recall, Kylie was waiting in a tree for her target human to walk under it so she could drop down and kill him. Unfortunately, a huge fang cat was targeting Kylie. A fight ensued, and Kylie successfully killed the fang cat. All was good, right? Right?

Not on a bet. Scenes must end in ***failure*** not success (barring the final scene that resolves the story). So, how did Kylie's successful escape from the fang cat's venomous jaws end in failure? Did her human prey see her and attack? Had she not actually killed the cat after all? What went wrong?

Remember that we already know that Kylie can see and speak to the dead. Humans anyway. With the end of this scene, we learn something more about her.

> It was an effort to maintain my balance on my injured leg, as I stared down at my latest kill. With every generation of fang cats since the Change their fangs have grown longer, their bodies more muscled, and their tempers more dangerous. Worse, they now had venomous glands serving those fangs—a venom would kill a full-grown man in a minute or two. Me? I'd have been dead in seconds from the slightest nip.
>
> My leg was still bleeding. I limped over to the sling-vine tree and hunted around its trunk. Sure enough, as usually was the case, there was a good-sized patch of wound-lichen growing on the far side. I grabbed some and pressed it against my leg. The natural clotting agent in the lichen went to work. The bleeding slowed as I pressed on it. With my clawed hand, I sliced a flexible piece of vine to tie the lichen in place. Not the greatest bandage, but I still had prey of my own arriving any minute.
>
> With sniff of the astral plane, I realized my human prey likely sensed some of the disturbance. He

approached more slowly now, still a couple minutes or more away. My tangle with the fang cat was brief enough to leave me a sliver of time. But despite knowing I should be re-positioning myself for my own prey, I couldn't do so when I had one more task to complete.

Kneeling at the head of the dead animal, I placed my fingers on her brow. Gently I soothed her. "Be at peace. All is good. You were unlucky. You can come out now."

Her astral body struggled to get free. She didn't speak, of course, but her mind was filled with fear and rage. *She should have killed me. I was a danger. She needed to kill me.*

"No, no," I told her. "I would have been no danger to you. I hunt other prey today."

She was almost out of her body now. Then she showed me what I really threatened. *She protected her kittens—her first litter. No harm must come to them.*

Shocked, I released her head as her astral body sprang up and snarled angrily. After a futile swipe at me—her astral body couldn't hurt me physically—she stared behind me. With a deep bellow only I heard, she moved toward a thick cluster of shrubs and trees. Her astral body faded away as she moved past me.

A nest of baby fang cats was in there? Hastily, I jumped to my feet, not sure whether to try to reposition myself for my prey, who would arrive in—*sniff-sniff*—less than a minute, or to move away from mama's nest of babies.

And that's when I realized taking a mama's assessment of her babies was never a good plan. The fang cat's offspring weren't exactly kittens.

I faced a pack of four snarling, three-quarters grown fang cats slinking out of concealment. And

they were all totally pissed that I stood over their dead mom.
<END OF SCENE>

—Meg Leader (*Tyger's Claw*)

The failure that Kylie experiences is that now, instead of one fang cat, she faces four more, not as large as the mother cat, but all snarling mad at her for killing their mom.

Out of the frying pan and into the fire.

Here's the surprising thing:

> *"Every scene ends in failure—until the very last one, which ends in either ultimate success, or ultimate failure in which no further options are possible."*
>
> *—Meg Leader (Page-Turner Fiction)*

In other words, with every scene, your hero or heroine gets farther and farther from achieving their overall story goal. They fail, time after time. They get up—and fail again. And every failure makes things worse. Their situation gets blacker and blacker until finally they try one last thing...and they succeed! Or, in a negative ending, they finally die or give up on their goal completely, knowing they can never attain it.

NO! Failures

Scene failure comes in two key forms. The most obvious form is the "NO!" where the POV character simply fails at whatever they're trying to do in the scene. The character then must regroup and try something else to accomplish their goal—but now they're in worse shape than before

because presumably they already tried the "easy" way to get there. Now they must do something harder to get what they want.

YES, BUT! Failures

There is a second form of failure, however. This is the "YES, BUT" form. The character gets what he or she wants, but after getting it, realizes that they're in a worse state than before.

You can consider that scene with Kylie in that light. Her immediate scene goal at the beginning of the scene is to survive the fang cat attack, right? So, she does that, kills the fang cat and lives to tell about it. That's a YES ending.

Except it's not. Why not? Because then she discovers that the fang cat that Kylie killed had a litter of three-quarter grown babies, and, to put it in Kylie's words:

> I faced a pack of four snarling, three-quarters grown fang cats slinking out of concealment. And they were all totally pissed that I stood over their dead mom.
>
> —Meg Leader (*Tyger's Claw*)

Yup. That's a "YES, BUT" ending for sure. YES, she killed the mama fang cat. BUT now she faces even more, really angry fang cats. Her situation has gone from bad to worse.

So why use a YES, BUT ending? Jack Bickham explains it this way:

> *"Such 'Yes, but' disasters are often better than a simple 'No!' because they put the hero on the horns of*

a moral dilemma, and in making an ethical choice...he in effect brings on his own disaster."

—Jack Bickham (Scene & Structure)

The hero facing a "YES, BUT" failure can also (as in the case of Kylie) find herself simply in worse conditions than before. But note: by killing the mama fang cat, no matter how essential it was to Kylie's survival, she effectively created her own disastrous failure that presented as now having to face down *four* fang cats, all focused on seeing her pay for their mama's death.

"YES, BUT" failures at the end of scenes are very common in well-written and exciting novels. Bickham points out that such scene endings can often increase the reader tension while at the same time increasing the reader's empathy toward the POV character. That character strove hard to reach their scene goal, only to have it turn to dust as getting what they wanted only made things worse.

"YES, BUT" failures can vary in one respect, and that is the location of where the "BUT" revelation is located. In most cases, the POV character reaches the scene goal—and then realizes that getting that goal was possibly a mistake. In this case, the "BUT" portion of the failure is located at the end of that scene.

In some cases, however, the "BUT" portion of the failure isn't immediately apparent to the POV character. In these scenes the "BUT" only shows up in the next scene that has the same POV character. A great example of where this is used can often be found in romances. The first time the couple make love is generally a very positive situation—a definite "YES" for sure, right? However, at

some point—sometimes right after that climactic positive event—one or both of them realize that their personal relationship now makes the rest of their lives more difficult.

For example, in Romeo and Juliet's case, Juliet is promised to another man—yet she no longer can be the virginal bride promised to County Paris—and she's married to Romeo. Having given into the urge to make love with Romeo, she's now double-whammied as a potential bigamist and as the "obedient" daughter who will shame her family if the truth is revealed. The "BUT" doesn't come in the bedroom scene—it comes only the next morning when Juliet is told she's now betrothed to County Paris.

There is a third possible place where the "BUT" portion of the failure can be located. This is in the immediately following scene from the POV of the opponent. In this situation—often found in thrillers and action/adventure stories—the "bad guy" somehow knows that the hero or heroine has achieved the scene goal...but now the reader discovers that getting that goal is part of the elaborate trap the opponent has laid for the hero. In other words, while the hero may not yet realize it, the reader knows that things are immeasurably worse than they were before that trap was sprung!

Wherever you place that "BUT" it needs to be in very close proximity to the "YES" so that it's clear to the reader that getting that scene goal was a bad, bad idea.

The point is, make sure your scenes all end in some type of failure. Either a "NO!" or a "YES, BUT" failure will do. Until the final scene of the novel, when the ultimate

outcome is at last determined, the hero fails every single time.

Elements of a Scene Summary

- Point of View (POV) is the perspective that a scene is written from; the POV character in a scene.
- Ultimate Writer Sin #2: Never, ever confuse the reader.
- Ultimate Writer Sin #1: If you're writing genre fiction, never, ever violate reader expectations for that genre.
- Staying in one character's POV in the scene increases the reader's emotional engagement with your story.
- The correct POV character for a scene is usually the character most affected by the events of the scene or the one most emotionally engaged with the action.
- All information presented in the scene must be only that information the POV character perceives, feels, or infers.
- All scenes have a fundamental structure of four pieces: Goal, Motivation, Conflict, Failure.
- GOALS: The story goal is the fundamental question that your story will answer.
- The story starts when the main character asks the story goal question.
- The story ends when the goal is either achieved or not achieved.
- The scene goal is the next step in the POV character's plan to achieve the overall story goal.

- MOTIVATION: You need to ensure that the POV character has a solid, believable reason for doing anything he or she does. Even if he's trying to blow up the world.
- You can take your story ANYWHERE you like as long as you motivate the characters to do so.
- CONFLICT: Every scene has to have someone or something that opposes what the POV character is trying to accomplish.
- FAILURE: Until you get to the very last scene where the story's resolution happens, every scene has to end in failure.
- There are two kinds of failure:
- NO! where the scene goal is not accomplished.
- YES, BUT where the scene goal is accomplished, but the POV character realizes that they are now in worse situation than before.
- YES, BUT disasters place the POV character on the horns of a dilemma where an ethical or moral choice must be made.

CHAPTER 4

PAGE-TURNER TECHNIQUES™

Wow. You've come a long way, baby. You've figured out the scene basics so you know what a scene is, what it has to accomplish, and why it's important—perhaps the most important building block of your novel. Then you have learned about the elements of a scene: Goal, Motivation, Conflict, and Failure. In this section we're going to figure out how to take your scene and turn it into one that is a massive page-turner, something that readers can't stand to put down before reading the very next page.

What Makes a Scene a Page-Turner?

I'm going to turn this around on you. Imagine you're reading a book by your very favorite author. It's late at night and you must get up early to get to work or school on time. Yet you cannot stop reading that fascinating story. You keep turning pages, and turning pages, pulled deeper and deeper into the story. You simply can't bring yourself to put the book down and go to sleep.

Why not?

Most likely, the author you love to read so much keeps you turning pages by using any of a wide variety of techniques that are designed to keep you reading and not letting go of their grip on your imagination.

It's beyond the scope of this book to go into every single way authors snare readers and keep them enslaved to their stories. But there are a variety of simple techniques you can use to force the reader to keep reading your work.

One thing to note about these techniques, however. They are not one-and-done methods. It's not like you choose one particular method and you're done making your novel sing.

Nope. Not that easy. ***You can and should combine these techniques***. In fact, every single page needs to use multiple methods. That's so important I'm going to say it again:

> *"Every page of your manuscript needs to have at least one to three applications of the Page-Turner Techniques™. EVERY PAGE."*
>
> *—Meg Leader (Page-Turner Fiction)*

Hmmm...Gosh, that sounds hard, doesn't it? I mean, a manuscript page has between 250 and 300 words on it on average. So what I'm saying is that at least one Page-Turner Techniques™ has to appear within every 100 to 200 words or so.

Whoa! Sounds like a lot. But as you'll see, it's pretty simple, really. Once you understand these techniques it's easy to incorporate them in your writing. With practice,

you'll find that it's more and more automatic to pop these in at will.

Let's talk about the top ten Page-Turner Techniques™.

Technique 1: Keep 'Em Hanging Off the Cliff

This is simple, really. The idea is to end the scene with something dangerous, exciting, something half-completed, something dangerous or exciting. Something like...they're hanging off the edge of a steep cliff—will they fall?

> *"Give your scene a cliffhanger ending."*
>
> *—Meg Leader (Page-Turner Fiction)*

Think back to Kylie's example in that excerpt from TYGER'S CLAWS. She was waiting for her human prey to walk below her so she could drop down and kill him. Then, before he arrives—a venomous fang cat drops down on her! CHAPTER (and SCENE) BREAK!!! So, you gonna go get a cup of coffee, watch a movie after that? Nope, you'll quickly turn the page to find out what happens with Kylie and the fang cat!

It's that cliffhanger ending that keeps folks reading long after they need to go to sleep. Cliffhangers don't have to be dangerous and exciting. It can be waiting for the jury foreman to announce the verdict. Or pacing the hospital waiting room and seeing the surgeon walk in with a grim expression. But make the reader want to move to the next scene as fast as they can turn the page!

Technique 2: Give Them a Hard Choice

Ever heard the term of being "on the horns of a dilemma"? Of course, you have! It's a darned uncomfortable situation to experience, isn't it? No matter which way you choose, you're going to be in trouble.

This isn't a matter of choosing between two good things: Do you want to visit Disney World or go to Universal City?

Nor is it a choice between a good thing and a bad thing: Do you want to get a raise and promotion, or do you want to live on the streets?

A true dilemma is *always* between two bad things. ALWAYS.

> *"A true dilemma is always between two bad choices. Never between two good things or a good thing and a bad thing."*
>
> *—Meg Leader (Page-Turner Fiction)*

Did you ever read the 1980 novel *Sophie's Choice* by William Styron? Or see the Oscar winning 1982 film of the same name starring Meryl Streep (who won Best Actress as Sophie)? The story was set in a post-WW-II Brooklyn boarding house where Polish immigrant Sophie lives in a tough relationship with her live-in lover. The ultimate reveal (SPOILER HERE!) is that in World War II Germany, Sophie was faced with a horrendous dilemma. She was taken to Auschwitz where she was forced to make a choice: Which of her two children—a boy and a girl—would be immediately gassed and killed, and which would live, although in the concentration camp?

That is probably the ultimate set of bad options. Neither choice is good. Both are horrific.

You want readers to be thrilled with your story? Give the main characters a dilemma that is truly awful—and then make the character choose.

Technique 3: Keep It on the Knife Edge

Keep your readers on the edge of a knife by seesawing them between **hope** and **fear**. First give the reader a reason to **hope** that the story goal or a scene goal will be achieved. Then throw in a reason to **fear** that the POV character will never get to that goal. Next, it's back to **hope** again. Then **fear**. Back and forth. Forth and back.

Play with the readers and keep whiplashing them to the point where they hardly know what to think. Will he? Yes, he will. No, he won't. Maybe he will after all. Nope, can't happen. But, wait...there's another way to make it happen...on and on and on.

Why is this such a powerful interest technique? It's because the fundamental basis for **tension** is this knife-edge seesaw between hope and fear. If you keep granting hope then snatching it away again, you create powerful tension in the reader—and no way are they gonna put down your book!

> *"The easiest way to increase tension in a scene is to keep the reader on the knife-edge between hope and fear."*
>
> *—Meg Leader (Page-Turner Fiction)*

This is powerful within a scene, but it's also a powerful keep-'em-reading technique across your whole story. Just bear in mind that whenever you give the reader hope, you need to be ready to snatch it away again.

Until, of course, you're about to finish the story and give the reader the final resolution.

Technique 4: Peel Back the Layers

Here's another very cool technique: Expose something unusual, out-of-character, or unexpected about your main character (or any other character, actually).

> *"Reveal unexpected characteristics of your characters to intrigue readers."*
>
> *—Meg Leader (Page-Turner Fiction)*

My favorite example of this comes from Patricia Briggs, another of my favorite authors. She has a fabulous series (two actually) about Mercy Thompson, a VW auto mechanic in Kennewick, Washington, who also just happens to be a shape-shifter—she turns into a 35-pound coyote. Raised by werewolves who fostered her, she's slightly intimidated by her much, *much* older foster brother, Charles, who happens to be the second most dangerous werewolf on the planet. (His dad, Alpha of all werewolves in North America and possibly the world, is the most dangerous one.) Charles is half Native American, and stoic. He's tall—think Darryl Johnson in terms of build—and says almost nothing. He never smiles, never jokes, never laughs. Except, in *Smoke Bitten* one of the later books in the series, Ms. Briggs reveals that Charles

did something completely out of character and unexpected. He glitter-bombed his dad's office. Or, as Mercy describes it:

> Cold, scary, efficient, deadly—those were words that suited Charles. That the term "glitter bomb" and Charles's name were in the same sentence was dumbfounding except maybe in something like "Charles discovered the glitter-bomber's secret identity and hanged her by her toenails to teach the other people who stole her idea never to do that ever again."
>
> —Patricia Briggs (*Smoke Bitten*)

Now, don't you want to know more about that glitter bomb incident? I sure do!! And I'm gonna keep reading and reading in hopes of finding out the inside scoop on that incident. (If you want to read Patricia Briggs's fabulous series in her "MercyVerse" the first of about a dozen Mercy Thompson books is *Moon Called*, and there's a spin-off series in the same world with overlapping characters—starring Charles as a matter of fact. The first book in that Alpha & Omega series is a novella, titled, oddly enough, *Alpha and Omega*.)

Technique 5: Tell Lies

Okay, let's not get crazy here. I'm not advocating wholesale fabrications. I especially don't recommend such lies when you're dealing with the IRS! But the truth is, a novelist is someone who tells lies for a living, right? Halldor Laxness said it well:

> *"The difference between a novelist and a historian is this: that the former tells lies deliberately and for the fun of it; the historian tells lies and imagines he is telling the truth."*
>
> *—Halldor Laxness*

In case you're not familiar with Mr. Laxness, he was merely the winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1955. So...yeah...I think he knows what he's talking about.

So, novelists do in fact tell lies for a living. But what I'm referring to here is to develop your scene so the reader thinks one thing is happening and then you reveal that it's something completely different.

To do this, you first need to decide on what piece of information you want to reveal. Once you figure that out, you then write the beginning of the scene to make it look like something else will be revealed.

One other thing to bear in mind. Narrators (by which I mean your POV character) are not always truthful. They can lie to other characters. But they can also lie to the reader. Even if the reader is in the POV character's head (figuratively, anyway!), it's entirely possible to have the POV character lie. Mostly, that's done by simply having the POV character withhold information—but doing so without being obvious that information is withheld.

When you write a character like that, you are writing an *unreliable narrator*. The very best example of an unreliable narrator that I know of is a classic Agatha Christie mystery starring Hercule Poirot: *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*. I recommend you read this classic mystery and study how the unreliable narrator was done.

There's a reason this particular book was voted the best mystery ever written. Yeah. It's that good.

Technique 6: Endlessly Engage the Reader

This may well be the single most important Page-Turner Technique™ of all. Imagine this: You're reading along and you come to a mysterious fork in the road in your story. Instead of being able to simply turn the page, you're faced with two links, NextPage Option1 and NextPage Option2, to determine which next page you will read. You have to choose which to follow. Happily, you don't have to choose based solely on the bland names of "Option 1" and "Option 2" because the author gives you a very short description of what happens with each option:

- **Option 1:** The main character goes to the library and returns three overdue books, paying a fine of $53.79 because they were *really* late.
- **Option 2:** The main character goes to the bank, where she interrupts a bank heist in progress

Hmm...which of those two scenarios sounds more interesting? Go ahead and think about it. I'll have a cup of tea while I wait...

Slam dunk decision, wasn't it? It's easy to understand why 99.99% of all readers would choose...Option 1, going to the library!

No! Wait! I'm kidding!

Seriously, almost every single person is likely to choose Option 2 because it clearly has more potential to be interesting, in large part because even in the simple

description provided, it probably has **more CONFLICT potential.**

For most books, readers aren't offered the choice of which page to go to next, though a few printed books have come out with that opportunity. And if you go to any website with multiple pages, you know that every visitor can visit any page in almost any order. If they could choose, however, it's safe to assume that the vast majority —perhaps even all, of readers would choose to read a scene that offered more excitement, more conflict, and possibly just more fun.

While boring-errands type scenes do make their way into all novels, the most skilled, bestselling novelists make sure that even boring chores are turned into something fun and exciting.

Patricia Briggs's Mercy Thompson series has many great examples of making potentially boring situations engaging. Mercy is a VW auto mechanic, so across the various books starring Mercy, we see a lot of scenes set in her garage, or that are about her garage. We see her fixing cars and dealing with customers and avoiding her paperwork. (No one likes all the paperwork that comes from owning a business!)

Let me give two examples: In the very first Mercy Thompson book, *Moon Called*, Ms. Briggs opens with Mercy at her garage working on a VW. Sounds B-O-R-I-N-G, right?

But with the very first paragraph in the book readers discover this isn't just another small businesswoman struggling to make her business survive. Here's what happens:

> I didn't realize he was a werewolf at first. My nose isn't at its best when surrounded by axle grease and burnt oil—and it's not like there are a lot of stray werewolves running around. So when someone made a polite noise near my feet to get my attention I thought he was a customer.
>
> — Patricia Briggs (*Moon Called*)

All *right!* That's how it's ***done***! Yup. Ordinary person in an ordinary job but—wham! Right in the middle of the first sentence in the entire book, we get *Werewolves*! Right here in River City, folks, that's *Werewolves,* which starts with a capital W, which rhymes with...nothing in particular. (My apologies to *The Music Man's* "Ya Got Trouble (in River City)"

When you must include ordinary chores or events, as will certainly happen, find a way to spice them up. And leave out the boring bits. Remember our buddy Sam who wanted to buy that diamond ring? The first option was *way* boring. Lots of boring bits, no conflict. Leave it out.

That doesn't mean always fill your scenes with danger and physical attacks. Another example from the masterful Patricia Briggs comes from a later book in the Mercy Thompson series, *Fire Touched.* Here the situation is different. Mercy is at her kitchen table when the mother of her stepdaughter's friend visits. Mercy immediately falls victim of a—well, I'll let her explain it.

She answers the doorbell, knowing there are a couple of werewolves upstairs talking about another boring thing, the pack's budget. Seems like this could be doubly boring, doesn't it? Here's what happens:

> "Holy Avon, Batman, I thought as worry relaxed into annoyance-tinged humor. I've been attacked by a multilevel marketer."
>
> — Patricia Briggs (*Fire Touched*)

The scene conflict in this case isn't about someone about to kill Mercy, or kidnap her, or hold her hostage in Faery Land. This scene is about a multilevel marketer trying to sell Mercy a bunch of products Mercy doesn't particularly want.

But after eight previous Mercy Thompson novels, the reader knows that Mercy never gets mad over such irritations, she gets *even*. She is, after all, a coyote-shifter, and a trickster type personality.

This multilevel marketing scene is one of the funniest such scenes ever. Readers revel in the sly and clever way Mercy manages to win out with only minor damage to her wallet. I won't spoil it by telling you what happens. However, Darryl, one of the pack werewolves discussing the budget upstairs, overheard Mercy's successful rout of the multilevel marketer, as did everyone upstairs. As he left the house after the happy saleslady left, he summed it up perfectly in his farewell to Mercy:

> "Darryl kissed my hand formally, and said, "You are endlessly entertaining.'"
>
> — Patricia Briggs (*Fire Touched*)

You see? That's what your scenes need to be: **endlessly entertaining.**

The most skilled bestselling authors, like Patricia Briggs, lead readers from one endlessly entertaining scene

to the next, offering surprises small (attack by a multilevel marketer) and large (werewolf in the garage) at **every scene and every step along the way.**

Technique 7: Challenge the POV Character

We all face challenges in our lives. For the POV character in a novel, the challenges aren't just whether they'll get a raise or promotion, or if he can bake two dozen edible cupcakes for his daughter's bake sale the next morning. On the other hand, challenges aren't always about having a fistfight, chasing a known terrorist to take him down, or saving a kidnapped baby. Challenges can be about anything important to the POV character in that scene.

Generally speaking, character might face five types of challenges::

- **Challenge the character's goals.** In other words, present a new or enhanced obstruction to the character, making it more difficult to reach either the scene goal or the overall story goal.
- **Challenge the character's needs.** In other words, put your character out in the woods and give him no food or water or tools. Or simply make the character go someplace urgently—and have the opposition remove access to all vehicles.
- **Challenge the character's values.** Force the character to make a choice between two options, both of which violate the character's moral or ethical code. (Remember, choices are always about two bad things, not a bad and a good or two good things.)

- **Challenge the character's wounds.** Julie Garwood, in *Ransom*, a NYT bestselling historical romance, forced her heroine with severe acrophobia (fear of heights) to climb down into a steep, rocky chasm. Why would she do that? Because of this:

  But she wasn't experienced—or nimble. Looking down made her dizzy, but, dear God, she couldn't leave him, and time was critical. The rope would soon snap, and the child would plunge to his death.

  —Julie Garwood (*Ransom*)

  This situation is a double-whammy, challenging the character's wounds (acrophobia) and challenging her moral values (refusal to let a child die if she can save him.)

- **Challenge the character's physical abilities.** Go back to that paragraph by Julie Garwood in the previous challenge point. Ms. Garwood actually got a triple out of these three brief sentences, because it is clear that the heroine lacks all physical skills needed to climb down into a steep rocky chasm. Alternatively, consider this powerful and intriguing challenge to the narrator's physical skills in her venture to take a solo, three-month hike along the Pacific Crest Trail. At the beginning of the story, the narrator says this:

  "At which point, at long last, there was the actual doing it, quickly followed by the grim realization of what it meant to do it, followed by the decision to quit doing it because doing it was absurd and pointless and ridiculously difficult and far more than I expected doing it would be and I was profoundly unprepared to do it."

—Oprah's Book Club author Cheryl Strayed (*Wild: From Lost to Found on the Pacific Crest Trail*)

Feel free to learn from Julie Garwood and Cheryl Strayed's superb examples. Challenge your POV character in as many ways as you possibly can, and even combine them in each scene or situation. Make the readers really worry about whether your POV character can overcome these challenges—and the readers will love you for it. And they'll keep turning pages of your story.

Technique 8: Add Subtext.

And what the heck is subtext, you ask? It's, well, it's usually considered to be pretty complicated. There are whole books written about this particular subject. But, truly, it's not that hard.

Suppose you have a couple whose marriage is falling apart. You (the writer) also have revealed to the reader that the husband has been fired from work, but he's afraid to tell his wife, who loves shopping and expensive things. They're going to have to go on a budget, and he knows she'll hate that.

So, you set up a scene where the husband argues with his wife about maybe buying her a used car instead of a new Lexus—of course, it'll be a certified dealer-guaranteed Lexus—but it won't be a brand new one.

The overt conflict in the scene is the argument about the Lexus. The subtext is fact that the husband is afraid to admit he's been canned.

And the *other* subtext is that the wife just won the PowerBall jackpot, so she knows there's plenty of money

for that new Lexus she wants. But she's not gonna tell her husband about that, because she figures after she squeezes him for a brand new, top of the line Lexus, she'll divorce him—*before* he finds out about that lottery win.

Here's a short-and-sweet definition of subtext:

> *"Subtext refers to what is actually happening in a scene that is hidden under the surface of the action in the scene."*
>
> *Meg Leader (Page-Turner Fiction)*

William Martell primarily writes for screenwriters, but novelists can learn a lot about how to write more effectively by taking advantage of many screenplay techniques. Martell describes subtexts this way:

> *"The difference between what I say and what I mean is* subtext*."*
>
> *—William Martell (Dialogue Secrets)*

In screenplays, of course, it's all about dialogue, but subtext can also be about actions. For example, a character cooks a meal, knowing it's the least favorite dish for the person he'll serve the meal to. ("So sorry, do you really hate candied eyeballs? I didn't know." Yeah. Right. That's an "as if" moment for sure.)

The whole point is to think about what the characters in the scene *want,* and the obstructions they encounter trying to get that want. Whatever they're overtly doing and saying in the scene can have underlying meaning to the reader via that subtext.

Subtext makes the reader feel as if they're an insider with hidden knowledge. It adds to their interest and tension in the scene.

Think this makes the story too hard for your readers? Not at all! In fact, readers love to figure out the "secret" behind how and why a character does something. So add subtext to your scenes to make them sing.

Technique 9: Give It a Twist!

Adding twists and turns is perhaps one of the easiest and yet most effective Page-Turner Technique™. In this method, you consider what the obvious outcome of a scene would be to the reader—and you take the scene somewhere else entirely. Twists and turns can be accomplished pretty easily by inserting something unexpected in the scene. Here are some suggestions:

- **Add an unexpected character.** For example, in a love scene between your two main characters in a romance, try having an unexpected character show up. The mother of one of the participants. A nosy little sister. A bill collector. Someone's boss—especially effective if the wife of the boss is one of the participants.
- **Add unexpected information.** For example, have the POV character visit someone to discover where the map to a treasure is—but have that character reveal that the POV's favorite little dog has been kidnapped and won't be released unless the POV character agrees to find and retrieve the treasure for the kidnappers.

- **Add unexpected events.** For example, the two main characters are having a romantic moonlit picnic under starry skies—only to watch as the hero's house is struck by lightning and bursts into flames.

The point is you can have a scene just merrily ticking along and then—wham! Something unexpected happens. Note, however, that your characters have to **react** to that unexpected event. In other words, the unexpected can't just happen, it has to change the way the story flows.

Technique 10: Hook the Reader

The critical aspect of this Page-Turner Technique™ is to grab the reader's attention right from the first of the scene. This is most often used at the beginning of a chapter, and especially at the beginning of a scene. The point is, give the reader a reason to read the scene in the first place.

Going back to what bestselling authors do, here are some bestselling books' opening lines:

> "I didn't realize he was a werewolf at first."
>
> —NYT Bestselling author Patricia Briggs (*Moon Called*)

> "My first superbeing was an accident. Literally and figuratively."
>
> —Bestselling author Gini Koch (*Touched by an Alien*)

> "'Why kill me?' Sierra Raines said. 'I'm just the go-between.'"

— NYT Bestselling author Jayne Ann Krentz (*All the Colors of Night*)

"Dear You,
The body you are wearing used to be mine. The scar on the inner left thigh is there because I fell out of a tree and impaled my leg at the age of nine. The filling in the far left tooth on the top is the result of my avoiding the dentist for four years. But you probably care little about this body's past. After all, I'm writing this letter for you to read in the future."

—Bestselling author Daniel O'Malley (*The Rook*)

I could go on and on, but I hope you get the point. Hooking the reader right up front is a super good way to ensure they want to keep turning the pages of your story.

Page-Turner Techniques Summary

- You make your scene a page-turner by ensuring that you increase the number of Page-Turner Techniques™ .
- Every manuscript should have a *minimum* of one Page-Turner Technique™ on *every single page*.
    - Page-Turner Techniques™ include:
    - Give your scene a cliffhanger ending.
    - Present the characters with impossible choices so they must choose between two bad options.
    - Keep the readers on the knife-edge between hope and fear to increase overall tension.

- Peel back the layers of your characters to reveal unexpected attributes to their personalities
- Tell lies by deciding on a piece of information you want to reveal, then set up the reveal by hinting something completely different.
- Endlessly engage the reader by making sure that "boring" events are either left out of the story entirely or are made "un-boring" by giving the reader a strong reason to read them. But make them less boring in the first place.
- Challenge your POV character:
    - Challenge their goals (scene goal or story goal).
    - Challenge their needs.
    - Challenge their values.
    - Challenge their wounds (emotional, mental, physical, social, any kind of wound).
    - Challenge their physical abilities.
- Include subtext to deepen the reader's understanding and experience of the story.
- Include twists and turns to ensure the reader's continuing interest by adding any of these, or any combination of these:
    - Add an unexpected character.
    - Add unexpected information.
    - Add unexpected events.
- Hook the reader at the beginning to keep them turning pages into the scene.

CHAPTER 5

MISTAKES AND HOW TO FIX THEM

In this section, I'll clarify the most common types of errors beginning writers make in telling their stories. I've sorted these into problems with the three key elements of scenes: Goal, Motivation, Conflict, Failure.

To Fix Goal Problems

Writers can get into trouble with goals fairly easily. Here's how:

- Not giving the POV character a specific, identified goal for the scene.
- Not making the goal important to the POV character.

It's essential that the reader know what the POV character for each scene is trying to accomplish (even if the reader doesn't yet know how the character intends to do that). Sometimes the goal is pretty obvious. A child has been kidnapped, and the mother is desperately taking

steps to try to get her child back. In those cases, and particularly if the previous scene set up the action for this scene, you may not need to explicitly state the goal.

Go back to my example scene from Kylie's story Tyger's Claw. In that scene Kylie's goal was to set a trap for the man who was her target. We knew that from the previous scene, which is not included here, where she noticed that this guy had seen her kill her earlier target Harlan (remember him, the "I didn't do anything to Melly Jo guy"?). So, she decided she needed to "go hunting" to take the new guy down before he could cause her problems.

Did I need to have Kylie explicitly state that "I'm hiding in this tree so I can take out this guy who's a danger to me"? No, I did not. I trusted the reader to infer that from the information given to them.

On the other hand, if your character is doing something entirely new or unusual, it's helpful to give the reader a clue about why the character is doing that. Again, you don't have to give details about how that goal will be accomplished, but without a clue about what the character is trying to do, the reader will be confused. And remember that Ultimate Writer Sin #2:

> *Ultimate Writer Sin #2: "Never, ever confuse the reader."*
>
> *—Meg Leader (Page-Turner Fiction. Yes, I've said this before.)*

The second problem with goals that often occurs is not making that goal important to the POV character. Whatever the character is trying to do in the scene, it

needs to be the **most important thing they can do at this time in these circumstances.** It can't be something casual. If they want to spend the day at Disney World, go for it—but if it's not vital to what their story goal is, then don't include that side trip in your novel. Unless of course, they get there and discover that a sharknado is about to attack Disney World, and your handy-dandy chain saw is needed to protect everyone there (with gratitude to the *Sharknado* films from SyFy TV). I'm just saying...it *could* happen, right?

Remember also:

> *"Every single scene has to do both these things: be interesting and advance the story."*
>
> *—Meg Leader (Page-Turner Fiction)*

If you lack a goal for the scene, it tends not to be interesting. If that goal isn't super-important to the POV character and his or her overall story goal, it doesn't advance the story. It's that simple.

To Fix Motivation Problems

The single worst problem that beginning writers make with motivation is simply not to provide it. Please remember that readers want to live in the heads of the main characters. They want to understand those characters, yes, even the evil ones. I mean, who doesn't love Hannibal Lechter? (Would I invite the man for dinner? No, I would not, lest I turn out to be the dinner.)

Make sure your hero or heroine has a strong motivation to achieve whatever their story goal is. Do

they want to save the world? Save a child? Save themselves? Do they want to get a promotion, get an award, or get a jewel thief?

Whatever they want to achieve in the overall story, they need to have a strong reason for wanting that. Without that strong overall story motivation, they cannot have a strong scene motivation to do whatever they have to do in an individual scene.

If their goal is to win the apple pie eating contest at the county fair, but if they're also willing to shrug and walk away if they come in second or don't place at all, then the reader won't care either.

The flip side of this problem is to provide a motivation that does not match the actions they take. If their motive is to save the local river from polluting industries, taking an action that further pollutes the river is a mismatch. The character's actions in a scene have to match their motivations for it to work.

Finally, you cannot use coincidences as motivation. You see this in B-movies in which the beautiful blonde in a flowing negligee in the middle of a dark, stormy night decides to go down into the basement without even a flashlight—or simply flicking the light switch. Debra Dixon says it most effectively:

> *"Most individuals will not put their lives at risk without good reason. ... Stupid characters without common sense do not make great heroes—no matter how much trouble they're in."*
>
> *—Debra Dixon (GMC: Goal, Motivation & Conflict)*

Don't write stupid characters who do things for no good reason. Or who act without common sense. Just don't do it.

To Fix Conflict Problems

There are some things that beginners may mistake for actual conflict, but actually are not useful conflict for storytellers.

- Simple misunderstandings.
- Bickering.

Debra Dixon points out that these are not the type of conflict that work in general in stories. She also provides a great rule of thumb to identify whether you have a simple misunderstanding or an actual conflict:

> *"If your characters in rocky relationships can sit down and resolve some misunderstanding, then you don't have conflict."*
>
> *—Debra Dixon (GMC: Goal, Motivation & Conflict)*

In other words, if two mature people could figure out how to resolve the issue between them simply by talking it out...well, that's not good. Because if they do not do that, it implies that you have two (or at least one) immature, silly people too childish for the reader to respect. Unless of course, the character is a child. Just saying...

Similarly, remember that the key function of a scene is to **advance the story**. If characters spend three to five pages bickering over something, the story is just sitting

there by the side of the road, waiting for them to get over it so the story can move on down its path. In other words, simple bickering of the "You are too!" "I am not!" "Yes, you are!" "No, I'm not!" variety simply doesn't work. Five-year-old kids have arguments like that. And readers don't want to regress to that level. Usually.

How do you fix these problems with conflict? There are several ways:

- Eliminate the scene if it's just bickering.
- Find a deeper conflict than a simple misunderstanding.
- Let the bickering progress beyond just words and name-calling. Make it into a true fight. Or explosion. Or bomb. Or something that includes action.
- With misunderstandings, either build one on top of another so the problems get more and more complex or make the misunderstandings brief and quickly resolved.

To Fix Failure Problems

There are a few failure traps that beginning writers sometimes fall into. Here are the key problems in this part of the scene.

- Letting the POV character succeed (other than in the final resolution scene).
- Not having the failure—whether it's a NO failure or a YES, BUT failure—make things worse than at the start of the scene.

We love our characters, right? We want them to succeed and achieve their hopes and dreams. Right? Of

course, we do! The problem is that such kindness results in boring stories that no one wants to read.

There is a writing adage that you take your main character. Put him up a tree. Throw rocks at him. Have him on a limb stretched over a river. Have a hungry crocodile in the river looking up. Then have someone set fire to the tree.

You see? That's an interesting story! If the reader isn't constantly asking, "How on Earth is that character going to get out of this mess?" you haven't done your job as a writer.

So, make sure that every scene ends either in a "NO!" or a "YES, BUT!" and that in each case the character's situation is worse than it was at the start of the scene. If you do that, you'll have a page-turner for sure.

To Fix Page-Turner Technique Problems

The single biggest mistake that writers make is not to use the various Page-Turner Techniques™.

The easiest fix is to go through your printed manuscript with a highlighter and literally highlight every time you use any of the Page-Turner Techniques™. If there are 2 or more pages with no techniques used go back and rewrite the scene to include at least one of them on each of those pages.

Ultimately, simple repetition and practice will enable you to include Page-Turner Techniques™ almost automatically. This truly is a case where practice makes things, well, maybe not *perfect*, but way better and easier.

See how many of these Page-Turner Techniques™ you can add to each scene you write. Pretty soon it'll become a simple habit for you—and your writing will sing.

Mistakes and How to Fix Them Summary

- TO FIX GOAL PROBLEMS:
    - Ensure your POV character has a stated or implied specific goal for every scene.
    - Make sure that scene goal is the most important thing that character has to do at this moment to achieve his or her story goal.
- TO FIX MOTIVATION PROBLEMS:
    - Make sure every character has a solid reason for doing everything they do.
    - Don't write stupid characters who lack common sense.
- TO FIX CONFLICT PROBLEMS:
    - Ensure your conflicts are more than simple misunderstandings that could be resolved with a frank discussion.
    - Don't let arguments be mere bickering.
    - The conflict must advance the story.
- TO FIX FAILURE PROBLEMS:
    - Be sure that every scene ends in failure, either a NO! or a YES, BUT failure.
    - Be sure that the POV character is in a worse position at the end of the scene than at the beginning.

    - You can defer the "BUT" failure slightly, but it should be clear to the reader by the beginning of the next scene that gaining the goal (the "YES") was a Bad Idea.

- TO FIX PAGE-TURNER TECHNIQUE™ PROBLEMS
    - Make sure that every single page has a minimum of one Page-Turner Technique™ on every single page of your manuscript.
    - More Page-Turner Techniques™ are better.
    - Give your scene a cliffhanger ending.
    - Present the characters with impossible choices so they must choose between two bad options.
    - Keep the readers on the knife-edge between hope and fear to increase overall tension.
    - Peel back the layers of your characters to reveal unexpected attributes to their personalities.
    - Tell lies by deciding on a piece of information you want to reveal, then set up the reveal by hinting something completely different.
    - Endlessly engage the reader by choosing interesting and intriguing situations to include, leaving out the "boring bits," or by making even fairly ordinary events and situations interesting by upping the tension, adding humor or any other method that increases reader engagement.
    - Challenge the POV character in any of several ways: challenge their goals, their needs, their values, their wounds, or their physical capabilities.

- Add subtext by having something different happening under the surface of dialogue and actions than the words and actions openly show.
- Give the scene a twist by adding something unexpected—a character, an event, or reveal unexpected information.
- Hook the reader up front, not just in your opening scene but at various scenes throughout the story.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

I hope this has been a helpful book for you. I want each and every one of you to succeed in your writing and to have a wonderful, successful career.

Writing a novel is a challenging process. It's not something you can do in a day. It takes thought and care. Most of all, it takes understanding the basic building blocks of a well told story.

Scenes are those building blocks. They are the fundamental tools you use to create wonderful stories that capture readers and keep them those pages.

Understanding scenes and scene structure will go far to help you become that best-selling writer. So, please, go for it! And don't hesitate to drop me a line and let me know how you're doing!

Here's My Gift to You!

If you're serious about becoming a bestseller-worthy writer, it's helpful to have a set of guidelines you can check your writing against when you're editing your

work. To help you with that, I have a set of two checklists on scene structure, and on Page-Turning Techniques™. You can get those for free, just by emailing me at contact@megleader.com and put "free checklist" in the subject line. If you purchased directly from me, you should also have found these as part of the zip file that included this e-book.

This will bring you into the community of Page-Turner writers, and you'll get occasional emails and special members-only discounts on courses, e-books, and other services.

And if you need more help—an online course, another e-book, or manuscript evaluation services, be sure to check out my product directory on my website, megleader.com under the "Writing Tools" tab to see a current catalogue of what's available. It changes regularly as we add new products, so visit it often!

I hope you plan to join us. And whatever your writing goals are, I wish you the very best of success with them!

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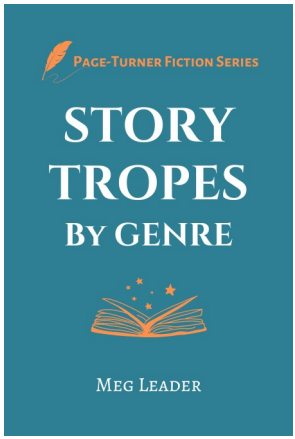

All genres have tropes—standard characters, situations, or events that readers love. Do you know the tropes for *your* genre? No? Maybe you should.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

I'm a writer. I've been writing and publishing professionally for well over three decades, both fiction and nonfiction books, articles, short stories, and novels. I'm also a Master Screenwriter. I've been a judge in a number of novel writing contests for a couple decades.

Writing is a way of life, and I found writing nonfiction considerably easier than writing fiction. In nonfiction, if you understand the topic you're writing about, and if you can put together an organized outline and some decent sentence structure, you can generally create something that's...well...at least passable.

But writing fiction is different. With fiction, you have a whole world to create, a whole cast of characters to produce, and you have to imagine what those characters would realistically do given who they are and the situation they're in. It's challenging to say the least.

Please drop me a line at contact@megleader.com and let me know if this ebook helped your writing or stop by my Facebook page at www.facebook.com/MegLeaderAuthor/ and say hello.

I want every one of you to become the very best writer you can be. I would love all of you to write exciting, wonderful page-turner stories that readers love.

So... I'm counting on you.

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