

How to expand your scenes and chapters (AI suggestions edited by Bob)

Here are effective techniques to expand your chapters:

1. Deepen Character and Inner World

- **Explore Thoughts and Emotions:** Replace summary ("telling") with internal monologue ("showing") and actions. If a character is angry, show them stewing, replaying the argument, or physically reacting (fists clenching, heart racing).
- **Show more about your minor characters:** Give side characters more purpose or deeper, personal motivations that parallel or conflict with the main plot.

2. Enhance Scene Details and Setting

- **Utilize Sensory Details:** Engage all five senses—sight, sound, smell, touch, and taste—to make scenes more vivid. Sometimes this is called imagery. Writing gurus say that smell is the best sense for creating a world (Ex. She smelled the pork and sauerkraut cooking New Year's Day).
- **Describe the Environment:** When a character enters a new place, have them take time to observe their surroundings, which helps ground the reader and extends the scene. Setting = time and place. Add a detailed description of both.
- **Use Metaphors and Similes:** Replace simple adjectives with original, descriptive language to add texture.

3. Build Conflict and Tension

- **Raise the Stakes:** If a character is trying to get somewhere, add obstacles that delay them.
- **Increase Dialogue:** Add banter or debates between characters that reveal personality or backstory.
- **Create "Try-Fail" Cycles:** Before a character succeeds at a task, have them try and fail several times, with each failure bringing new complications. Characters failing at what they're trying to do builds interest.

4. Improve Structure and Pacing

- **Slow Down Important Moments:** Treat critical moments like slow-motion, adding in thoughts, reactions, and small details that make the reader wait for the outcome.
- **Add Subplots:** Weave in secondary storylines that relate to the main theme, providing more complexity and, naturally, more words.
- **Connect Scenes Properly:** Use transitional scenes to bridge gaps, rather than jumping too quickly from one major event to another.

Key Advice on Expanding

- **Don't Rush the Journey:** Allow characters time to react and process events, rather than moving immediately to the next plot point.

Example of Expansion:

- *Tell (Short):* "He was sad when she left."
- *Show (Expanded):* "He watched her tail-lights disappear, the silence in the room suddenly deafening. He sat on the couch, staring at the empty spot next to him, and felt the cold seep into his bones."

From Alice Sudlow, “What Is a Scene? The Ultimate Guide to Write and Edit Amazing Scenes”

Read the much longer article if you like at <https://alicesudlow.com/novel-scenes/> and it’s also on my HA website

Elements of a Scene

You can probably guess that every scene includes conflict. After all, stories are about conflict! If there’s no conflict, there’s no story.

What you might not know is that conflict happens within a specific structure. There are a few fundamental story structure elements that describe the way in which conflict begins, progresses, and resolves. And every scene includes all these elements (with a couple of exceptions that I’ll talk about in a moment).

Now, depending on which story craft books you read, you’ll find that different story theorists use different names for these elements. And some people include ones I don’t, or they don’t include ones that I do.

The set of elements I’m going to share are the ones I use myself to analyze and edit scenes. They’re the ones I use to give my clients feedback and help them learn to craft great scenes. They’re really, really useful specifically for editing.

So let’s get into them. There are six elements:

1. Inciting Incident
2. Progressive Complications
3. Turning Point
4. Crisis
5. Climax
6. Resolution

And now I’ll give you a quick breakdown of each of these terms.

1. Inciting Incident

Something disrupts the character’s “normal” and kicks off the action of the scene.

In our opening scene of *Under the Whispering Door*, it’s that Patricia has come to Wallace’s office, and she’s sitting in front of him crying.

2. Progressive Complications

The conflict escalates as more complications happen. These events might make things better or worse, but they certainly make things more complicated.

In our scene, Patricia says she didn’t think he cared, and Wallace bristles that she’s implying he doesn’t care that she made a mistake in her work.

Then she makes it clear that she thought he didn’t care about *her*, but she knows he does because he sent her flowers for her birthday. That’s a problem for Wallace because he never sent her flowers, and it means someone in his office wasted money on sending flowers in his name, and he’ll have to stop that.

And then she starts listing out all her problems in her life and why she’s so grateful for this job to keep her family afloat, and Wallace can’t keep this conversation on track.

And then she says, “I don’t care what anyone else says, Mr. Price. You’re a good man,” and he finds out that people think he’s pretty horrible.

We’ve got some good things here and some bad things here, but the scene is escalating at every turn.

3. Turning Point

This is the largest, most problematic progressive complication, which forces the protagonist to respond in some way.

In our scene, the turning point is that Patricia finally asks Wallace why he called her here.

4. Crisis

In order to respond to the turning point, the protagonist must make a difficult choice. This is a choice between two bad things (best bad choice) or two good things (irreconcilable goods).

In our scene, the crisis for Wallace is: Will he be swayed to compassion by all the deeply personal things she's shared, and let her keep her job? Or will he go through with his initial plan to fire her, even knowing now how badly it will ruin her life?

5. Climax

This is the moment when the protagonist takes action on the crisis choice and experiences the consequences.

In our scene, Wallace fires her. He is unaffected by her sob story and lets her go. And she doesn't take it well, but no matter how she defends herself, or how much she pleads, or how angry she gets, he doesn't sway, and in fact goes so far as to have her literally dragged out of his office kicking and screaming.

6. Resolution

This is the "new normal" after the climax. Something has changed since the scene began with the inciting incident, and readers want to see what the world looks like now.

In our scene, this is the moment of calm after the firing.

How does Wallace feel after that traumatic demonstration? What does he do after his employee of several years has been forcibly removed?

He goes straight back to work and puts her out of his mind with absolutely no further concern about the matter except for a general resolve to hire better in the future.

Scenes (Almost) Always Include These Six Elements

Inciting incident. Progressive complications. Turning point. Crisis. Climax. Resolution.

Bob says: Good scenes are structured the same way we structure short stories.

Crafting a Story Using the Basic Elements of Structure

