

17+18.

WRITING SCENES

“At the end of a scene, we have to be at least one step further than we were before.”

—Aaron Sorkin

SUBCHAPTERS

- Purpose of a Scene
- Launching From One Scene to the Next
- Reward Patience
- Comedy Scenes
- Opening Scenes: Lay the Theme
- Opening Scenes: Grab the Audience
- Character Introduction Scene
- Character Introduction Scene: *The American President*

CHAPTER REVIEW

A screenplay is just a series of scenes. Here are a few tips to help strengthen your scenes:

- Every scene in your screenplay should move the plot forward.
- Not every scene needs to end dramatically, but you should feel satisfied with how it does end.
- If you are struggling with what the next scene should be, try answering a question posed in the previous scene.
- Grab the audience as soon as you can. Try dropping the audience in the middle of a conversation —it forces the audience to pay attention and play catch up.
- It’s also satisfying to lay out the theme to your entire movie right in the first scene.
- If you’re introducing a character in a scene for the first time, show the audience what the character wants.
- If a character doesn’t want something, then they are cluttering up your screenplay.

And remember, a great scene clearly shows each character’s intention and obstacles, the exposition is laid out without impeding the story, and the stakes are high and clear. Aaron loves writing courtroom dramas because all of these elements are built into the setting.

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ASSIGNMENTS

- With these basic principles in mind, continue to be a diagnostician. Select several scenes from TV shows and movies with different parameters:
 - A 1-page scene
 - A 5-page scene
 - A scene containing only one character
 - A scene containing multiple characters and conversations

Compare all the scenes you collect in each category to each other. Why do they all work (or don't work)? Does the scene move the plot forward? How does each scene end?

Now, write your own opening scene for a film that starts in the middle of a conversation. If you've already started your script, rewrite your initial scene to start this way. How can you establish who the characters are and their intentions and obstacles?

- Write a scene that takes place in a courtroom or deposition environment. Make your main character on trial for a crime. What is their intention? The lawyers'? What are their obstacles? Have a jury or judge be the stand-in for the audience, and use them to introduce any exposition.

