

Understanding Scenes, Sequels, and Chapters

What is a *scene*?

A scene is a unit of story action, one of the building blocks in fiction writing. According to Jack M. Bickham, in *Scene & Structure, How to Construct Fiction with Scene-by-Scene Flow, Logic and Readability*, it has a fundamental pattern of:

- Statement of a goal
- Introduction and development of conflict
- Failure of the character to reach his goal, a tactical disaster

Common Purposes of a Scene:

- Advance the story by introducing a problem or making a problem worse.
- Show conflict between characters, between a character and nature, or a character and something in the world around him.
- Introduce a character.
- Develop a character.
- Create suspense to keep the reader's interest.
- Give information the reader needs to know.
- Create atmosphere such as setting, weather, time, and mood.
- Develop the theme of the story further.

Length of a Scene:

- Exactly as long as it needs to be. A scene can be from a few paragraphs long to a few pages, or even an entire chapter.
- What is being focused on within the scene determines the length.
- A scene can involve more than one setting.

What is a *sequel*?

A sequel is what follows the unit of drama in a scene, the aftermath. According to Jack M. Bickham, in *Scene & Structure*, it is the special something that holds scenes together. It is a structural element that begins when a scene ends and can do the following:

- Help with in-depth characterization
- Give an analysis of motivation
- Explain character planning

Length of a Sequel:

- As with a scene, it should be as long as it needs to be.

What is a *chapter*?

A chapter is a division within a book and can widely vary in length and content. It can be anywhere from one scene, to a scene-sequel-scene, to three or more scenes, or whatever fits the genre or storyline.

Common Details About Chapters:

- Each chapter should drive the story forward and always end at a point where the reader wants to turn the page.
- A good place to end a chapter is a change in viewpoint.

- A good place to end a chapter is at the moment of disaster ending a scene.
- A good place to end a chapter is in the middle of conflict.

Length of a Chapter:

- A chapter can be any length from one page to 20-25, possibly more but not recommended.
- Chapter length can depend on the publisher's preferences, especially in romance. Publishers like Harlequin like as close to a precise number of printed pages, with chapters of a certain length. ***Always review a publisher's guidelines and read or skim through a number of their books as examples for their preferences.***
- Online publishers often very different standards and preferences. Again, review common books they have published.
- Common word lengths/chapter lengths for novellas: 25,000 words=6, 4,000 word chapters or 5, 5,000 word chapters; 30,000 words=6, 5,000 words chapters or 7, 4,000 word chapters
- Common word lengths/chapter lengths for novels: 50,000 words=13, 4,000 word chapters or 10, 5,000 word chapters; 60,000 words=15, 4,000 word chapters or 12, 5,000 word chapters; 80,000 words=20, 4,000 word chapters or 16, 5,000 word chapters