WRITING FUNDAMENTAL SERIES

2025 - 2026

The Anatomy of a Scene Workbook

by

HEENA RATHORE-PARDESHI

About the Author

Heena Rathore-Pardeshi is an award-winning novelist, developmental editor, and creative writing mentor with over a decade of experience helping writers shape powerful stories.

She has taught hundreds of writers through her courses, workshops, and editing programs, and has

worked with bestselling authors, debut novelists, and publishing houses across India and abroad. She has also worked with multiple American and British production houses for turning books into scripts.

Her own works, including the acclaimed psychological thriller Deceived, gothic Indian-folklore horror The Manor and her upcoming book The Art of Storytelling, are known for their depth, atmosphere, and intricate psychological layering.

A passionate reader (she reads over 100 books a year), Heena brings to her teaching a rare blend of literary insight, structural precision, and emotional intelligence. Through her YouTube channel and Verbatik Media, she continues to build spaces for writers to learn, create, and grow.

Introduction

A strong story is not built from chapters, it is built from scenes.

Scenes are where characters want something, face resistance, make decisions, and change. They are the smallest working units of storytelling, the place where plot moves forward and emotion deepens. When scenes work, readers stay hooked. When they don't, even the most beautiful writing can feel flat or directionless.

This workbook has been created as a practical companion to the Anatomy of a Scene session in the Writing Fundamentals series. Its purpose is simple: to help you write scenes with clarity, intention, and emotional weight.

Inside, you'll find step-by-step tools to:
- identify the true purpose of a scene
- clarify your character's goal and stakes
- build meaningful conflict
- track change and momentum
- structure scenes using Action and Reaction units
- use setting and sensory detail intentionally
- diagnose weak or filler scenes during revision

You don't need to fill every page for every scene. Think of this workbook as a toolkit, not a rulebook. Use it before drafting, while revising, or when a scene feels "off" and

you can't quite tell why.

Writing powerful scenes is about understanding how scenes work. Once you grasp that, your storytelling becomes more focused and far more compelling.

Print this workbook, keep it beside your draft, and return to it whenever a scene needs clarity.

Let's build scenes that matter.

HEENA

How to Use This Workbook

This workbook is designed to be used alongside your novel draft or during revisions.

You can:
- Fill it before writing a scene
- Use it to diagnose weak scenes
- Print it and write by hand (highly recommended)

You do NOT need to complete every page for every scene.

Use what the scene needs.

Table of Contents

SECTION 1
WHAT IS A SCENE?

A scene is a unit of change.

By the end of a scene, something must be different:
- emotionally
- relationally
- situationally
- or in the story's direction

Quick Check

At the end of this scene, what has changed?

☐ The character's understanding
☐ The situation
☐ A relationship
☐ The stakes
☐ The direction of the story

Write 1–2 lines:

What is different at the end of this scene compared to the beginning?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

SECTION 2
SCENE PURPOSE CLARIFIER

Every scene must have a clear job.

Scene Purpose (choose one or more):

□ Move the plot forward
□ Reveal information
□ Escalate conflict
□ Deepen character
□ Shift a relationship
□ Build tension or atmosphere
□ Explore theme

In one sentence, the purpose of this scene is:

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

SECTION 3
CHARACTER GOAL

What does the POV character want in this scene?
(Be specific and immediate.)

Type of Goal:
□ External (action-based)
□ Internal (emotional / mental)
□ Both

Why does this goal matter right now?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

SECTION 4
STAKES CHECK

What is at risk in this scene?

☐ External/Practical stakes
☐ Internal/Emotional stakes
☐ Relational stakes

If the character fails, what happens?

_____
_____
_____
_____

Why should the reader care about this outcome?

_____
_____
_____
_____

SECTION 5
CONFLICT & OBSTACLES

What stands in the character's way?
(Check all that apply)

☐ Another character
☐ Internal fear or doubt
☐ Time pressure
☐ Environment / setting
☐ Social or cultural rules
☐ Supernatural / unknown force
☐ A secret or misunderstanding

Describe the main obstacle in this scene:

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

SECTION 6
TURNING POINT
(THE SHIFT)

Every strong scene has a pivot moment.

What is the turning point in this scene?
(The moment things change direction.)

_____
_____
_____
_____

After this moment, the scene can never go back to how it started. Why?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

SECTION 7
OUTCOME

How does the scene end?

☐ Success
☐ Failure
☐ Partial success
☐ Revelation

What does the character gain or lose by the end?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

SECTION 8
CHANGE DETECTOR

By the end of this scene...

☐ The character feels differently
☐ The character knows something new
☐ The situation has shifted
☐ A relationship has changed
☐ The stakes have escalated

Describe the change clearly:

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

SECTION 10
SCENE CYCLE
(STRUCTURE CHECK)

ACTION UNIT (What happens)

- **Goal:**

  _____
  _____
  _____

- **Conflict:**

  _____
  _____
  _____

- **Outcome:**

  _____
  _____
  _____

REACTION UNIT (What it causes)

- **Emotional reaction:**

  _____
  _____
  _____

- **Processing/reflection:**

  _____
  _____
  _____

- **Decision made:**

  _____

  _____

  _____

- **New goal formed:**

  _____

  _____

  _____

Together, this forms a **Scene Cycle**.

SECTION 10
SETTING & SENSORY LAYERING

Sensory Hierarchy

Dominant Sense (1 main detail):

_____
_____
_____
_____

Supporting Sense (1 secondary detail):

_____
_____
_____
_____

(Optional)
Atmospheric Sense:

_____
_____
_____
_____

Emotional Filter

What emotion is the POV character experiencing in this scene?

_____
_____
_____
_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Does the setting reflect this emotion?

□ Yes □ Needs work

SECTION 11
SCENE CHECKLIST

Tick all that apply:

A. Purpose & Focus
□ The scene has a clear purpose
□ I can explain why this scene exists in one sentence
□ The scene is doing more than one job (plot + character/emotion)
□ This scene cannot be removed without affecting the story

B. Character Goal
□ The POV character wants something specific in this scene
□ The goal is immediate (not vague or long-term)
□ The character is active rather than passive
□ The goal makes sense given the character's emotional state

C. Stakes
□ The stakes are clear to the reader
□ There are emotional stakes, not just practical ones
□ The character cares deeply about the outcome
□ Failure would lead to consequences

D. Conflict & Resistance
□ Something actively blocks or complicates the goal
□ The conflict feels meaningful, not random
□ The conflict increases tension as the scene progresses
□ The conflict forces the character to react or adapt

E. Turning Point & Outcome

☐ There is a clear turning point or shift in the scene
☐ The scene ends differently from how it begins
☐ The outcome feels earned
☐ The outcome creates new questions or problems

F. Change & Momentum
☐ The character experiences an internal or external change
☐ The scene pushes the story forward
☐ The stakes escalate by the end of the scene
☐ The scene creates momentum for what comes next

G. Structure (Scene Cycle)
☐ The Action Unit is clear (goal, conflict, outcome)
☐ The Reaction Unit is clear (emotion, processing, decision)
☐ The decision leads naturally into the next scene
☐ The scene cycle feels complete

H. Setting & Sensory Layering
☐ The setting is clearly established early
☐ Sensory details are selective, not overwhelming
☐ The dominant sensory detail supports the scene's emotion
☐ The setting influences the character's behavior

I. Emotional Anchoring
☐ The reader can clearly sense how the character feels
☐ Emotional beats evolve during the scene
☐ The emotional tone matches the events of the scene
☐ The character's inner world is grounded in the moment

J. Scene Ending
☐ The scene ends with a hook or unresolved tension
☐ The ending encourages the reader to continue
☐ The final moment highlights change or consequence

□ The ending feels intentional, not accidental

SECTION 12
COMMON MISTAKES SPOTTER

This section helps you diagnose what's going wrong in a scene before you try to fix it.

Tick any box that feels true.
(A scene may have more than one issue.)

A. Purpose & Relevance Issues
☐ I'm not sure why this scene exists
☐ The scene feels like a bridge or filler
☐ The scene repeats information already shown elsewhere
☐ The scene could be removed without changing much

Fix focus: Clarify the scene's purpose and job.

B. Goal Problems
☐ The character doesn't clearly want anything
☐ The goal is vague or implied, not specific
☐ The character is mostly reacting instead of acting
☐ The goal doesn't feel urgent

Fix focus: Define a clear, immediate scene-level goal.

C. Weak or Missing Stakes
☐ It's unclear what happens if the character fails
☐ The outcome doesn't feel important
☐ The stakes are too low for the scene length
☐ The character doesn't seem emotionally invested

Fix focus: Strengthen emotional, relational, or practical

consequences.

D. Conflict & Tension Issues
□ The character gets what they want too easily
□ There is no meaningful resistance
□ The conflict feels random or artificial
□ Tension stays flat throughout the scene

Fix focus: Add obstacles that actively challenge the goal.

E. Turning Point Problems
□ There is no clear shift or pivot in the scene
□ The scene feels like a straight line
□ Nothing surprises the character
□ The scene ends the same way it began

Fix focus: Introduce a moment where direction or understanding changes.

F. Outcome & Change Issues
□ The scene ends without consequence
□ The character learns nothing new
□ No emotional or situational change occurs
□ The scene feels emotionally static

Fix focus: Make sure something is different by the end.

G. Dialogue Problems
□ Dialogue goes in circles
□ Characters repeat the same emotional beat
□ Dialogue exists mainly to deliver information
□ Voices sound similar or flat
□ Conversations don't escalate or shift power

Fix focus: Give dialogue direction, subtext, or a reveal.

H. Introspection Overload
□ The character spends too long thinking
□ Internal monologue stalls the scene
□ Emotional rumination repeats without evolution
□ Thoughts don't lead to a decision or action

Fix focus: Tie introspection to movement, realization, or choice.

I. Setting & Description Issues
□ Setting is underdeveloped or confusing
□ Setting is over-described and slows pacing
□ Sensory details feel random
□ Description does not reflect the character's emotion

Fix focus: Use the sensory hierarchy and emotional filtering.

J. Pacing Problems
□ The scene feels too long for what it achieves
□ The scene feels rushed despite important content
□ Emotional beats don't have space to land
□ Action and reaction are unbalanced

Fix focus: Adjust length, rhythm, or scene cycle balance.

K. Weak Scene Ending
□ The scene ends too softly
□ The ending doesn't raise curiosity
□ The next scene doesn't feel clearly set up
□ The final line lacks emotional or narrative punch

Fix focus: Add a hook, decision, realization, or unresolved tension.

L. Emotional Disconnect
□ The reader may not know how the character feels

□ Emotional tone doesn't match events
□ The scene feels distant or mechanical
□ Emotional beats don't evolve

Fix focus: Strengthen emotional anchoring and POV alignment.

What Needs Fixing First?
You do NOT need to fix everything at once.

Top 3 issues in this scene:

1. _____
_____
_____
2. _____
_____
_____
3. _____
_____
_____

CONGRATULATIONS!!

You've just built a purposeful scene.

If you repeat this process consistently:
- your pacing will improve
- your scenes will feel intentional
- your characters will gain agency
- your story will gain momentum

This is not about perfection; it's about clarity.

NOTES

STAY CONNECTED

Continue your writing journey with me and the Writing Fundamentals community.
You'll find more workbooks, resources, and upcoming live sessions here 👇

Website: www.verbatikmedia.com
YouTube: @Heena R Pardeshi
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THANK YOU!