10 Ways to Launch Strong Scenes

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1. GET STRAIGHT TO THE ACTION. Don't drag your feet here. "Jimmy jumped off the cliff" rather than "Jimmy stared at the water, imagining how cold it would feel when he jumped."

2. HOOK THE READER WITH BIG OR SURPRISING ACTIONS. An outburst, car crash, violent heart attack or public fight at the launch of a scene allows for more possibilities within it.

3. BE SURE THAT THE ACTION IS TRUE TO YOUR CHARACTER. Don't have a shy character choose to become suddenly uninhibited at the launch of a scene. Do have a bossy character belittle another character in a way that creates conflict.

4. ACT FIRST, THINK LATER. If a character is going to think in your action opening, let the action come first, as in, "Elizabeth slapped the Prince. When his face turned pink, horror filled her. What have I done? she thought."

5. SAVE TIME BY BEGINNING WITH SUMMARY. Sometimes actions will simply take up more time and space in the scene than you would like. A scene beginning needs to move fairly quickly and, on occasion, summary will get the reader there faster.

6. COMMUNICATE NECESSARY INFORMATION TO THE READER BEFORE THE ACTION KICKS IN. Sometimes information needs to be imparted simply in order to set action in motion later in the scene. Opening sentences such as, "My mother was dead before I arrived," "The war had begun" and, "The storm left half of the city underwater," could easily lead to action.

7. REVEAL A CHARACTER'S THOUGHTS OR INTENTIONS THAT CANNOT BE SHOWN THROUGH ACTION. Coma victims, elderly characters, small children and other characters sometimes cannot speak or act for physical, mental or emotional reasons; therefore the scene may need to launch with narration to let the reader know what they think and feel.

8. ENGAGE WITH SPECIFIC VISUAL DETAILS. If your character is deserted on an island, the reader needs to know the lay of the land. Any fruit trees in sight? What color sand? Are there rocks, shelter or wild, roaming beasts?

9. USE SCENERY TO SET THE TONE OF THE SCENE. Say your scene opens in a jungle where your character is going to face danger; you can describe the scenery in language that conveys darkness, fear and mystery.

10. REFLECT A CHARACTER'S FEELINGS THROUGH SETTING. Say you have a sad character walking through a residential neighborhood. The descriptions of the homes can reflect that sadness—houses can be in disrepair, with rotting wood and untended yards. You can use weather in the same way. A bright, powerfully sunny day can reflect a mood of great cheer in a character.