

Don't let your character lose their voice while running from monsters! Today we'll go beyond the basics of good action scenes and delve into how we balance perspective, action, and narration as well as how we can use transitions to keep the momentum up.

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1. We'll begin with you **nailing down a few characteristics** of your character as well as voice.

Q: Define your main character's voice—what qualities make it unique?

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Q: What does your character do in a tight situation? How do they handle tension? How do they *show* tension? How is this different from when they feel relaxed?

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## 2. A review of action scene-basics:

- a. Action scenes should strike a balance between moving the plot forward and immersing the reader into suspense.
- b. Use short sentences and/or simple constructions. Short paragraphs also help. More white space and clear transitions = a faster read
- c. Avoid flowery language and reflections and insights.
- d. Write to your audience's interests—use details and jargon and develop settings accordingly.
- e. On that note, try to describe the setting ahead of time so that staging does not have to be explained at length once the action has started.
- f. Use dialogue—internal and external—to keep pacing up. A short phrase/comment is your go-to solution when the action might be dragging.
- g. Remember, the “fight” or action scene should serve a narrative purpose.
- h. Also remember that not all action scenes are fight scenes. Sometimes a tense conversation that moves plot forward can be written as an action scene. Talking IS doing something/action—as long as you keep the pacing up.

### 3. **Specific considerations before you draft** or revise that scene

**Setting:** How will they interact with it, and what aspects **MUST** be shown? Any unique props or staging to incorporate?

**Stakes:** What emotional and plot stakes are present and how will the character react to these?

**Voice:** (See page 1 warm-up.) What aspects of voice feel most important to maintain?

**Reveal:** Are you doling out info or answering story questions in drips to keep reader guessing? If possible, decide how much you want to reveal in this scene—and when.

**Fear Factor:** Do you want the reader to be worried that the main character will fail? Die? Screw up? Do you want them to be *terrified* of these events? Do you want them worried through the entire scene or just a certain part (how much are you willing to turn up that dial in this scene?)

**Repeatability:** Particularly if you have numerous fight scenes in one work, how will you keep the reader worried over time? How will you increase the stakes? Change the fights? The stakes? Challenge the protagonist so that we're worried over and over as she becomes stronger?

### 4. **How much voice is too much voice?**

Okay, so let's say we're writing an action scene in a funny thriller YA. As usual, the teen characters are sarcastic, witty, and prone to constant commentary on their experiences.

**Kella:** 18, protective, hard on herself, resilient, proactive, quick to express her (often dramatic) feelings. She has a very undisciplined bladder.

**Huck:** 15, her younger brother, also funny and quick to share his view of the world, dry, stubborn, understated, critical, easily overstimulated with a tendency to ignore rules and boundaries

Let's just imagine zombies are running toward Kella and her brother as they try to hold their ground while standing on top of a rotting, none-too-tall lean-to. Notice our options — degrees of voice.

**Kella:** *God I have to pee.*

**Kella:** The zombies are screaming. My bladder is screaming. Next to me, Huck is silent.

**Kella:** *Seriously. Right now? I have to pee now?*

**Kella:** The whole time I'm standing on the lean to and feeling like I'm about to fight the battle at Helm's Deep, I'm thinking if I *don't* get eaten, this day is *still* going to suck, because I'm going to pee my shorts. And since I only *have* one pair of shorts, that means diaper rash for the next hundred miles of the Appalachian Trail.

**Huck:** "I bet you wish you'd peed before you left the house," Huck says as the zombies begin climbing the criss-crossed Lincoln logs.

Try writing out a brief scenario like this with your own character and play around with a few degrees of quirky dialogue (QD) that showcase your character's voice.