

The 2 Building Blocks of Writing a Sex Scene

Part 1 of How To Write a Steamy Love/Sex Scene



2 Building Blocks of a Love Scene

3. INTRODUCTION

Do you struggle to make your love scenes believable? To make them more than a clinical description of moving body parts? Or maybe you have figured out the choreography of a sex scene and you are wondering how to take it to the next level.

It can be overwhelming to try and write a successful love scene. Don't worry! I've got your back.

In this series of blog posts we will build a sex scene in layers, adding elements until it moves from a dull action scene to a love scene that brings in the five sense, emotions, character development, and more!

Today we'll start with the foundation. The 2 building blocks of writing a sex scene are Action-Reaction. This will establish how the characters move and interact and set up the structure for our expanded scene.

4. BODY TEXT

A Conversation

Diana Gabaldon's book *I Give You My Body* is a master course on how to write a sex scene,

but it can be intimidating to see her deftly woven examples. How does a mere mortal, a beginner romance writer, learn what to do?

Well, we start with the basics. Sex scenes, as Gabaldon reminds us, are conversations–dialogues in the form of interactions between two (or more) partners. There is some speech, likely, but the majority of the conversation takes place with their bodies.

Quote: “In essence, a good sex scene is usually a dialogue scene with physical details.”

<https://www.dianagabaldon.com/2012/07/how-to-write-sex-scenes/comment-page-1/>



Other writers liken love scenes to dances or fights. You have to work out the choreography, the interplay, of the characters since the physical interactions form the foundation of the scene. Now, if you just include the physical part then you will miss out on many of the things romance readers love: emotions, conflict, and tension, for example. But if the physical parts don't work then the rest won't matter.

The first building blocks are the Action-Reaction cycle. One character acts, the other reacts. Usually the point-of-view character is giving us their experience, so their partner(s) does the

acting and they do the reacting. And then the cycle continues through Action-Reaction-Action-Reaction until the end of the scene.



Here is an example of a kiss scene from Lauren Landish's steamy Bennett Boys Ranch series (I have a fondness for cowboys—hello, *Yellowstone*, I'm talking to you!). The passage is the opening of a love scene, the first kiss (Action) and the main character's response (Reaction). You can do this with a longer scene—check out one of your own favourite scenes and map out the Action-Reaction interplay for yourself.

Example

In this story Sophie and James have their first kiss. In this scene we are in the POV of Sophie so I have labelled Purple for Action by the POV character's partner James and Red for Reaction by the POV character.

Remember, this Action-Reaction cycle is only the first stage of the love scene, so you will see that there is more going on than we talk about in this post. Stay tuned for further discussions in the series. Here we are showing how the scene is like a conversation – a back and forth exchange.

Lauren Landish, *Buck Wild* (Bennett Boys Ranch Book 1) Montlake Romance. Kindle Edition, (p. 54).

“And what about your sense of touch?” he asks. “What do you feel?” Before I can say a word, I feel his fingertips tracing up my arm, this time to find my jaw and cup it in his hand. He turns my head toward his, guided almost blindly before pressing his lips to mine. It’s sweet, not tentative, but it’s like he’s testing me out, exploring without pressuring me too much. Forward, but respectful . . . and exciting. I move my lips to adjust slightly, tasting him. He must feel my agreement because he takes our kiss deeper, hotter, more forceful. Setting my beer down, I wrap my arms around his neck, our tongues starting to tangle as he threads his fingers through my belt loops and pulls me into his lap to straddle him. Dimly in my mind I hear a clink as one of our beers tips over, but I really don’t care. Feeling his already thickening cock underneath me gives me another jolt, and I roll my hips against him, grinding myself against the ridge in his jeans. “My touch is telling me a lot of things . . . all of them good and hot,” I rasp as he kisses my neck. “Very fucking good.” He gently grabs my ponytail, pulling my head back to give him access as he moves down my neck, licking and kissing. He reaches for the hem of my shirt, slipping it over my head before cupping my bra in his hands.

If we ignore for right now the black type, then we can see clearly how the pattern of the purple and red-Action / Reaction show us the back and forth exchanges of the characters. Although it is like a dialogue, you’ll notice that their “conversation” includes some speech (some love scenes have more dialogue than others), touching, kissing, and bodies pressing against each other.

We also notice the use of POV here to keep things interesting-while some of the actions in purple are straight-forward SVO - he did this or that-there are also some actions that are felt by the POV character. This can add a little variety as well as bridging the gap between action and reaction.

Reactions

Reactions can take several forms. In a sex scene the first reaction to a physical action will be a physical response to that action-doing something makes the character feel something.

This physical response can then provoke an emotional and/or intellectual reaction—when the character feels something on the outside (their body) it makes them think or feel something inside (heart, soul, or mind).



In the next post we'll examine the forms of response in more detail, but for now it's important to see that they are not all just physical actions. Including a variety of reactions helps to make your love scene well-rounded, so that it is more complex and enjoyable for the reader.

These responses can happen almost simultaneously, but we have to present them somehow in a logical, interesting progression in our writing. In our example we see a variety of reactions: physical sensations, dialogue, and thoughts. More on this in the next post.

Now, I'll lead you through the process of building up a sex scene, using my WIP, *Princess Nerya's Knight*, a second-chance fantasy romance. First I choreograph the scene, told in her pov:

1. He kisses her and pulls down her nightgown
2. He uses his mouth on her breasts
3. She pulls off his tunic and touches him
4. He lifts her onto his lap
5. She squeezes her legs around him

That is the bare bones of the action. Now we add in the exchanges between the two characters:

1. He kisses her and pulls down her nightgown.
2. She becomes aroused
3. He licks
4. She shudders
5. He sucks
6. She gushes
7. She pulls off his tunic and touches him
8. He lifts her on his lap
9. She arches into him
10. He pulls her closer
11. She run her hands on him and squeezes her legs around him

In this outline I have alternated between Action-Reaction so I can get the choreography right. The building blocks then look like this:

Draft 1

He kissed her, softly first, then insistent. He pulled down her nightgown until it revealed her breasts. Her nipples hardened under his gaze. When he bent down and took one of the points in his mouth she shuddered. He sucked, swirling his tongue around the areola. He cupped the other breast, licking it and settling in to suckle on the pebbled tip. She squirmed as liquid pooled between her legs.

She sat up and pulled off his tunic, admiring his hard, smooth chest. She touched him, exploring the angles and curves of his body. When he lifted her on his lap she arched into him. He caressed her buttocks and then pulled her hips in so she was snug against him. She ran her hands along his shoulders and squeezed her legs around his waist.

Although this draft is very mechanical we can see how the interchanges occur between them, where one person takes the lead and the other responds. We have made sure to include both the actions of her lover and her responses. But we have not varied the types of reactions yet-it is only her physical reactions so far. In the next blog post we will consider how to add in the variety of reactions to make it more interesting.

Denise Williams provides a helpful clue when she states, "Writers can balance one or two reactions for every written action. For example, when the character is touched, how does it

feel? What does it make them think? How does their body react?" We don't want to overdo it, and slow down the pacing, by include multiple reactions for every action, but we want to include the variety of possibilities not only to keep it interesting but also to advance the story. It is the feelings and thoughts that will keep the reader engaged in your love scenes.



Quote: ***Denise Williams

<https://www.google.ca/amp/s/www.writersdigest.com/.amp/write-better-fiction/five-tips-for-writing-romantic-scenes>

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Add a couple of other people's writing about it: e.g.,
<https://writersinthestormblog.com/2014/07/lets-get-down-to-it-writing-the-sex-scene/>

5. CONCLUSION

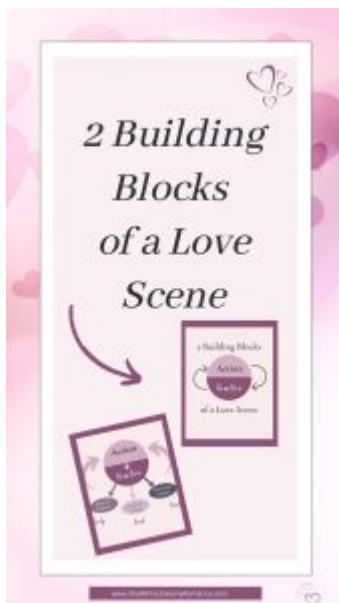
So putting it together. Think of your sex scenes as a conversation, a fight scene, or a dance—physical exchanges that communicate the interactions and relationship between or among the characters.

Using the Action-Reaction to structure your love scenes will allow you to set the foundation upon which the rest is built.

6. CALL TO ACTION

In the next post we will look at the variety of responses in more detail. We will use an example from Sherilynn Kenyon and then we'll make another draft from my WIP excerpt.

You can find that post here:



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