

Master Scene Profile

Thank you for your interest in “The Writer’s Coloring Book®” I’m sharing this worksheet with you, as I find it very helpful if you are revising a long project. Be it a novel, a memoir, or a screenplay, it’s tough shuffling through printed pages or scrolling through a long document to revamp your story structure. You’re trying to find out what to keep, what needs changing and it can be a frustrating experience.

In this section, my goal is to help prepare you for the next draft. I call it “the iceberg draft.” In his book *Death in the Afternoon*, Ernest Hemingway spoke about what he called the “iceberg principle” or the “theory of omission.” He explains,

“If a writer of prose knows enough about what he is writing about he may omit things that he knows and the reader, if the writer is writing truly enough, will have a feeling of those things as strongly as though the writer had stated them. The dignity of the movement of the iceberg is due to only one-eighth of it being above water. The writer who omits things because he does not know them only makes hollow places in his writing.”

But before you think about what to omit or cut from your scenes, it would be a good idea to have a catalog of everything you want in each scene and to know where the scene fits in the overall scheme of your story. To examine the scenes you’ve already written and then organize them, I created the Master Scene Profile (MSP); it’s a form that you will fill out, one form for each scene in your story. A form? You mean “paperwork”? Yes, another way to “trick” your brain. Once you see it, you’ll relax and think to yourself, “Oh, it’s just a form to fill out, there’s no writing involved.” This will help you get over the hump of starting that next revision. Once you do the work here, ask the big questions, come up with a strategy, and the next draft will be easier to write. I promise.

The MSP is based on a “call sheet” that is used by production companies. When you’re producing a large project with lots of moving pieces, you create a sheet for each day of production. You list who needs to arrive on the set, at what time. You list what props or machinery or costumes will

be needed. Your MSP will give you the chance to include all the elements that you want in the scene before you begin revising. You'll have all of your ideas, notes, and suggestions on one piece of paper for each scene.

As you fill out the forms, you'll discover that some scenes don't have enough to really be a full scene. You may think of blending information from one scene into another. You'll track the story progression using our mandala symbols along the side of the sheet. It's much easier to scribble, make changes, and rethink scenes on one sheet of paper than it is to keep writing draft after draft after draft. We're talking about a better use of your time, creating a clearer version of the original idea you had in your head. You may discover as you map out your scenes that there are scenes that are missing. Use this worksheet to describe the missing scene and add as much material as you can.

Let's go over the MSP, to help you make the best use out of it. You'll find it at the end of this chapter.

Scene Name: Just as I suggested in the section on plot cards, it's a good idea to give each scene a name like "the confrontation at the ranch" or "Joe breaks into the underground vault." It gives you a snapshot of the action and helps track your plot sequences.

Scene Number: Don't number the scenes until you have decided on the final lineup. If you start numbering them too early in the process, you'll have to cross them out and re-number them several times.

First Table: This first box I refer to as "Housekeeping." It's the basic information. Fill in the boxes for location and day/time to plant your scene in time and place. I have also included a box for lighting/mood to get you thinking about the general mood of this scene.

Next, list the name of the main POV character for this scene. If you are writing a novel using third person and have several POV characters, list the name of the POV character whose point of view we are experiencing in this scene. List other characters who appear in the scene. List all of the objects in the scene: a cell phone, a stolen watch, a set of golf clubs, a thumb drive, or a time bomb. Finally, in the "Storyline" box, make a note if this scene is from your main story line or from a subplot.

Sensory Detail: To make your story lifelike and anchor your reader in the reality of your story world, engage their senses: sights, smells, textures, sounds, and flavors. Don't rely on generic locations, like "an office building." Make your scene pop off the page by adding specific and unique details and describing how your characters react to them. Describe the sounds she's hearing, or describe her reaction to nasty food.

Objective and Obstacles: Remember Chapter Three, where I gave you a diagram for the linking scenes and the big moments? This is where you list your characters' objectives, obstacles, and adjustments. At the beginning of the scene, you should know exactly what your character wants. What is her objective when she arrives at the scene? In good stories, the character never just gets what she wants. She always hits at least one obstacle, maybe more. It could take the form of other characters that are competing for the same thing she wants. Or, maybe, they just don't want to see her succeed, and they get in her way.

It could be simple physical obstacles that get in her way. Let's say she wants to get into the building to find the planted money. But once she arrives, she discovers a barbed-wire fence, an alarm system, and at least a dozen security guards preventing her from entering the building. Why do we do this? Because how she solves the problems creates drama and reveals her character to your readers. What does she do? Does she call for backup? Does she give up and go home? Does she come up with a new plan? How will this new plan change the direction of your story?

Along the side is our mandala plot chain. The top linking chain reminds you to chart the objectives, obstacles, and adjustments in the scene. You might use your color-coding system to keep your plot organized. This can be as simple or as elaborate as you want. Is this a linking scene? Use a highlighter to color in the top linking symbol. Is this a big moment scene? Highlight or color in the ego/shadow/persona symbol in the middle of the chain. If you have scenes using a different POV character or a different time line, use color as a visual cue. Place your MSP sheets in your binder, so you can easily flip through them and visually track your plot.

Main Plot Actions And Emotional Reactions: In this box, list the series of actions and reactions that take place in the scene. I know, this will take time, but the time you devote to this process will save you at least one major revision of your project. Make sure you have everything you want this scene to accomplish. Heap on the conflict, highlight the emotions, heighten all your elements—the shadow issues, the egos, and the personas. Show your theme being argued back and forth among your characters.

Review all the worksheets you filled out in your planning sessions, and integrate all the ideas and elements you explored. Hopefully, since the time you wrote the first draft, you will have new ideas of what to add or subtract from this scene. If you discover scenes that really aren't working, but had elements that you want to keep, make notes here and figure out how to consolidate these elements into another scene. If you need to add a brand-new scene, describe it here on the MSP, adding all the details you need to make the scene work and how it links with the previous scene and with the next scene.

Offstage: For those who are writing tightly woven plots, this next section is very helpful. It tracks important events that are happening offstage. As an example, let's say you're writing a murder mystery, and in this scene, your detective is interviewing a suspect. While this interview is going on, the real killer is doing something dastardly to cover his tracks—killing someone else, getting rid of the murder weapon, or planning his escape. For stories with many time lines, this is a great way to remind yourself of what is going on with other characters while this current scene unfolds..

Adapt this form to best serve the story you want to tell. Once you have completed all of them, you'll find it much easier to plan your next revision. I suggest you start each writing session by taking up one completed MSP at a time. Review it, write any last-minute details that you want to add, and then focus all of your concentration on this one scene. It will be easier to do because you won't have to worry about how this scene meshes with the next—you've already decided on your plot sequence ahead of time. But before you grab your coffee and fire up your computer, in the next chapter I have some tips on how to accomplish the last goal on our list: writing that balances the needs of the plot and allows your unique voice to be heard.

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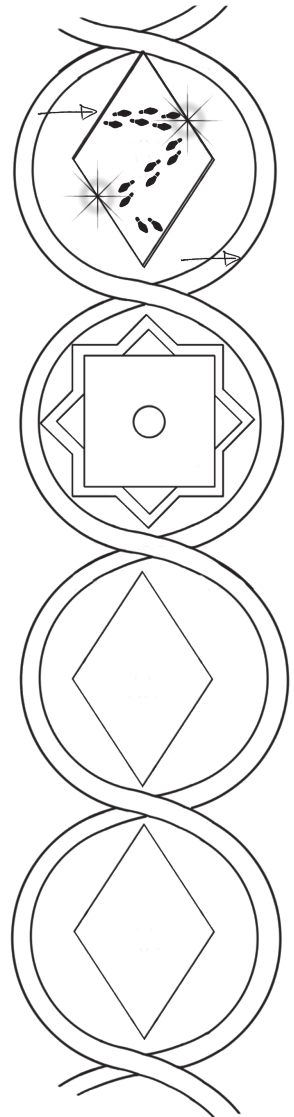
Scene Name: _____ Scene #: _____

Location:	Other Characters:
Time & Day:	Objects:
POV Character:	Storyline:

Sensory Details:

Objective & Obstacles:

Main Plot Actions & Emotional Reactions:



Offstage:
