

Action Writing!

Helping pupils write effective
action sequences in fiction.
Bring on the blood, the gore,
and the disaster stories!

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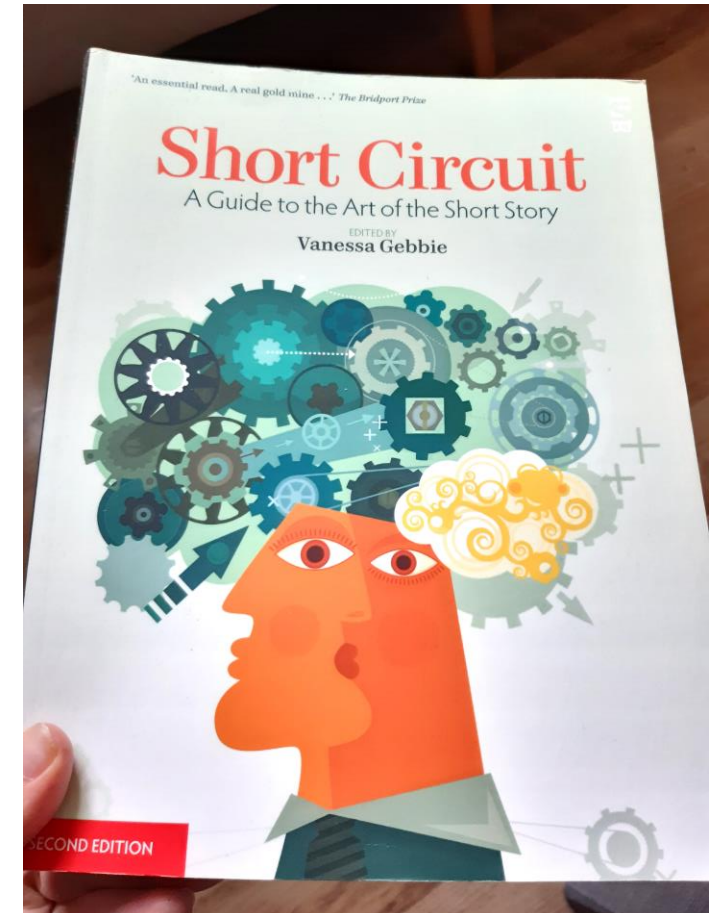
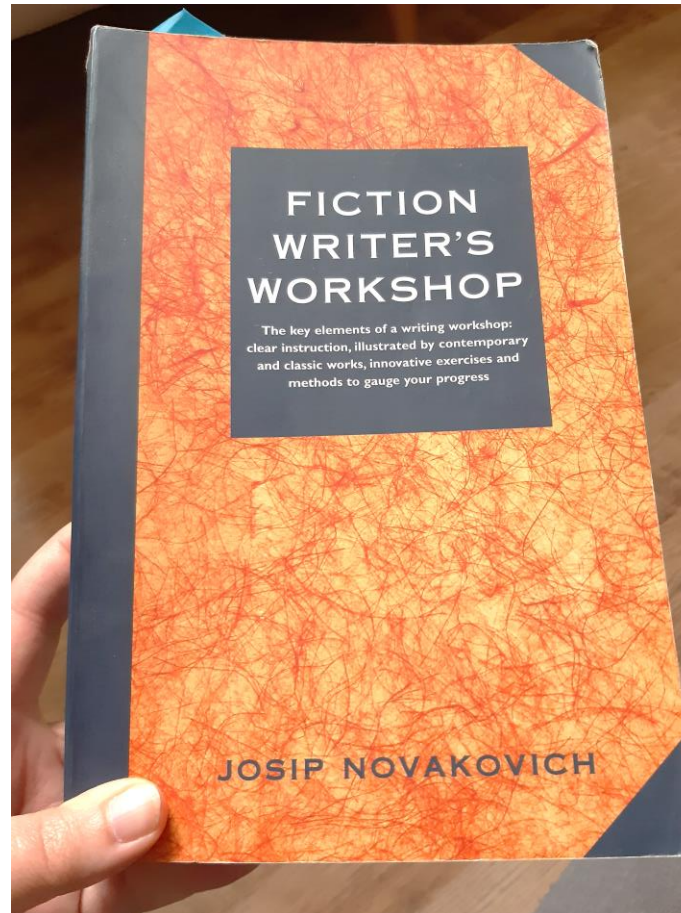
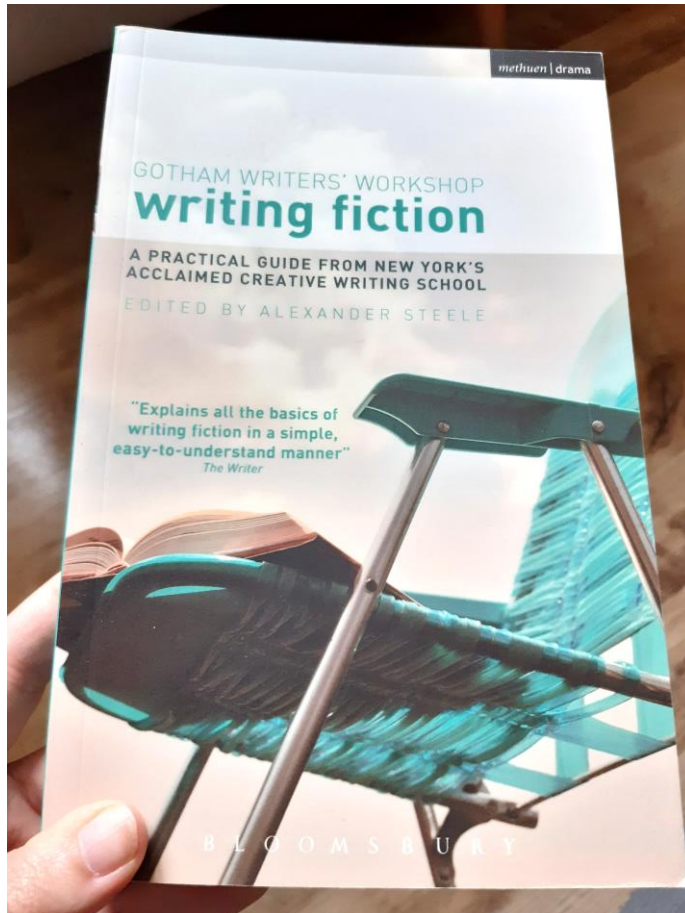
The Plan

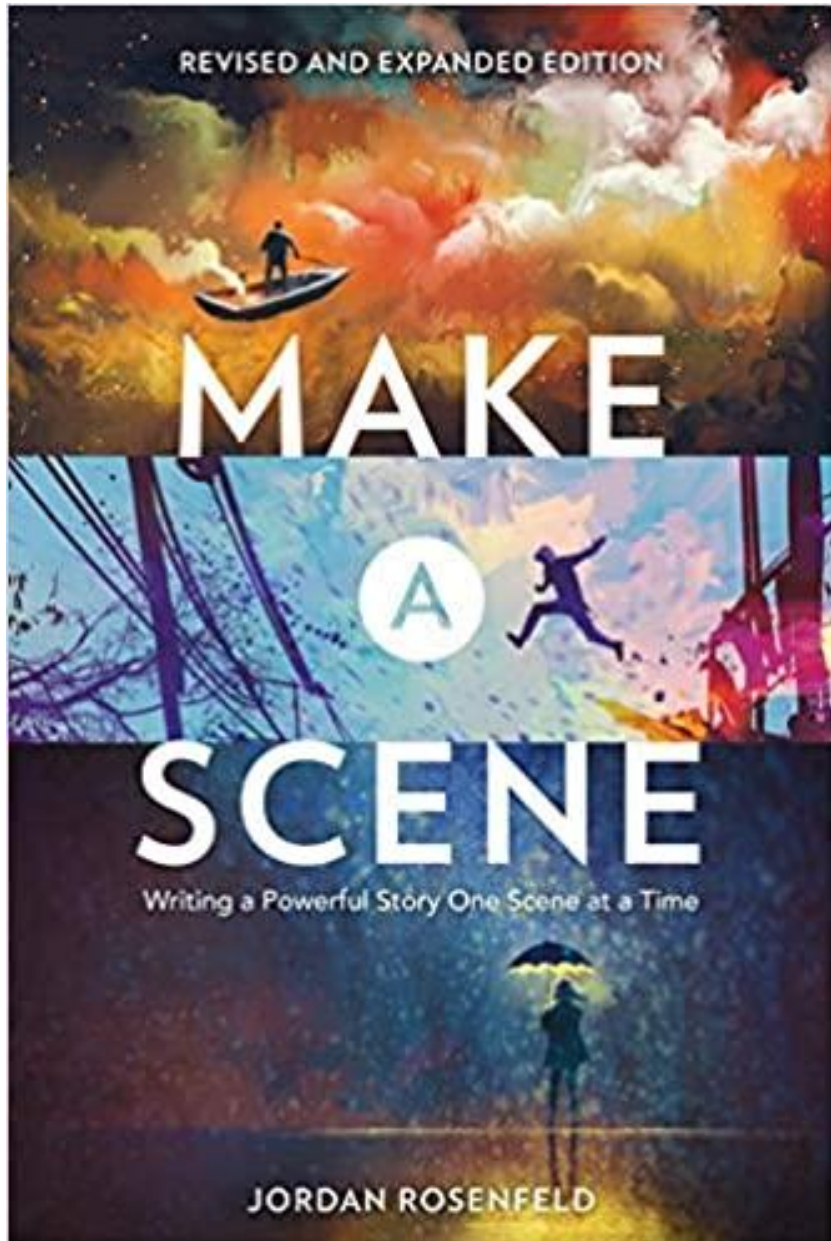
Be ready to write! Grab a pen and paper. Get stuck right in.

- Short story writing in school
- Why we MUST teach students to write action!
- Activity 1: It's all about the nouns and the verbs
- Activity 2: Shot by shot create your scene
- Activity 3: Tension and interruptions



My Go-Tos





Jordan E. Rosenfeld, author of *Make a Scene*,

“The only requirement of an action scene is that it rely in part upon physical movement through the space you’ve created, and evoke a sense of time passing.”

Short story writing in school

- We are asking pupils to write a very specialised type of fiction. One with form, structure and language all of its own
- A definite moment in time
- Simplicity is key
- Limited structure
- Requires clarity and precision



We must teach action

- Every narrative requires action
- It is a challenging, technical element of writing
- We must be careful about limits
- Beware teaching to our comfort level
- Your students will surprise you!



Write your answer to Section B here:

Three sharp knocks. Loud and clear, the sounds flew down the wooden banisters, darted through the grand rooms and skirted across the aged carpet, reverberating through the doorways as they went, before finally coming to rest on my eardrums. My ^{grip} hands immediately loosened on the cutlery I held, my eyes widening. I barely registered the metallic clatter as they fell to the table, for my mind was instantly

- Start where they are
- Take the same steps you do with everything else in writing
- Break it down into manageable steps

In a raging outburst he grabbed the helper's hair and yanked it so hard that she flew across the room. Screaming in anger and outrage, she left. Left him, left me. Alone. With this cold-hearted monster with ice running through his veins. He was

Activity 1

- All writing should start with word work

Nouns

- Take your students on a word learning journey from 'surfer, surf board, sea' to wave, crest, swells, breakers, ebb and flow, riptide. Take them from surfer to torso, shoulders, neck, fingers, deltoid etc

Verbs

- From 'jump' to paddling, switch, shift, change, glide, break, paddle

Get technical <https://www.surfertoday.com/surfing/the-glossary-of-surfing-terms> or
<https://www.activekids.com/basketball/articles/33-basketball-terms-every-kid-should-know>



Activity 1

Adjectives

- Add detail. Very precise detail
- Details like shape, size, texture, age, colour
- Avoid emotive adjectives (menacing)
- Focus on creating exact colours and exact shapes

I hit Shelley under the jaw, and he stepped back and swung at me. I shrugged my shoulder up and took the punch on it. I hit Shelley four times, three lefts and a right in the face. He stumbled back, blood rushing from his nose.

— Robert B. Parker, *Early Autumn*



Activity 1



Nouns (for precision)	Adjectives (for detail)
Verbs (for movement)	Description

Activity 2

The shot thundered across the beach, an echo of the waves. The lead bullet broke his bottom right incisor, tore through his palate, just above his upper teeth, punched through the lower bone of his eye socket, and broke through the skin just in front of his left ear. He staggered back, then dropped down into a sitting position. Pain shot through his head. The blood dripped warmly down his cheek. His left eye wouldn't focus.

But he was alive.

— Deon Meyer, *Dead Before Dying*



Activity 2

Shot by shot creating the scene

- Break the moment of action down
- Create 5 phases
- Add verbs for each phase, what is your character doing? What is happening around them?
- Collect your nouns and adjectives, aim for precision and accuracy



Activity 2



Brainstorm verbs for each of the 5 phases:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Add nouns and precise adjectives as well:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Now it's time to write:

Activity 3

- **Add urgency to actions.**
Describe characters caught in a time-sensitive process
- **Interrupt actions with other actions.**
If a character is bolting along an underground passage, they can also be searching their pockets for their phone, a treasured item, a weapon.
- **Interrupt actions with dialogue**



Activity 3

Four minutes.

I tongue the gun barrel into my cheek and say, you want to be a legend Tyler, man, I'll make you a legend. I've been here from the beginning.

I remember everything.

Three minutes.

- Chuck Palahniuk, *Fight Club*



Activity 3



5 phases - nouns, adjectives, verbs	What creates urgency? How?
Interruptions (actions)	Interruptions (dialogue)
Now it's time to write:	

Mentor Texts

“God damn it — let’s stop this taking the Name of the Lord in vain!” — “Come on men! Let’s finish him!” The mob surged forward, led by one bold with a club; they were on him with rocks and fists, and then with feet as he went down. He went on talking while they kicked his ribs in and smashed his golden body, broke his bones and tore an ear loose. At last someone called out, “Back away so we can get the gasoline can on him.”

- Robert A. Heinlein, *Stranger in a Strange Land*

- Dramatic tension
- Action
- Very specific details
- Dialogue

Mentor Texts

Reacher half turned and half stepped back, toward his door, a fluid quarter circle, shoulders and all, and like he knew they would the two guys moved toward him, faster than he was moving, off-script and involuntary, ready to grab him. Reacher kept it going long enough to let their momentum establish, and then he whipped back through the reverse quarter circle toward them, by which time he was moving just as fast as they were, two hundred and fifty pounds about to collide head-on with four hundred, and he kept twisting and threw a long left hook at the left-hand guy. *Lee Child, Never Go Back*

Further Reading

- Lee Child's op-ed on writing suspense
<https://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/12/08/a-simple-way-to-create-suspense/>
- This website has practical advice and examples
<https://thewritelife.com/writing-action-scenes/>
- Sports commentary is one of the best ways to learn to write action. Once you start listening for the words (and not just the sport) you will see that commentators have some of the best verbs in the writing business.
- <https://thebiglead.com/2014/02/21/doc-emrick-used-153-words-to-describe-puck-movement-in-the-usa-canada-game/>
- <https://thebiglead.com/2013/06/16/doc-emrick-said-pass-53-different-ways-in-game-2-of-the-stanley-cup-finals/>