

PROBLEM-SOLVING PASSAGES

by Mike Klaassen

In the real world of fiction, from a rough draft to a published novel, passages of writing may be classified into four groups: (1) scenes, (2) sequels, (3) passages that are *neither* scenes nor sequels, and (4) passages that include elements of *both* scenes and sequels.

Passages that include elements of both scenes and sequels may be divided into two types: (1) passages with an unclear purpose, and (2) problem-solving passages.

An example of a problem-solving passage can be found in *Hatchet*, where young Brian tries to figure out what he can eat in the wilderness.¹ The passage begins with Brian's determination to find food, a clear goal (an element of scene) but no plan to achieve it (assessment of his situation is an element of a sequel). He digresses into recollection of a Thanksgiving meal at home, which only makes his saliva flow and his stomach growl (the emotion of frustration, which is an element of both scenes and sequels). He considers options (an element of the analysis phase of a sequel), such as finding lizards, but selects berries as his optimal choice. Brian plans a course of action that he hopes will let him find berries without getting lost before dark (planning is an element of the analysis phase of sequels). He makes a decision (which is the final phase of a sequel).

The passage described above could be classified as a sequel (with the elements of emotion, review, analysis, planning, and decision), or it could be classified as a scene (with a goal, multiple attempts, and a resolution).

Problem-solving passages are particularly useful in mystery stories. For example, Dan Brown uses problem-solving passages extensively in *The Da Vinci Code*.ⁱⁱ They are also common in *The General's Daughter* by Nelson DeMille,ⁱⁱⁱ and in *Without Fail*, by Lee Child.^{iv}

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ⁱ Paulsen, *Hatchet*, 57-61.

ⁱⁱ Brown, *The Da Vinci Code*, 68-70, 91-98, and 157-161.

ⁱⁱⁱ DeMille, *The General's Daughter*, 29-33, 54-65, 78-79.

^{iv} Child, *Without Fail*, 460-473.