

# STRUCTURAL UNITS OF FICTION WRITING

by Mike Klaassen

As fiction writers, we need to establish a common language regarding the *structural units of fiction writing*,<sup>i</sup> the format for constructing fiction from individual words to a complete novel. No doubt you are familiar with much of the terminology, but the relationship between the units is also important.

The smallest units of writing are words, phrases, clauses, sentences, and paragraphs. Duh! But what do you call two or more paragraphs with some common purpose? For lack of a better term, we generally refer to such "chunks" of writing as *passages* or *segments* of writing.

A *chapter* is a segment of writing delineated by chapter breaks. In a manuscript, you create chapter breaks by inserting a page break at the end of a chapter and by starting the next page with a chapter title partway down the page. The prologue and the epilogue are two specialized types of chapters.

A chapter may include one or more *sections*, passages separated by one or more section breaks. In manuscript format, you create a section break by leaving two blank lines. In printed novels a section may be delineated with a blank line, a bar, or some other symbol, such as a squiggly line. Some novels, especially long ones, may be further divided into *books* or *parts*, each including two or more chapters.

Where do scenes and sequels fit as structural units of fiction writing? Remember the definitions of scenes and sequels? A *scene* is a passage of writing in which a character attempts to achieve a goal. A *sequel* is a passage of writing in which a

character reflects on the resolution of a scene. Scenes and sequels are specialized passages of writing (i.e., subsets of the units we call passages of writing).

Each of these units has a role. As writers we need to recognize each one, know its purpose, and understand how to use it to construct our story. A chapter includes at least one passage of writing, but it may include many passages. Passages within a chapter may consist of (1) scenes, (2) sequels, (3) fragments of scenes and sequels, (4) passages that are neither scenes nor sequels, and (5) passages that include elements of both scenes and sequels.

Well-defined concepts and terminology, such as the structural units of fiction, foster greater understanding of the craft; and with greater understanding comes the skill by which we can develop stories to their full potential.

## LEARN MORE

Mike Klaassen is the author of *Scenes and Sequels: How to Write Page-Turning Fiction*, which is available for order at traditional and online bookstores. You may "Look Inside" the book at [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com).

This article was adapted from an excerpt of *Scenes and Sequels: How to Write Page-Turning Fiction* by Mike Klaassen. Copyright 2016 and 2022 Michael John Klaassen. All rights reserved.

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<sup>1</sup> Klaassen, Mike, *Scenes and Sequels: How to Write Page-Turning Fiction*, 3. ISBN: 9781682229071.