

Scott Editorial

Building Internal Reflection

A practical worksheet for bringing the reader closer to your character.



Readers do not only need to know what a character does. They need enough access to the character's internal world to understand what events mean to them. This exercise will help you add emotion, thought and reflection without stopping the scene.

Find an external scene

Choose 300–500 words from your manuscript where something happens to your character. Look for a section with plenty of action or dialogue but relatively little insight into the character's emotional response.

What happens in the scene?

What is the character's immediate or surface emotion?

Go beneath the surface

Now ask what sits underneath that first emotion. Characters rarely experience emotions one at a time.

- Anger might be hiding humiliation.
- Relief might be accompanied by guilt.
- Happiness might contain apprehension.
- Jealousy might come from fear of being replaced.

What is your character really feeling, and what might they be trying not to feel?

Ask what this means to them

Answer these questions from your character's perspective. You do not need to put every answer into the manuscript. The aim is to understand what is happening beneath the visible scene.

What am I feeling right now?

What am I trying not to feel?

What am I afraid might happen next?

What does this situation remind me of?

What am I assuming about the other person?

What do I want to say but won't?

What do I want to happen?

What am I pretending doesn't matter?

Find the moment of reaction

Return to the original scene. After each significant action, revelation or line of dialogue, ask whether the character has had an opportunity to react.

“I’m leaving,” he said.

The next line does not necessarily need to be another piece of dialogue or an action. A brief thought, physical sensation, memory or observation can show the reader what those words mean to the character.

Rewrite

Rewrite the scene, adding internal reflection where it feels natural. Avoid explaining every emotion. Let thoughts, physical responses, memories and observations carry some of the emotional weight. Internal reflection should work alongside action and dialogue, not replace them.

Final check

- Do I understand the character better?
- Do I know why this moment matters to them?

- Are their emotions more complex than simply happy, sad, angry or afraid?
- Does the reflection sound like this particular character?
- Have I allowed important moments enough space?
- Does the scene still move?

Internal reflection is not about telling the reader everything a character thinks. It is about letting them experience what the story means to that character.