

PUSH ME PULL ME

HOW TO ADD TENSION TO YOUR NOVEL

By Jan Cline

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What is tension?

- Anticipation
- Emotional Flirtation
- Uncertainty

How can you reflect these through your writing? Recall what makes YOU feel or experience them and write down what circumstances happened to bring them about. Use those instances to inflict anticipation, emotional flirtation, and uncertainty for your characters.

What does tension do?

- Creates questions
- Provides emotional experience
- Holds readers attention

The difference between children's books and adult books is tension. Tension demands you think, ask, and pay attention. It's the emotional hold you have on your reader. When you provide tension, you make the reader happy. (even when they don't realize it)

If you want some good examples of tension in story, watch these movies:

“Where Eagles Dare” 1969 WW2 with Richard Burton

“Rear Window” 1954 Hitchcock with Jimmy Stewart

“Rope” 1948 Hitchcock with Jimmy Stewart

Characterization:

You need a sympathetic character for your reader to care about.

Emotions come from the PLEASURE OR PAIN the character is experiencing.

What to know about your character – what are their:

- Fears
- Worries
- Attachments
- Goals
- Personality
- Values

How can you use characterization to create tension?

- Pit two characters against each other.
- Give hope – pull it back.
- Build high worth for the sake of your reader.
- Physical limitations.
- Just say no - Make them wait
- Body Language
- Personal Threat

Conflict also creates tension. How do you do that?

- ▶ Character against character
- ▶ Character against idea
- ▶ Idea against idea
- ▶ Character against external forces

Obstacles:

- ▶ *Internal:* Character's Fear, lack of knowledge, confusion
- ▶ *External:* other people, terrain, weather, war

Pacing: When your story is lagging, insert tension.

Tension will speed up the story with action or conflict. Dialogue will slow a scene down, but can still create tension. You need both speeds throughout your novel.

Stakes:

High obstacles + high stakes = Tension

Ask these questions to see if you have high stakes in the works:

- ▶ What is the worst thing that can happen to the character in this scene?
- ▶ What physical harm might come to them?
- ▶ What forces are coming against them, both real and unreal?
- ▶ Any dark secrets that could slip out?

- ▶ What will my character lose?
- ▶ Is there an external issue that is looming?

Lastly...

Setting: This may not be an obvious tension maker, but it's an important element to creating tension for your character. Look at your story to see if you can add any of these things to work for or against your character.

- ▶ Physical circumstances
- ▶ Perils, dangers
- ▶ Uncomfortable surroundings
- ▶ Bad memories
- ▶ Isolation, ugliness, cold, etc.
- ▶ Weather
- ▶ A place for your character to be

Read through your manuscript and see if you experience any tension as you read. All genres need some level of tension. It's what helps bond your readers to the characters and make your story unforgettable.