

Scene First Aid Kit

Triage for troublesome scenes



SAMPLE EDITION

Six of the twenty-four prescriptions

Keep within reach.

PENNY-FREE PRESS

About This Sample

Right up front: this is a sample of the kit — a selection of its problems and prescriptions, not the whole instrument.



IN THIS SAMPLE

The Scene X-Ray, the Vital Signs check, a short triage, and 6 of the 24 prescriptions (RX-01, RX-03, RX-04, RX-05, RX-06, RX-09) — enough to operate on a real scene tonight.

THE FULL VERSION INCLUDES

- All 24 prescriptions, and the complete two-page triage
- Six blank Scene X-Ray worksheets and two Scene Repair Logs
- The hyperlinked edition and the printable edition
- A one-page printable X-Ray sheet
- A printable Triage Sheet — the full checklist, for the wall above your desk

THE DELUXE PRESS2PLAY EDITION ADDS

- The Press2Play edition: press Second Opinion and the kit deals you a prescription — a second opinion you didn't pick
- All 24 prescriptions in the dealt set, five copies of each
- The “How Second Opinion Works” chapter, with the book's own stats

Sample \$0.99 · Full \$7.50 · Deluxe Press2Play \$12.50 — the ladder is on the back page.

How to Use This Kit



WHAT THIS KIT IS

A diagnostic tool, not a lesson. This kit isn't structured to teach — it's structured to help you jump in, get to the root of a problem, and get on the path to fixing it. You may learn a great deal along the way; most writers do. That's a side effect, not the syllabus.



1 — X-ray the scene

Fill in one Scene X-Ray worksheet. Name the want, the obstacle, the stakes, and the turn. Most ailments show up right here.



2 — Run triage

Check your symptoms on the triage list. Each one points to a prescription.



3 — Apply the prescription

Do the exercise on the page, then rewrite. One ailment at a time — don't operate on everything at once.

Start with the Scene X-Ray →

Scene X-Ray

Fill this in before you touch a single sentence.

_____ ◆ _____

Scene / Chapter _____

POV character _____

What do they want? (one sentence) _____

Who or what opposes them? _____

What's at stake if they fail? _____

The turn: value at start _____ → at end _____

Unanswered question for the reader _____

VITAL SIGNS (1-5)

Conflict ☐ Stakes ☐ Change ☐

Want clarity ☐ Momentum ☐

Total ____ / 25 Under 15? Run triage.

DIAGNOSIS

Triage

Check every symptom that applies. Follow the tag to its prescription.

-
- 
-
- ☐ I skim when I re-read it **RX-1** **RX-5**
 - ☐ I could stop reading mid-scene **RX-3**
 - ☐ It's all dialogue **RX-4**
 - ☐ The first page is throat-clearing **RX-5**
 - ☐ Paragraphs of explanation **RX-6**
 - ☐ Nothing feels at risk **RX-3**
 - ☐ The ending fizzles **RX-9**

ALSO IN THE FULL KIT

RX-2 The Scene Doesn't Turn
RX-7 Muddy Want
RX-8 No Tension
RX-10 Plot Puppets
RX-11 Wallpaper Setting
RX-12 The Mercy Cut
RX-13 The Flawless Hero
RX-14 Everything on the Nose
RX-15 The Convenient Rescue

RX-16 Head-Hopping
RX-17 Summary in a Scene's Clothing
RX-18 Too Polite
RX-19 Emotions from Nowhere
RX-20 The Scene That Won't Leave
RX-21 Everyone Sounds Alike
RX-22 The Morning After
RX-23 The Beautiful Corpse
RX-24 The Dangling Promise

RX-01 

Nothing Happens



SYMPTOM

You skim your own scene. Nobody seems to be doing much.

DIAGNOSIS

No one wants anything badly enough, or nothing stands in their way. A scene without opposition is a summary.

PRESCRIPTION

1. Name what every character in the scene wants — write each want down.
2. Give someone the opposite want. If she wants to leave, he needs her to stay.
3. Make them fight for it with words AND action. No one gets anything for free.

TRY THIS

Rewrite the first three lines as a confrontation.

RX-03 

Low Stakes

SYMPTOM

A reader could put the book down mid-scene and not hurry back.

DIAGNOSIS

Nothing will be lost if the character fails — or the loss is abstract and far away.

PRESCRIPTION

1. Make it personal: tie the outcome to the character's wound or deepest need.
2. Add a ticking clock — a real one, on the page.
3. Show one consequence happening now, not three chapters from now.

TRY THIS

Ask: what does the POV stand to lose in the next five minutes? Write the answer into the scene.

RX-04



Talking Heads



SYMPTOM

Pages of dialogue floating in a white room. You can't see anyone.

DIAGNOSIS

Bodies and place went missing. Readers experience scenes through the senses, not just speech.

PRESCRIPTION

1. Put an object in someone's hands — a cup, a letter, a weapon.
2. Every three or four exchanges, one action beat: a look, a movement, a touch.
3. Let the setting interrupt: weather, a noise, someone arriving.

TRY THIS

Take one dialogue-only passage and stage it: where is everyone standing, and what are their hands doing?

RX-05



Saggy Opening



SYMPTOM

Throat-clearing: weather, waking up, commuting thoughts. The scene starts before it starts.

DIAGNOSIS

You began too early. Readers don't need the approach — they need the collision.

PRESCRIPTION

1. Cut the first two paragraphs. Start where it gets interesting.
2. Enter late: drop us mid-action or mid-decision and let the reader catch up.
3. Open on a choice, a disruption, or a desire — never on routine.

TRY THIS

Delete the opening and read what's left. If it still makes sense, the cut was correct.

RX-06



Info Dump



SYMPTOM

Paragraphs of explanation. Backstory, worldbuilding, history — all at once.

DIAGNOSIS

Exposition without conflict is a lecture. Readers retain what a character needs under pressure.

PRESCRIPTION

1. Keep only what the POV character needs RIGHT NOW to act.
2. Deliver it through conflict — someone who doesn't want to tell.
3. Turn the rest into a question or a problem for later.

TRY THIS

Highlight every explanation. For each: who needs it, and what happens if they don't get it yet? Cut the orphans.

RX-09



Flat Ending



SYMPTOM

The scene fizzles. It resolves, tidies up, and lies down.

DIAGNOSIS

Everything got settled. Resolved scenes release the reader — you want to hand them forward.

PRESCRIPTION

1. End on a decision, a revelation, or a new complication — never on comfort.
2. The last line should point forward, not backward.
3. Try cutting the final paragraph. End one beat earlier and see what happens.

TRY THIS

Read only your last three lines aloud. If they summarize, replace them with a door opening.

Vital Signs

Score a finished scene. Be honest — the patient can't feel it.

Circle a number 1–5 for each sign, then add them up.

Conflict

Is someone opposed, on the page?

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

Stakes

Is something lost if they fail?

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

Change

Does a value turn by the end?

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

Want clarity

Could you state the goal in one sentence?

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

Momentum

Does the last line point forward?

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

Total ____ / 25

20–25: healthy. 15–19: one prescription. Under 15: run full triage and operate.

Scene X-Ray

Fill this in before you touch a single sentence.

_____ ◆ _____

Scene / Chapter _____

POV character _____

What do they want? (one sentence) _____

Who or what opposes them? _____

What's at stake if they fail? _____

The turn: value at start _____ → at end _____

Unanswered question for the reader _____

VITAL SIGNS (1-5)

Conflict ☐ Stakes ☐ Change ☐

Want clarity ☐ Momentum ☐

Total ____ / 25 Under 15? Run triage.

DIAGNOSIS

Scene X-Ray

Fill this in before you touch a single sentence.

_____ ◆ _____

Scene / Chapter _____

POV character _____

What do they want? (one sentence) _____

Who or what opposes them? _____

What's at stake if they fail? _____

The turn: value at start _____ → at end _____

Unanswered question for the reader _____

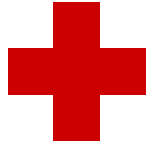
VITAL SIGNS (1-5)

Conflict ☐ Stakes ☐ Change ☐

Want clarity ☐ Momentum ☐

Total ____ / 25 Under 15? Run triage.

DIAGNOSIS



The Full Kit

You've used six of the twenty-four prescriptions. The full Scene First Aid Kit carries all twenty-four, the two-page triage, the repair logs — and comes in editions for every kind of writer.

THE EDITIONS

Combo • \$7.50

The full hyperlinked kit, a printable edition with page numbers instead of links, and the one-page X-Ray sheet for your printer.

Deluxe • \$12.50

Everything in the Combo, plus the Press2Play edition — press Second Opinion and the kit hands you a prescription to try.



etsy.com/shop/PennyFreePress

penny-free.com