

How can I create tension in my writing?



In the video we talk you through a few methods to consider if you want to build tension in your writing. Use this work sheet to expand on those methods and consider a few more:

In the following extract the writer uses a form of slow motion in writing to build the tension in the description of a train crash.

Can you find the following devices in this extract?

- Adverbs to build tension
- Sentence variety
- Verbs to add to the pace of the action
- Adjectives to build the imagery
- Emotive language
- Sensory description

I didn't even know anything was wrong until it had happened. We were travelling fast, whizzing through green fields and clumps of woodland when I felt a slight lurch as if invisible arms had reached down and pulled me out of my seat. That was all there was at first, a sort of mechanical hiccup. But then I had the strange sensation that the train was flying. It was like a plane at the end of the runway, the front of the train separating from the ground. It could only have lasted a couple of seconds but in my memory those seconds seem to stretch out for ever.

I remember my uncle's head turning, the question forming itself on his face. And my aunt, perhaps realising what was happening before we did, opening her mouth to scream. I remember the other passengers; I carry snapshots of them in my head. A mother with two small daughters, both with ribbons in their hair. A man with a moustache, his pen hovering over The Times crossword. A boy of about my own age, listening to a Walkman. The train was almost full. There was hardly an empty seat in sight. And then the smash of the impact, the world spinning upside down, windows shattering, coats and suitcases tumbling down, sheets of paper whipping into my face, thousands of tiny fragments of glass swarming into me, the deafening scream of tearing metal, the sparks and the smoke and the flames leaping up, cold air rushing in and then the horrible rolling and shuddering that was like the very worst sort of fairground ride only this time the terror wasn't going to stop, this time it was all for real.

Silence.

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Before you begin writing think about how you want the reader to feel once they have read your work.

Look at the following paragraph:

This time I was underwater, running, feet sinking deeper and deeper into the bed. The surface was within reach if I raised my arms, but I couldn't get my head out of the water. I had to breathe, the compulsion to inhale is huge. But I can't, I mustn't.

- How does the character feel?
- Highlight the words and phrases that show you this.
- Look at the extract again, what effect does the final sentence have?

This paragraph could be used in your account. But it needs some work.

Edit this paragraph using the techniques you have learnt, You can then incorporate it into your final version.

I was very scared when I heard some say "Do not move".

I felt like I had frozen. I couldn't move even if I wanted to. There was going to be a lot of effects of not being able to move in this situation.

Suddenly, a person stared at me and I knew he was angry. I knew I had to get away but I didn't know how to get away from this big man.

You are going to attempt the following task.

Write an account of a visit to a doctor's or dentist's surgery.

You firstly need to plan what your response is going to be.

You then need to think about how you could build tension into the story.

Possible sentences stems:

- With my heart thumping, I slowly but carefully...
- Looming menacingly before me...
- Without warning...
- It was as if...
- It was silent; eerily silent.
- The sight of...
- I tried to scream but nothing came out.