



EMOTIONAL PROGRESSION EXAMPLE

Scene Plotting: Emotional Responses

Plotting a range of emotional ups and downs makes for compelling reading. This chart helps you plan a character's emotional responses to escalating tension and conflict in a scene. It also allows you to brainstorm how those responses can be shown rather than told (for more information on how emotions can effectively be shown, see the [Emotion Thesaurus](#)). Below is an example of how this chart might be used for one scene. For your own blank template, click [here](#).

What event triggers your character's next emotional response? Remember that emotions may increase in intensity, decrease, shift to a new feeling, or even cause a character to experience several feelings (even conflicting ones) simultaneously. Choose a logical sequence that will engage readers.

TIP: increase tension using THE RULE OF 3 if it fits your scenario. If your scene has less than 3 conflict-building events, leave the circles you don't need blank

ONE STOP
FOR
WRITERS

Is late picking son up from preschool; can't find car keys

EMOTION AND STRENGTH:

FRUSTRATION, ANXIETY

(LOW, **MEDIUM**, HIGH)

SHOWN THROUGH (DIALOGUE, THOUGHTS, ACTIONS, VISCERALS):

Shakes out the contents of her purse on the table, swears profusely, scrabbles through items, knocks things to the floor, thoughts are foggy from waking up from a nap and full of self-directed anger at falling asleep in the first place

EVENT 1:

Finds keys but hits road construction and must detour

EMOTION AND STRENGTH:

RELIEF (**HIGH**) then ANGER

(LOW, **MEDIUM**, HIGH)

SHOWN THROUGH (DIALOGUE, THOUGHTS, ACTIONS, VISCERALS): Shoves wallet into purse, pushes feet into the closest pair of shoes, and runs out the door. Guns car engine, curses slow traffic, hit road block, slams fist against the wheel, curses, clock-watches to see time slip away

EVENT 2:

Preschool calls cell to find out why no one has picked child up

EMOTION AND STRENGTH:

EMBARRASSMENT, SHAME

(LOW, MEDIUM, **HIGH**)

SHOWN THROUGH (DIALOGUE, THOUGHTS, ACTIONS, VISCERALS): Answers call, voice snappy but quickly turning apologetic once realizing it's the preschool, stumbles over an excuse about traffic, lies about being only five minutes away, mentally beats oneself up for falling asleep again, dramatizes how son must feel (wondering why his mom didn't show, standing by the door all alone, etc.)

EVENT 3:

Arrives at preschool; son is no longer there

CHARACTER'S FEELINGS AT THE END OF THE SCENE:

DISBELIEF, ANGER, TERROR, PANIC

(LOW, MEDIUM, **HIGH**)

SHOWN THROUGH (DIALOGUE, THOUGHTS, ACTIONS, VISCERALS):

Stomach drops, voice warbles and changes pitch, blames staff for not watching one's son, roughly pushes past caregiver and starts running room to room while calling out son's name