

write

FIGHTS

right

Beginner's
guide for
writing
fight scenes



BY SARA FRANCIS

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A beginner's guide to writing fight scenes with
author and martial artist

SARA FRANCIS



Publishing & Media

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INTRODUCTION

Fight scenes are intimidating for your characters and you as the writer. However, you don't have to jump in completely defenseless. In this short eBook, I'll provide you with enough tips and tricks to write fight scenes like a champion.

WHAT'S INSIDE THIS EBOOK

There are fight explanations, examples, and questions you need to ask yourself and the fighters before writing. You can be as vague or in-depth as you'd like. This is meant to guide you in writing the most immersive and fun fight scenes!

WHY SARA FRANCIS CAN TALK ABOUT FIGHT SCENES:

- » SF is a third degree black belt in Tae Kwon Do
- » Wrote 3+ novels and stories with battles, fight scenes, brawls, etc.
- » 12 years experience in multiple martial arts
- » Over 20 medals and trophies for fighting/martial arts
- » Only reads books with epic action sequences
- » Literally practices what she preaches



Now, enough about me...

LET'S WRITE FIGHTS RIGHT!

THE BASICS

In every martial art, beginners always start with the basics. They are the foundations of every fight, form, and technique. The same goes for writing. You have to start at the beginning in order to reach the end.

1. ASSESS THE SITUATION

Outside of knowing **who** is going to be in the fight, you have to recognize **3 things** before any punches are thrown:

- » Where they are fighting
- » What they are fighting for
- » How they will be fighting

1.A. WHERE THEY ARE FIGHTING

You have to define the setting of the fight before anything happens. While this may be easy with the scene you've already written, you have to pay attention to the minor details.

Ask yourself the following questions.

- » What is the location of the fight?
- » Is there anything in the location that may give a character an advantage/disadvantage?
- » Are there obstacles?
- » Are there other people around?
- » Will the setting change mid-fight?
- » Are there any magical/scientific properties?

1.B. WHAT THEY ARE FIGHTING FOR

Motivation is a key factor in any fight. There has to be a reason someone risks their life.

Ask yourself the following questions.

- » What is the objective/cause of the fight?
- » What will the outcome be?
- » Does the character have a personal MO?
- » Will they be mentally/physically damaged by the fight?
- » What is going on inside the characters heads as the fight ensues?

1.C. HOW THEY WILL BE FIGHTING

Each individual has a different fighting style. Decide which style is best for your characters. (Check out “1. The Fighters” on page 7) This will highly impact their performance and the outcome of the fight.

Ask yourself the following questions.

- » Is it war, a battle, or one-on-one?
- » Is there magic involved?
- » What weapons do the characters prefer?

2. KNOW HOW DESCRIPTIVE YOUR SCENES WILL BE

Before you write anything, you have to know how fight-y your fight scenes are going to be. This is up to you and is based on your story’s needs. Not every fight scene has to be so long and elaborate. Even a short paragraph that is well written and immersive does the job just fine. Too long of a fight scene may disinterest or bore a reader. Regardless, to write any fight scene effectively you have to understand the basics and your characters.

Things to remember:

- » Will this progress the story and/or character development?
- » What length fight scene makes sense in my story?
- » Will I have multiple fights in one chapter? Is it too much or too little?
- » Will my lengthy fight scene disinterest a reader? Will a short one be not enough?

THE FIGHTERS AND THE FIGHT

Now that you have a foundation, let’s go in depth to the fighters and the fight. This next section is going to be mostly a Q&A that you need to ask yourself before writing any fight scene. If you are only having one or two fights in your whole story, you don’t have to go so in-depth. However, if fighting is a big part of your writing, I would recommend answering these questions for each character that fights and keeping a list. That way your fight/fighters will be consistent and you always have something to go back to!

First, let’s talk about your fighters.

1. THE FIGHTERS

Answer these questions for each main fighter. This will help you better understand who you're dealing with as the writer. But remember: **your fighters will get tired**. They will get hit. No one is invincible. No matter their strength, everyone has limitations.

- ◆ What is their objective for the fight?
 - » *ex. Win? Kill? Flee? Incapacitate? Gain Intel?*
- ◆ Do they have experience?
- ◆ What is their body type?
 - » *How is their stamina?*
 - » *How strong are they?*
- ◆ Male or female?
 - » *Species? ex. human, mutant, bionic, monster, etc.*
- ◆ What is their fighting strength?
 - » *ex. do they fight best with their arms/legs; can they withstand blows; do they use weapons or magic; do they have enhanced limbs, etc.*
- ◆ Are they right or left handed?
- ◆ Are they more offensive or defensive?
- ◆ Weapons or no weapons?
- ◆ Magic or no magic?
- ◆ Do they have a secret advantage?
- ◆ What is their current mental state?
 - » *ex. if they were just in a fight, was it traumatic? Are they enraged, content, upset, or complacent? etc.*
- ◆ Are they already wounded?
- ◆ What are they wearing?
- ◆ Who needs to win in this story? What steps need to be taken to get there?
- ◆ Will the fighter not make it?

2. THE FIGHT

Now that you understand the “who”, time to go in depth with the “how” and “where”. These are all key factors in any fight.

- ◆ Where are they located?
- ◆ What is the terrain?
 - » *ex. rocky, wet, sand, outerspace, slippery, etc.*
- ◆ How is the air quality?
- ◆ Is there anyone else around them? If so, who?
- ◆ Are there obstacles?
- ◆ Are the resources in the location useable?
- ◆ Will they be remaining in the same location or will they move around?
- ◆ Is it a battle or personal fight?
- ◆ What is the gravity?
- ◆ Will outside forces (natural or non) impact their fight/performance?
- ◆ How is the visibility?
 - » *ex. How well can they see? What time of day is it?*

HAND-TO-HAND FIGHTING 101

There are so many styles of fighting. Karate, Tae Kwon Do, boxing, wrestling, the list goes on. While each martial art is different, they have similar techniques. Neither you nor your character need a black belt in each one to write moves effectively. **All you need is a little common sense and a basic understanding of three things:**

- » Stances
- » Offensive moves
- » Defensive moves

Before I explain these points, please note that **not every defensive move will work against an offensive and vice-versa**. You have to visualize the fight in your head as you're writing. If you need help understanding what one looks like, check out the resources page or just do a web search!

STANCES

Yes, standing is very important when fighting. Each martial art style has a different way of being on your feet. This impacts the strength of the fight and the moves they perform. I'll share a few styles and provide examples of how you would describe them! (All characters in the descriptions are from "The Terra Testimonies" series by yours truly.)

◆ Tae Kwon Do/Karate

- » STANCES: Square (forward facing). They stand up straight, have their guard up (or down, depending how experienced). Their weight is dropped into the center of their stances.
- » MOVES: Swift, pretty, and clean motions. They also fight with open handed techniques.
- » *BASIC DESCRIPTION EXAMPLE: Nik dug his heels into the ground and kept his shoulders square, facing me.*

◆ Boxing/Kick-Boxing

- » STANCES: "Turtle stance". Their shoulders are up and their hands are in front of their face. Their body is at a slant so if someone kicks, they can shift and the kick will slide right off. They're also light on their feet and have a bounce to their step.
- » MOVES: They fight with strong, closed fists unless they're grabbing and grappling.
- » *BASIC DESCRIPTION EXAMPLE: Shannon lifted her fists to her chin and raised her shoulders, protecting her pretty face. She put her left foot forward and stayed light on her feet, bouncing with each step.*

◆ Wrestling

- » STANCES: There are many different wrestling stances, but basically they keep their knees bent, eyes forward, hands in front of their face, and elbows bent.
- » MOVES: Wrestling has grabs, sweeps, and a lot of harsh strong movements.
- » *BASIC DESCRIPTION EXAMPLE: Goliath kept his head straight; eyes locked on me. His strong arms were bent, but his hands were out like he wanted to give me a death hug. His steps were heavy and he kept his weight down low.*

MOVES

Now you know how to stand, I'm going to go more in depth to the moves. I'll use the same three style categories and describe their most common offensive and defensive moves.

◆ Tae Kwon Do/Karate

» OFFENSIVE:

punches (mid, upper, hinge, uppercut, overhead)

kicks (round-house, front, side, hook, crescent, back, thrust)

knife-hands (*usually striking with the side of the hand*)

palm-heels

elbows and knees

head butts

grabs (groin, eyes, collar, neck)

sweeps (back leg, front leg)

» DEFENSIVE:

blocks* (outside, inside, overhead, low parry, double-handed)

side step

rolls

**fighters use the "meaty" part of the limbs to block the attacks and always get out of the way as they block.*

- » *BASIC DESCRIPTION EXAMPLE: Nik raised his leg and threw a powerful side kick. I blocked the attack with my forearm and jumped in close. I caught him off guard. Before he had time to react, I grabbed his shoulders and smashed my leg against his and swept his feet out from under him. He crashed to the ground and hit his head with a crack.*

◆ Boxing/Kick-Boxing

» OFFENSIVE:

punches (jab, cross, hook, uppercut)

kicks (round-house, thrust, side)

head locks

elbows and knees

grips/grabs

sweeps

» DEFENSIVE:

bob and weave

dodge

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catching a punch
parry a punch
turns

» *BASIC DESCRIPTION EXAMPLE: PH threw a jab at Shannon who dodged and retaliated with a right cross. It struck PH's chin hard, but he didn't budge. PH caught her uppercut with his forearm and elbowed her across the face, knocking her out.*

◆ Wrestling

» OFFENSIVE:

tie-ups/grabs (collar, wrist, inside triceps, neck, etc.)
head locks
underhook
breakdowns
chops
takedowns (single and double leg)
ankle pick

» DEFENSIVE:

rolls
sprawling
stance
aggressive offense

» *BASIC DESCRIPTION EXAMPLE: Goliath and Nic were face to face; stances low and ready to strike. Goliath tried going for the neck, but Nic shoved his meaty hands against his opponent's shoulders and shoved him back. As Goliath staggered, Nic grabbed his leg with both arms. With a grunt, Nic shoved his shoulder into Goliath's chest. Nic drove his opponent to the ground, crushing him with his massive weight.*

There is so much more to fighting, but hopefully this gives you a good idea!
Another thing to remember:

ALL MOVES MAKE A NOISE.

Don't forget to describe the sounds of the fight! Use words like

bang, bash, thwak, crack, thud, gasp, klok, shoop, slap, sock, wap, wham

Just make sure they make sense with your move!

WEAPON FIGHTING 101

In stories, *anything* can be used as a weapon: even a spoon. I tell you how to use your weapons. Rather, here are questions you need to answer regarding your artillery and/or magical items!

- ◆ How much ammo does it have? Will its magical properties deplete?
- ◆ Will it grow dull as the story ensues?
- ◆ Is it heavy?
- ◆ Can it break easily?
- ◆ How far away can you be before it becomes ineffective?
- ◆ Can something destroy it?
- ◆ Is it lethal?
- ◆ How much does the character rely on it?
- ◆ Does it have more functions?
- ◆ Can it strike multiple targets at once?
- ◆ Is it specific to the fighter?
- ◆ Does it inhibit any of the fighter's abilities?
- ◆ How do they wield it?
- ◆ Is it the fighters' weapon of choice?

PAIN

The final section. In every fight, someone will get hurt. Make sure you describe the pain, but make your fights realistic (within your universe).

- ◆ Will the fight incapacitate a fighter?
- ◆ Where will the fighter be struck? Will that impact the rest of their performance?
- ◆ Will anyone perish?
- ◆ Will blood be shed? Will bones break?
- ◆ Will the pain be only physical or will it also be emotional?

RESOURCES

Wow, you made it through the whole eBook! I hope this has been helpful for you. If you need assistance understanding moves or fighting, here is a list of resources for you to reference outside of this information.

SARA FRANCIS' PINTEREST (New resources every week!)

Fighting: https://www.pinterest.com/sarafrancis_author/fighting/

Writing: https://www.pinterest.com/sarafrancis_author/writings-book/

This is one of my favorite resources! I use it for writing and real-life fighting!

<https://lawofthefist.com/home/>

TAE KWON DO/KARATE

Offensive

<https://lawofthefist.com/all-taekwondo-kicks/>

<https://www.internationaltaekwon-dofederation.com/taekwondo/martial-arts/10-basic-moves-for-taewondo-beginners>

Defensive

<https://www.taekwondonation.com/taekwondo-blocks/#:~:text=The%20two%20most%20basic%20blocks,designed%20to%20block%20specific%20attacks.>

BOXING / KICKBOXING

Offensive

<https://www.punchfit.com.au/punchfit-articles/the-six-basic-boxing-punches-used-in-boxing-and-boxing-classes/>

<https://www.prevention.com/fitness/a20488468/kickboxing-moves-for-beginners/>

<https://coolmaterial.com/feature/best-places-to-punch-someone/>

Defensive

<https://www.sportsrec.com/429776-types-of-blocking-in-boxing.html>

WRESTLING

Offensive

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<https://www.kolat.com/offensive-tie-up-positions>

<https://www.coachup.com/nation/articles/4-basic-and-effective-wrestling-move>

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j_BkUZ3wOQA

Defensive

<https://www.coachup.com/nation/articles/defensive-wrestling-techniques>

SOUNDS

<https://www.writtensound.com/index.php?term=punch>

WEAPONS

Fire arms

<https://www.popularmechanics.com/military/weapons/a19138318/how-guns-work/>

<https://www.usconcealedcarry.com/blog/what-are-the-types-of-guns/>

Blades

<https://historycollection.com/16-deadly-bladed-weapons-in-history/2/>

<https://www.buyingasword.com/swords-by-name-2>

“Pre Modern Combat Weapons”

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_premodern_combat_weapons

I hope this book has helped! Until next time, happy writing!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sara Francis". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Sara Francis