

And Now, For a Change of Pace

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What is narrative pacing?

- The sequence of events, prose style, rhythm, and level of tension in the narrative that affect the readers' perceived unfolding of the story
- Highly subjective and judged against readers' experience and expectations
- Dependent on genre, sub-genre, category, length of book, tone, and author voice

What is the “right” pacing for your story?

- Pacing is inextricably tied to structure; control structure and you control pacing
- What are the conventions of your genre and category? What do readers expect?
- What kind of reader are you hoping to attract with this work?
- What is your vision for this story? What experience are you trying to deliver?
- Remember that faster is not always better! (A misunderstood bias exists.)
- Beware the advice to “hook” the agent/editor/reader with action

It's all about variation and balance!

- A monotonous dance track might be fast...but it's still boring
- Think less of overall speed and more in terms of tension and release, rhythm and flow
- At any given time, are things happening that are crucial to the narrative?
- Is tension building? When released in one area, is it cranked up in another?
- Spacing out fight scenes, heavy emotional confrontations, POVs, etc.
- Keep the reader anticipating *change*, even in the small, quiet character moments
- Direct, control, or twist the readers' expectations of what will happen

Speeding up

- Make your scenes accomplish multiple objectives at once
- Vary locations and character circumstances
- Action scenes need to be adequately set up and have resonant consequences

- Add tension, premonition, foreshadowing
- Cut extraneous description and be economical in scene setting
- Don't write "realistic" dialogue

Slowing down

- Biggest indication you might need to slow down: "there's too much going on"
- Give characters pockets of time even within the storm
- Give characters (and thus readers) opportunity to see and understand the world
- Use well-placed flashbacks, interludes, and exposition to punctuate the narrative
- Work in time to breathe and reflect after major plot or emotional turning points
- If your story feels too short, develop subplots and side character struggles, and flesh out aspects of the story to give them more nuance and depth. Don't pad word count.

Auditing your narrative pacing

- Read and dissect best-in-class work in your sub-genre and category to understand expectations and develop an intuitive feel for pacing
- Be careful about who you chose as CPs/beta readers. Find appropriate ones and rely on them to tell you where they feel like the story's pacing feels off.
- Probe not only for what feels slow but what feels rushed (e.g. parts that are confusing, events that are not well set up beforehand, characters that feel flat)
- Determine your average scene length and vary it for intended effects
- Color code your scenes and examine your structure