

Setting

How to create and sustain
a sharp sense of time and
place in your fiction.

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Even with great characters, a gripping plot and outstanding dialogue, a story isn't complete without the appropriate setting—the unifying element in most fiction. Jack Bickham shows how to use sensual detail, vivid language and keen observations to craft settings which help tell credible, interesting stories and heighten dramatic and thematic effects. Over the course of his esteemed career, Jack Bickham published more than novels and instructional books, including *Writing Novels That Sell* and *The 38 Most Common Fiction Writing Mistakes (and How to Avoid Them)*. A former creative writing professor, he instructed thousands of writers through his classes, seminars and *Writer's Digest* magazine articles.

Setting: How to Create and Sustain a Sharp Sense of Time and Place in Your Fiction Details

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Devon says

This is a great resource, but it can be a pretty dry topic.

Angela says

The writing's long-winded.

Katia M. Davis says

This was alright, some very useful topics on integrating setting with character emotion and theme to ground a piece of work and keep it moving at the same time. A little outdated on the research guidelines, but it was written in 1994. I tend to do most of my research online using things like Google Earth, JSTOR and local online newspapers. If I need to learn something such as the basics of dressage (not that I would!), I'd hit Google, a few related sites and then look for magazines or blogs/forums where I could interact with people. If it was something academic, I'd get an overview from basic sites from Google then I'd hit JSTOR to drill down for specifics, maybe visit a forum and speak to a few people more knowledgeable than me. I'd recommend this book for a general overview of setting and how it relates to your writing, but for the research side, go with updated methods, they are faster and a lot cheaper than travelling to a town to see how it smells or to check out what colour the roof of the town hall is.

Jessica Baumgartner says

Every writer needs to keep learning to sharpen their skills. This book probably aided writers more twenty years ago when it came out, but his examples and some of the tips are more damaging nowadays due to the modern style of writing meant keep readers engaged in the fast paced tech savvy world. I picked up some good info, but struggled to finish because it gets really dry past the halfway point.

Jakk Makk says

I'm fond of Jack Bickham's books, particularly "Scene and Structure." I benefitted and would recommend this to writers who haven't yet read a book on the subject.

Evelyn says

Competent, quick book. It kind of felt as though the chapter divides were arbitrary - everything was an extension of the main point, that setting determines character and plot types.

Serge Pierro says

Jack Bickham's "Setting" is another book in the "Elements of Fiction Writing". Here he addresses the topic of the setting of your story, and gives instruction on how to make your world lifelike. Another decent book in the series.

Rainboe Sims-Jones says

Bickham explains the importance of conducting adequate research when choosing a setting for a story. He elaborates on expectations of the reader, how the setting affects the characters moods and the tone of the story. Bickham offers many valuable insights, especially regarding research. He has extensive writing experience as detailed in his biography, leaving no doubt to the depth of his knowledge.

Brandon Peters says

Good tips throughout. I liked the significance he placed on setting, although I felt some of the techniques could easily feel forced (continually returning to a certain object in a setting to unify your story or using setting to move the readers perspective from big-picture action to introspective thoughts.)

Also, he includes many exercise ideas that require significant effort and research. I couldn't tell whether I thought they'd be worth while or not, but perhaps some writers might benefit much more from the book by taking the time to put his suggestions into practice that way.

Overall, the book didn't resonate with me enough to believe it was definitive in its ideas on setting, but I did come away with some good perspectives and ideas on how to improve in that area.

Alexandru says

Few examples, most of the time from his own books, and not at all exhaustive.

LeAnne says

Pretty basic, but then that is what this series is designed to be.

David Fortier says

I need to go back to this one since it is so important to fantasy writing, or perhaps find a newer source to help understand what I'm missing.

Theresa says

A very useful book on one of the least understood aspects of fiction writing.

Anna Erishkigal says

I have both this version and also the newer Elements of Fiction Writing book on setting (Description and Setting by Rozelle being the other version). Of the two, I found this one to be slightly more helpful in fleshing out the setting-as-a-character in my epic fantasy work. This is the older of the two, so it refers to other ways of absorbing-and-disseminating setting than the internet-research heavy newer version by Rozelle. When it comes to setting, there is nothing like being there and speaking to people who have been there to get a 'feel' for a place, I have discovered, and this book bears that bias (though once again both are useful).

Candace says

This book covers setting in relationship to plot, character, theme, mood, tone and atmosphere. It discusses setting as the backbone of your story, presenting factual material and how to fudge those facts, and the importance of history and the associated cultural attitudes. Lastly, this book looks at style--using precise language in setting and how to write strong, vivid settings. The appendices are helpful, especially Nancy Berland's setting research form. There is an updated version of this book which covers researching in a tech savvy world.
