



Analyzing Flashbacks and Moment Memories

A very useful tool for bringing your protagonist's history to the forefront to make them relatable is flashbacks. But using flashbacks can be tricky. Placement, purpose, and frequency are key.

Full Flashbacks

Full Flashbacks are big memories that include physical and sensory details, and lots of emotion. These flashbacks can take a few paragraphs, or a few pages. The key is that the emotional connection the protagonist needs in the current scene comes from the flashback. Although other physical and sensory details are included in the memory, the emotional response is key, both for the protagonist and the reader.

Look at your own manuscript. Identify the flashbacks you've included. For each one, ask yourself this series of questions:

- *Are there physical details that are relevant?*
- *Are there sensory details that are relevant?*
- *What emotions does the protagonist feel in the memory?*
- *Are these emotions needed/similar to/connection building in the current scene?*

If the answer is 'no' to any of these questions, the flashback might not be needed. Would a moment memory suffice in that scene?

For the full flashback scenes you choose to keep, look for ways to pare down the words.

- Are there characters/dialogue/descriptions in the memory that aren't needed to convey the emotion you want shown? (Cut them.)
- Are there redundant phrases/situations/thoughts that add word count without adding new emotion? (Cut them.)
- Is your protagonist's main takeaway from the memory an emotional one? (It should be.)

Moment Memories

Moment Memories are memories that happen in the moment. They jump to the protagonist's mind in the middle of other situations based on physical or sensory stimuli. Moment memories can be a phrase, or a few sentences long, but not more than that. The key with moment memories is the physical or sensory connection to the current scene. There may be some emotion attached, that it's not the focus. Moment memories help build a rich historical background to everyday living of your protagonist.

Look at your manuscript. Identify the moment memories you've included. For each one, ask yourself this series of questions:

- *Is there a physical or sensory trigger in the current scene that brought up the moment memory?*
- *Is this trigger quite relevant to the current scene in at least one way?*
- *Does this moment memory add a nice element of depth and history to your protagonist's character?*

If the answer is 'no' to any of these questions, the moment memory might not be needed. Is it just added words with no real purpose?

For the moment memories you choose to keep, look for ways to keep them simple, short, and concise.

- Are there characters/dialogue/descriptions in the memory that overreach the brief need of the current scene? (Cut them.)
- Are there emotional charges included that aren't needed in the current scene? (Cut them.)
- Is your protagonist's main takeaway from the memory a physical or sensory one? (It should be.)