# Emotional Mastery for Fiction Writers - Assignments

## Module 1: Understanding the Action-Reaction Cycle

**Assignment:**

1. Open a favorite novel, a best seller (preferably in your genre), and pick a random scene. As you read through it, note what stages of the action-reaction cycle are being shown. The scene might, for example, start with the character processing what happened in her prior scene. Or it might open with action (which could be dialogue). Think about highlighting passages (you can do that on a Kindle or a paperback, if you don't mind marking up your book) that show the transition from one stage to another. Or jot down the lines on a piece of paper. For instance, the moment a character moves from processing to new decision. That moment might be a thought or demonstrated by a new action.

2. When done highlighting, flip through the pages of the scene or study your notes to see the cycle at work. Low-energy scenes are going to cycle slower than high-action ones. Maybe the entire scene is an argument or a car chase—all action.

3. Do this with another scene, and another. Pay attention to the speed of the cycling and how many of these steps are repeated while noting the scene type. Do you see a pattern? Think how this can help you when you plot similar types of scenes. There is a lot you can learn by doing this exercise!

**Assignment:** Grab one of your scenes you've been working on. Do the same procedure. Note where (if) you are missing any steps in the action-reaction cycle. If so, put something in place. Pay special attention to your character's immediate visceral reaction to things she sees or hears. Think how you would react. If it helps, freewrite in a separate document, imagining yourself in that moment—the thoughts that go through your head, the feelings in your body. Get in the habit of doing this as you write scenes so that you can craft believable reactions in your characters.

**Assignment:** For fun, go on Amazon and do a random search in the Kindle store (you can type in keywords like zombie thriller or sappy romance) and choose a novel that doesn't have great reviews (I know, that doesn't mean it's a badly written book, but one with a bunch of 1-star reviews usually implies there are some problems with the writing and/or structure). Use the Look Inside feature to read the first pages (as far as you can get). Look for the action-reaction cycle. See if stages are missing. Do the characters fail to react in response to what is going on in the scene? Do they jump into action without showing evidence of processing? Studying "less than masterful" writing can teach you a lot! You might even consider how you would rewrite certain passages so that they would flow more believably. That, in itself, will probably improve the scene.