

This is a scene from an old, unpublished manuscript. In the first version, my heroine rushes in to stop a fight and takes a punch from her boxing champion brother. Her response and recovery were unrealistic, as pointed out by a critique partner. In version two, you can see how the changes improved the story significantly.

Counterfeit Truth Fight Scene Version 1

An army of hands came between them and forced them apart before the kiss could become anything more. Daniel and Ford pulled her into the parlor where they and Father created an impenetrable barrier. The smack of flesh against flesh followed an instant later.

Surely, Ben wouldn't—

"I told you to stay away from my sister." Ben's words were punctuated by a grunt.

How could Father and her brothers just stand there? Hayden could probably hold his own against an ordinary citizen, but Ben was a trained boxer. He'd taken down men nearly double his size. She dragged a chair over and climbed on top.

Ben attacked Hayden without mercy, yet all Hayden did was deflect or dodge.

"Stop it, Ben!"

He continued his assault, and no one else moved to intervene. Fine. She'd have to take matters into her own hands. She dove between Daniel's legs, scrambled to her feet, and darted between Ben and Hayden.

Pushing Hayden back, she twisted to face Ben. Horror crossed his face a fraction of a second before his fist made contact with her jaw.

Bright lights crossed her vision, and she fell against something hard. Strong arms wrapped around her and eased her to the floor. She leaned against what had to be Hayden's chest as she blinked. Feet pounded toward the back of the house, along with something about ice. Hard to tell with all the ringing in her ears.

Ben's frantic voice rose above it. "Fel, I'm so sorry. I didn't see you coming until..."

She waved off his words. Iron tainted her mouth as she rubbed at her jaw. Growing up the only girl in a house of boys, one would think she'd learn not to step into the middle of a fight by now.

"Now, I know why you were a boxing champion." Her poor attempt at humor only creased the faces of the men around her. Each one of them as dear to her as the one holding her.

"I've got the ice." Daniel skidded across the floor to her side.

Ford wrapped the melting chunk in his handkerchief before pressing it against her face.

She took over holding the ice and shooed him back. "Quit acting like mother hens. I'm fine." Or she would be soon.

*There is nothing inherently wrong with this scene. However, it lacks the realism of experience for anyone who has been hit in the face full force. By researching and applying the fight scene checklist to this passage, I was able to change it into something more believable, and hopefully, engaging. Check out how it changed in the following version.

Counterfeit Truth Fight Scene Version 2

[All the same until about here.]

Ben attacked Hayden without mercy. Each backward step Hayden took, Ben used to close him into a corner. Soon Hayden would have no room to deflect or dodge. Ben swung again and clipped Hayden's chin.

"Stop it, Ben!"

Ben continued his assault, and no one else moved to intervene.

Fine. She'd have to take matters into her own hands. Using the chair like a ram, she forced her way through the human barrier. Father and Daniel yelled but were too slow to stop her. She flung the chair to the side and darted between Ben and Hayden.

Pushing Hayden back, she twisted to face Ben.

Just in time to receive one of his championship blows.

Bright lights flashed. Her brain smacked against skull. Tears poured from her eyes, and something dripped from her nose.

She blinked through the flashes. Somehow she'd ended up on the floor, propped against Hayden while her family knelt around her. How in heaven's name had that happened so fast? She was supposed to stop the fight, not get tangled in it. And shouldn't Ben have stopped the punch? It wasn't as if her face looked like Hayden's.

Ben's lips moved, but the ringing drowned out his voice.

Daniel disappeared, and Ford brought a handkerchief to her face.

The moment it made contact, every nerve came alive and screamed. Half her face throbbed with relentless force. Even her teeth ached, and a headache threatened to grow into migraine proportions.

If this is what Ben's opponents felt after being hit, it was no wonder the man was champion. She never wanted to be on the receiving end again.

Ben's frantic voice finally cut through. "Fel, speak to me."

Speech sounded wholly unappealing. The taste of iron filled her mouth as she tested moving her jaw. Painful but not broken. At least she didn't think so.

"Fel, please."

Maybe she should let him suffer a bit and delay the pain of speaking. Leaning against Hayden seemed like a perfect excuse to avoid the problem at hand.

"Ford, go for the doctor."

"No." The single word brought on a wave of nausea. She swallowed past it. If she was going to convince them she was okay, it would take more than one word. "You're losing your edge, Ben. It wasn't a knock-out."

*As you can see, the core of the scene hasn't really changed, but the details have. Which version did you find more engaging? More realistic? Whenever you have a fight scene, take the opportunity to stretch yourself and turn it into something better than what you started with.