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THE ROMANCE WRITER'S GUIDE

Tips and Resources to Help You Capture Your Readers' Hearts

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ABOUT DONNA WINTERS

- Published Author since 1985
- I have 20 historical and contemporary romances in print
- Published by
 - Thomas Nelson
 - Zondervan,
 - Guideposts
 - Bigwater Publishing LLC
- Publisher since 1989

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WHAT I'LL TALK ABOUT TODAY

- Age Groups
- Subgenres
- Plotting Your Romance
- Historical Romances—What's Popular, What's Not
- Sweet to Sexy and Everything In Between

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WHAT I WON'T BE DISCUSSING

- How to research your historical romance
 - Join Tyler Tichelaar's presentation on September 24
- Character Development
 - Join Naomi Rawlings' presentation on October 8
- Marketing and Promotion
 - Join Smith Publicity's presentation on October 15

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AGE GROUPS

- Three Basic Categories
 - young adult (12-18 years old)
 - new adult (18-25 years old)
 - adult (readers over 25)

Romance Writers of America does not define the new adult category but mentions Young Adult Romance as a subgenre.

Amazon includes “New Adult & College” in its subgenre list.

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SUBGENRES

- The RWA List
 - Contemporary Romance (1950-present)
 - Erotic Romance (explicit sex, any era)
 - Historical Romance (pre-1950)
 - Romance with Spiritual Elements (any belief system)
 - Romantic Suspense (suspense, mystery, thriller)
 - Young Adult Romance (young adult life central to plot)

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SUBGENRES AT AMAZON

- Action & Adventure
- African American
- Anthologies
- Clean & Wholesome
- Collections & Anthologies
- Contemporary
- Fantasy
- Gothic

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MORE SUBGENRES AT AMAZON

- Historical Romance
- Holidays
- Inspirational
- LGBT
- Medical
- Military
- Multicultural & Interracial
- Mystery & Suspense

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EVEN MORE SUBGENRES AT AMAZON

- New Adult & College
- Paranormal
- Romantic Comedy
- Science Fiction
- Sports
- Time Travel
- Westerns

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WHAT'S MISSING FROM THE SUBGENRE LISTS?

- AMISH ROMANCES
 - Subgenre originated in 1997 (Beverly Lewis—*The Shunning*—became a movie in 2011)

- AMISH ROMANCE SUBGENRES
 - Mysteries
 - Young adult
 - Second chance at love
 - Amish vampires (NOT Inspirational)

NOTES:

Amish romances are not written for the Amish to read. (In fact, Amish rules generally forbid the reading of fiction, although some Amish women admit to reading them in secret.) The readers of these stories are Evangelical women age forty or older.

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PLOTTING YOUR ROMANCE

[NOTE: Think about the length of your story. . Harlequin publishes fifteen romance lines with varying word lengths from 50,000 to 75,000 words. However, the word count for a romance can be as short as a novella of 25,000 words to a full length novel at 110,000 words.

Popular in recent years is the romance novella that runs from 25,000 to 35,000 words. At least two highly reputable publishers are releasing romances of this length in collections: Barbour Books, an imprint of Barbour Publishing, Inc., and Bethany House, a division of Baker Publishing Group. In addition, many independently published authors have gained traction with romance novella collections.]

- Dozens of plot devices have been used for romance novels
- Many of them work for both contemporary and historical settings
- For more Romance tropes, consult Victorine E. Lieske's *How to Write a Swoon-Worthy Sweet Romance Novel*

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TROPES

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DOG LOVERS

- Dogs love each other, their people don't get along
- Dog lover meets cat lover. Fur flies.
- Dog lover combined with Christmas

NOTE: The book *The Dogs of Christmas* by W. Bruce Cameron brings a dog caregiver novice (hero) into a relationship with a heroine who is a dog expert at a shelter. This is a Christmas story with an O. Henry twist—very inventive. Readers love Christmas romances.

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ENEMIES TO LOVERS

- Main characters form an instant dislike at first meeting
- Amplify tension with a “trapped” device

Example: *For the Love of Roses*

NOTE: *For the Love of Roses* is free on Kindle today. Another example is *Mackinac*, the first book in my Great Lakes Romances series.

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A FAKE RELATIONSHIP

For some reason (perhaps a lie told to a relative or boss that the hero or heroine really does have a serious romantic commitment) the couple must pretend to be in love.

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FAKE RELATIONSHIP Cont.

- Fake boyfriend/girlfriend
- Fake engaged couple
- Fake marriage

Include compelling reasons the couple can't fall in love.

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FRIENDS TO LOVERS

Hero and heroine have been longtime friends and resist becoming romantically involved

- Desire not to ruin friendship
- Age difference

See *Charlotte of South Manitou Island*

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LOVE ALMOST LOST

- The hero or heroine only recognizes their love for the other after the couple parts. After an “aha” moment, they must go after their beloved on a mad dash to revive the relationship.
- A great example of this is the Christmas romantic comedy movie starring Henry Winkler as the uncle of the heroine in *The Most Wonderful Time of the Year*.

NOTE: In this story, Jennifer, a single mom with a six-year-old son, is approaching Christmas somewhat like Scrooge. Then her uncle Ralph visits and brings with him a fellow passenger, Morgan, from his flight. Morgan and Jennifer seem completely incompatible since Morgan is a carefree chef with no life plan and Jennifer has a plan to marry a wealthy businessman. As the plot unfolds, Jennifer and Morgan clash again and again. But on Christmas Day, when Jennifer’s engagement to Mr. Perfect falls apart, she realizes with Uncle Ralph’s help that Morgan is the right match for her and she must stop him from boarding a plane and flying out of her life forever. The scene at the airport is priceless!

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MAY-DECEMBER

- The couple can’t fall in love because one is much older than the other.
- I combined this concept with “friends to lovers” in *Charlotte of South Manitou Island*.

NOTE: A real-life example of this concept is the romance of Celine Dion and her manager/husband, René. He became her manager when she was twelve years old, but the couple was not married until she was twenty-five. He was twenty-six years older than Celine.

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ROMANTIC COMEDY

- Here's a subgenre that has experienced renewed interest of late.
- It can be sweet or sexy.
- It can be contemporary or historical.
- Learn how by consulting Billy Mernitt's book *Writing the Romantic Comedy, 20th Anniversary Expanded and Updated Edition: The Art of Crafting Funny Love Stories for the Screen*.

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ROMANTIC SUSPENSE

- Includes danger, a mystery, and a villain
- It is a romance story and a suspense story in equal parts.
- It is quite possibly the most challenging subgenre to write.
- Consult Fay Lamb, Patience Bloom, and Susan Sleeman for advice.

NOTE: If you do a Google search on each of these ladies, you'll find articles about writing romantic suspense that are very informative.

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SECOND CHANCE AT LOVE

- The hero and heroine were either romantically involved or married and then broke up.
- They meet again and find a second chance at love.
- Works well when paired with other tropes such as a fake relationship.

NOTE: This is a highly popular trope. If you want to dive deeper into it this trope, look up the book, *How to Write a Swoon-Worthy Second Chance Romance Novel* released in November 2019 by Victorine E. Lieske.

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TOO MANY HEROES

- Two (or more) men fall for the same heroine.
- An example is my historical romance *Bridget of Cat's Head Point*.

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TRAPPED

The couple is forced together. Options include:

- In an elevator
- In a cabin
- In a car stuck in a snowstorm
- In an office overnight
- In a hotel room during a disaster

NOTE: An example of the “trapped” plot is *It Happened One Night*, the 1934 romantic comedy film with Clark Gable and Claudette Colbert.

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HISTORICAL ROMANCES

- Some historical eras are popular
- Some never caught on

Let's take a look

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REVOLUTIONARY WAR ROMANCES

- Not as popular as other eras
- Market may be limited

Check out *The Lacemaker* by Laura Frantz

NOTE: I have read her work. She is a truly gifted writer. She is a Christy Award Winner 2018 and an ECPA (Evangelical Christian Publishers Association) bestseller. I'm sure a close study of her work will be quite informative.

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REGENCY ROMANCES

- The British Regency era (1811-1820)
- Popular since Jane Austen
- Georgette Heyer (American writer) popularized the genre in the mid-1900s

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REGENCY ROMANCES Cont.

- Accuracy of period social customs, settings, costumes, and vocabulary are key
- Originally written as sweet romances
- Now, many are steamy

NOTE: My favorite Regency author who does both sweet and sexy stories is Erica Ridley. The best example of her work that I have read is *The Viscount's Tempting Minx (Dukes of War Book 1)*. The dialogue is quick, funny, and completely unpredictable.

Another way to grasp the Regency vocabulary, settings, customs, and costumes is to watch the Masterpiece series and movies set in that era: *Sanditon*, *Emma*, *Sense and Sensibility*, *Northanger Abbey*, *Persuasion*, *Mansfield Park*, and *Pride and Prejudice*, all adapted from Jane Austen novels. If you'd rather read her books, you can do that online at <https://www.janeausten.org/>.

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CIVIL WAR ROMANCES

Ever since *Gone with the Wind*, Civil War fiction has become intriguing costume drama.

Plot possibilities include

- Underground Railroad workers
- Spies
- Women disguised as men

NOTES: A word of caution. Ever since *Gone with the Wind*, Civil War fiction has become intriguing costume drama. Be sure to research the costumes carefully and don't rely on movies or television to dress your characters. With the popularity of Civil War reenacting, readers of this era will know whether you are accurate with your historical details.

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WESTERN ROMANCES

Popular in both contemporary and historical eras

Many plot choices

- Pioneering
- Mail order bride
- Women going west to escape shame of indiscretions

NOTES: The stories are as varied as the historical backdrops against which they are set, but the mail order bride theme seems to predominate. A good source for story fodder is the letters and diaries of pioneer and homesteading women. One example is *Letters of a Woman Homesteader* by Elinore Pruitt Stewart.

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VICTORIAN AND EDWARDIAN ERA ROMANCES

- Victorian era: 1827-1901
- Edwardian era: 1901-1910 (or 1914)
- Both eras are extremely popular

Good examples are romances by Amanda Barratt

NOTES: Amanda has several novellas and one full-length romance novel available at Amazon.

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WORLD WAR I

- This era hasn't gained much traction
- If it's your passion, write about it
- If you're concerned about market, try a different era

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WORLD WAR II

A newly popular era for romances

Plots can be

- Spies
- Resistance
- Parallel retrospective on true history

NOTE: The best romance I have read set during World War II is Amanda Barratt's *My Dearest Dietrich*. This is the story of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a famous German theologian, told from the viewpoint of the woman he loved, Maria von Wedemeyer. The big exception to this romance is that it does not have a "happily ever after" ending. But the story could inspire a similar romantic tale that comes out well in the end.

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SWEET TO SEXY AND EVERYTHING IN BETWEEN

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ONE PUBLISHER DOES THEM ALL

Harlequin

If you self-publish

Your first title will signal the level of sexiness readers can expect from you. You will want to stick with that level in your subsequent releases so as not to disappoint them.

NOTE: If you do decide to write a different kind of romance (either much sweeter or much sexier than your early re-releases), you will want to clearly signal that to readers. One way to accomplish the switch is to adopt a pen name. Another possibility is to assign a series name that defines the difference.

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A CLOSE LOOK AT SWEET ROMANCES

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FIRST KISS

- If historical, not before the engagement

NOTE: Kissing earlier than that puts your heroine's reputation at risk. In contemporary stories, no such restrictions exist.

- If contemporary, when your heroine is willing for it to happen
- Delay until some commitment to the relationship occurs

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STORY FOCUS: EMOTIONS

- The push/pull of the romantic couple
- Each wants to engage romantically
- Each has reasons why they can't

NOTE: Even as little as his hand brushing hers can call for both the physical and emotional reaction of the heroine.

For a progression of touch scale, consult Victorine E. Lieske's *How to Write a Swoon-Worthy Second Chance Romance Novel*.

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BEYOND SWEET ROMANCES

- There is no one formula for sensual content
- Harlequin has guidelines for their different series
- Read lots of titles to learn the editorial content expected

NOTE: The guidelines for Harlequin are on their web page <https://harlequin.submittable.com/submit>. For each imprint there is a dropdown arrow. Click it to read the guidelines.

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ROMANCE WRITING TIPS

NOTE: These are clichés to avoid at all costs:

- Do *not* have your heroine drop something and the hero pick it up for her.
- Do not have the hero and heroine accidentally bump into each other on a busy sidewalk or going in/out of a door.
- Do not have your hero or heroine spill coffee (or some other liquid/food) on the other.

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SOME FINAL TIPS

“Follow your passion and the money will come.”

- That saying may be as fictional as the romance you write.
- Probably fewer than one thousand fiction writers in North America make a living from their writing.

NOTE: By that I mean their income is solely from writing, not from speaking engagements, teaching, or any other related activity.

- Nevertheless, follow your heart.

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THANK YOU

- Thanks for viewing *The Romance Writer's Guide*!
- The paperback and Kindle on this topic are available on Amazon

NOTE: *The Romance Writer's Guide: Tips and Resources to Help You Capture Your Readers' Hearts* contains a large RESOURCES section including dozens of web links particularly helpful to historical fiction writers.

- Visit amazon.com/author/donnawinters to find these and all my other books

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BEST WISHES WITH YOUR ROMANCE WRITING!