

THE LOVE KNOT

Newsletter of the Ottawa Romance Writers' Association

October 2009



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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

The colour of the leaves in October makes it a time of intense beauty and change. The air is crisp and the days slip away more quickly. Everyone is busy between work, family and school. It seems to be a great time to get serious about things and accomplish tasks. Just make sure you also take the time to enjoy the beauty not only in nature, but in everything you do. Writing is not easy and in our dark moments we may occasionally wonder why we continue to pursue it. But we forget how lucky we are to be pursuing our passions. Some people never find their passion, or lock it away, too afraid to try.

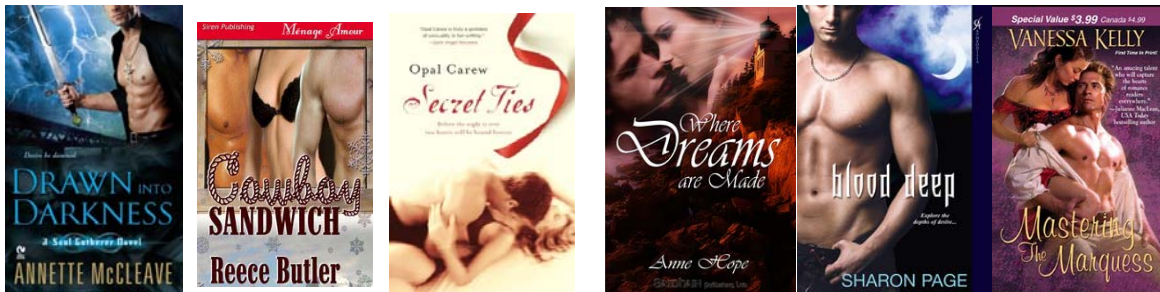
Not only are we lucky to be pursuing a career we care deeply about, but we are even luckier to do so with the help of ORWA and RWA, both of which are excellent organizations, dedicated to the pursuit of helping their members realize their writing dreams. But as we all know, these organizations are only as strong as the loyal volunteers who make these groups into the professional groups that they are. It's important that we all care deeply about our own goals, but that we also care to make ORWA a better organization.

We are now beginning the search for volunteers for 2010. Take the opportunity to get involved and make a difference. Translate some of

your passion for writing into a passion for the organization. After all, success is really a team effort. Yes, it's up to the individual, but when someone achieves a goal, you will find they had a whole team of support behind them. That team usually includes friends and family, but for us, it also includes ORWA. So, take the opportunity to think about how you can get involved in a realistic way that suits your availability. If your time is limited, look for a small way that you can contribute. Or, if you have more time and are feeling particularly passionate about something, take that as a sign to get involved. Wishing you the very best of luck in pursuing your passions this month.

Cynthia Boyko
President

CURRENT RELEASES



REECE BUTLER, COWBOY SANDWICH was released summer 2009 by Siren-Bookstrand

OPAL CAREW, SECRET TIES was released in June 2009 by St-Martin's Press. Also available from SMP are SIX, BLUSH, SWING and TWIN FANTASIES.

ANN HOPE, WHERE DREAMS ARE MADE, was released in print in July 2009 it is also available in digital format from Samhain Publishing.

VANESSA KELLY, MASTERING THE MARQUESS is available now from Kensington Zebra.

ANNETTE MCCLEAVE, DRAWN INTO DARKNESS was released September 1st 2009 by NAL/Signet Eclipse

SHARON PAGE, BLOOD DEEP, was released May 26 from Kensington Books. Also available from Kensington are SIN, BLOOD ROSE, BLACK

SILK, HOT SILK, BLOOD RED, and WILD NIGHTS. Also available is the *USA Today* bestseller THE CLUB released in February 2009 from Dell Publishing.

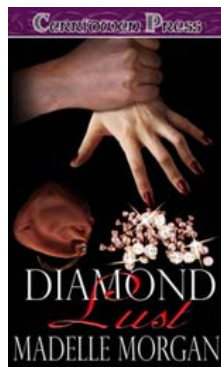
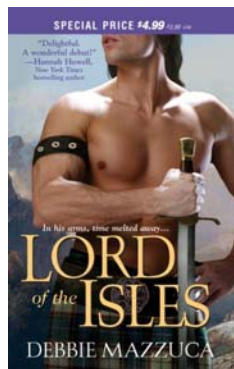
Coming Soon...

MAGGIE JAGGER, **JASPER'S ANGEL**, is due out November 2009 from New Concepts Publishing. PERFECT OBEDIENCE and EVERY MIDNIGHT are also available now.

LINDA POITEVIN, **A Fairy Tale for Gwyn** will be released from The Wild Rose Press January 2010

MADELLE MORGAN, **Diamond Lust** will be released from Cerredwin Press in February 2010

DEBBIE MAZZUCA, **Lord of the Isles** will be released from Kensington Zebra in 2010.



ACCOLADES

BRENDA HAMMOND entered a ChickLit contest
 COREENE SMITH had two manuscripts final in two contests
 MAUREEN FISHER pitched to an agent who requested a partial
 ANNETTE MCCLEAVE released her first book and handed in book 2.
 KAREN SMOCK has two requests from Nationals
 MADELINE MCBRIDE received her book cover it's out in February
 LINDA POITEVIN edits from her agent on her paranormal
 VANESSA KELLY another two book contract with Kensington and a
 novella with Jo Beverly
 TERESA WILDE finished her third adult manuscript and pet with her
 agent

SHARON PAGE sold two more books to Kensington Aphrodesia
 TAMMY PLUNKETT entered the 2010 Emily and will be speaking at
 NJRW conference

LILLIAN CHOW has been offered a mentorship with a Hollywood
 screenwriter

ELIZABETH BATEN-CAREW finished Bliss for SMP, Twin Fantasy sold to
 German publisher, and her books were mentioned in Publishers Weekly

RANDY SYKES finished his first romantic suspense and judged his first
 contest

LUCY FARAGO got four requests at Nationals

UPCOMING WORKSHOPS



Sunday, October 4th, 2009, 2 p.m.

**A Hands-on Guide to Forensic Anthropology
 by Ed Holland**

Love the TV show Bones? Can't get enough of the books by Kathy Reichs? Then join us for a hands-on forensic anthropology workshop led by John Holland, Chair of Anthropology at John Abbott College, Montreal, QC--and yes, he's bringing bones!

ARTICLES

**How Anthropology Can Add Cultural Detail
 by Martha Catt**

The following article ran in the October 2009 issue of The Final Draft, the newsletter of Carolina Romance Writers in Charlotte, NC. Permission granted to sister chapters to forward or reprint with proper credit.

I can't speak for everyone, but when I read a story I want to feel like I'm there. For a writer to create the environment on the page, she must include sensory information beyond just sight, but also sound, smell, touch and taste. For contemporary stories, we can use our own experience, but if one is writing a historical novel, particularly about a place that has been so altered by modernity that little of its former self can be revealed even by going to the place,



where does one turn? Or what if your story is about Wall Street in the 1980's, and you weren't on Wall Street in the 1980's?

The public library offers a good start, particularly if you have a librarian who can help you find old monographs (first hand anthropological accounts) through interlibrary loan. Anthropology is the study of human beings and includes four sub-fields:

- o Archaeology, the study of past civilizations through their cultural artefacts
- o Social or Cultural, the study of current civilizations
- o Biological, the study of humans and their relationship to other primates (a sub-sub specialty of this is forensic anthropology, which deals with human bones and comes into play when trying to identify a decomposed corpse)
- o Linguistic, the study of language and meaning

For most writers, archaeology and cultural anthropology will offer the most help. Archaeology not only preserves the cultural artefacts of ancient civilizations, but puts it into context.

If you are fortunate to be able to visit museums where such objects are displayed, you can get a much better idea of scale and texture by viewing them in person. This is particularly true for costume collections. I once read an account of a heroine's dress rustling to the floor, only the dress was wool and wet as she'd been caught in the rain. A wet wool dress would thwack against the hearthstone, and it would smell like a wet dog, but it would feel so good to get it off. The word "rustle" attached to this event pulled me right out of the story.

Even if you visit the museum, pick up the collection catalogue as it could provide additional references. Good catalogues include photographs of where objects were found, and those alone are a wealth of information. Most also provide the text from the object labels that discusses how it might have been used.

Back to the library and those monographs: this is where your librarian becomes really important. If you have access to a University library, more the better, but even public libraries offer such books. The trick is discovering the way the library catalogue lists them. If you don't have specific authors or titles, the librarian can help you find likely titles by subject, and if you're really lucky, the librarian is familiar enough with the collection to recommend books.

For example, if your story is about Wall Street in the 1980's, read Michael Lewis's LIAR'S POKER. It's a funny, informative first-hand account of a young man who landed a job at Solomon Brothers after graduating from Princeton. While Lewis is not an anthropologist by training, the way he describes how this world works is similar. It's always best to write what know, but when you can't know it yourself first hand, research someone who does.

Martha Catt is a CRW member and RWA PRO with two completed manuscripts. When she isn't cooking up novels or meals for her young family, she is an investment advisor for a Fortune 500 company.



T is for Title
By Kathleen Coddington

This article first appeared in Sept. '09 Bouquet of Romance, Pocono Lehigh RW, Easton, PA. Permission to forward with credit.

As authors we often spend hours wracking our brains for the perfect title

that will not only grab the reader's attention, but will also best exemplify our story. In the end, as is often the case, after all our hours of agonizing over just the right choice, our publisher weighs in. They either change the title or assign us that task, which is exactly what happened with

my second book. Originally titled Love's Tangled Web, after I submitted it my editor informed me that I had to find a new title because the company already had a similarly named novel. After days of crumpled paper filled with possibilities, Mistress of Deception became the new choice. All that hard work got me to thinking about titles in general. Titles and covers help sell books, so here are a few helpful tips to keep in mind when selecting your next title:

- * Make sure the title fits the tone, theme and genre of your story.
- * Keep it short. Use descriptive nouns and short words with lots of punch. Taken, Defiance, Signs-there's a reason why movie makers and publishers use titles like these.
- * Consider alliteration or tried and true words with a twist, like Pride and Prejudice, Miss Understanding, Mythalliance, Made of Honor.
- * Shoot for something original. Run a search on Amazon.com. If you get lots of hits, it might be wise to choose a new title. On the other hand, titles can not be copyrighted, so if the absolute perfect title for

your book has already been used, feel free to use the same title.

* Brainstorm. List a bunch of possible choices, then list some more. Look to poetry, folklore and fables, Shakespeare and the Bible for ideas.

* Look to your book for ideas. Focus on the stories theme-revenge, forgiveness, justice, etc. One of those words might do the trick. Or perhaps a line of prose or dialog holds the key to the story and hence to a fantastic title.

* Have a backup in case your publisher doesn't like your first choice or has just bought a book with the same or a similar title.

* Reserve a page in a notebook for possible titles. Sometimes the best ideas come in the middle of the night, even from a snippet of a dream so keep a pencil and the notebook handy. Or set up a file for titles as I've started to do. I often query my critique partners for words they would use to characterize my story or to help select those titles that most resonate with them

On a lighter side, according to the list of titles up for 2008's Diagram Prize (a prize awarded by the British publishing magazine The Bookseller for the oddest title of the year) there are a few authors out there who obviously have very different ideas about choosing titles. Among my favorite entries: I Was Tortured by the Pygmy Love Queen, If You Want Closure in Your Relationship, Start with Your Legs and Cheese Problems Solved. Of course it's hard to beat the catchy title of the first prize ever awarded in 1978, Proceedings of the Second International Workshop on Nude Mice. Apparently mice have a whole other life we know nothing about.

First impressions are important so give your next title the attention it deserves.

Kathleen Coddington writes paranormal and historical romance. She currently has three books published with Cerridwen Press. To find out more about her, visit her website at www.kathleencoddington.com or go to www.jasminejade.com.

Grammar Guru

By Diane O'Key

The following article was originally published in the SW Florida Romance Writers July 2009 newsletter for our Grammar Guru column. Permission to forward or be used with appropriate credits given.



Before I begin my grammar "snippet" for this month, I had a specific question emailed to me (appreciate all inquiries :-)) that I'll address first. Question (paraphrased): What's the deal with "its" and "it's". Answer: "Its," like "his" and "hers," is possessive. Period. It's (There's the other guy. :-)) a possessive pronoun that replaces any non-gender noun: house, car, book, etc. Using "book" as an example, in lieu of "the book's cover," you'd say or think, "Its cover was stunning." "It's," on the other hand, is a contraction of "it is". Think "can't" for "cannot" or "won't" for "will not". Same principle. Hope that works as an explanation. If not, let me know; I'll give it another shot.

Now, on to my pet peeve (always want--incorrectly--to hyphenate that phrase) of the month...

SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT

If the subject of the sentence is singular, it requires a singular verb.
If the subject of the sentence is plural, it requires a plural verb.

Basic, right? I'd feel a bit foolish even mentioning this except that I see and hear, as I'm sure many of you do, obvious mistakes all the time--in print, from "professional " broadcasters, in everyday conversation.

Examples: "There's storms moving across the state." Really?! When did "there" become the subject of that sentence??? "Storms" is the subject, and that's plural, guys. While the contraction "there're" may sound awkward, sorry... It's also correct. If you don't like it, use "there are". But "there's" means "there is," and I can't imagine a literate person saying, "There is storms...."

Along this same line, here's a list you may want to keep in mind for future reference: Everyone, anyone, someone, [or every one, any one, depending on usage] etc. You see the pattern. If a pronoun ends in one, it's singular. Always. No exceptions. When the word ending in "one" is right beside the verb, no problem. "Everyone is," for example. However, when you separate the singular subject and verb with a prepositional phrase, big problem for many people. Example: *Two errors in the

sentence below; I'll note both, then (Yeah, technically, I need a comma after "then," but I'm trying not to over-the-edge it.) leave you alone for this month. :-)

Every one of the children need their jackets.

"One" is your subject. "Of the children" is a prepositional phrase and has nothing!! to do with subject/verb agreement. "One...needs..."

Also, as "one" is singular and requires a singular verb, "needs," it also requires a singular pronoun (called a referent because it refers back to the subject).

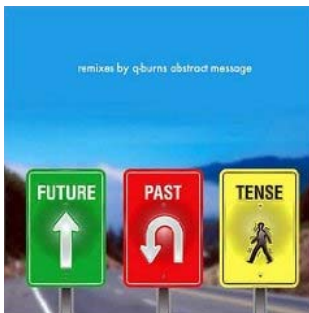
The sentence, correctly written, should read:

Every one of the children needs his jacket.

While the above may not be PC, it's grammatically correct. Unless the sentence makes it clear you're dealing only with females, all male or mixed groups use the masculine pronoun.

Feel free to contact NOW or the great grammar gods (whoever they may be :-)) if that offends you. Either way, I'm done here....

Until next month, happy writing!



The Grammar Goddess AKA Pattie Giordani

A remembrance of tenses-and columns-past.

The following article appeared in the July '09 issue of Bouquet of Romance, Pocono Lehigh Romance Writers, Easton, PA. Permission to forward with credit.

This column originally ran in the April 2004 PLRW newsletter-some things should be repeated!

Most fiction is written in the simple past tense. She fed the cat. If you're telling the story, it already happened. In general, it's not a good idea to mix tenses, unless you come to a part of the story that calls for another tense.

Past perfect tense (also called pluperfect) is used to show an action or event that began and ended in the past. She had fed the cat. Sometimes called "past past," past perfect shows events or actions that happened before events or actions in the simple past.

Past perfect relates items in a more distant past to the "now" of the story. Most flashbacks use the past perfect. Be consistent and don't mix tenses, which will confuse your readers. But if you must write about something that began and ended before any simple past tense events, use the past perfect.

Two more past tenses: The past progressive tense (or past continuous) is used to write about events that began in the past and continue in the present-whether the "present" is the actual present tense or the simple past of the story. She was feeding the cat. Generally, use this tense if you need to recount something that was still going on when another event occurred: She was feeding the cat when her husband called.

Past perfect progressive (or past perfect continuous) is used to write about something that began in the past and continued for a while before ending in the past. She had been feeding the cat. While past perfect implies that the event or action happened without interruption, the past perfect progressive shows that something else happened before the event or action ended. She had been feeding the cat when her husband called is past perfect progressive, and means the feeding was still happening. But She had fed the cat when her husband called is past perfect tense, and means she finished the feeding when her husband called.

Be consistent and keep it simple-simple past tense, that is. Change tenses only when you must. When editing your work, look carefully at all the tenses used and see if you can change them to simple past without changing the meaning. If you can, keep them in past tense, if not, use whatever tense the events and actions warrant.

Please send your grammar questions to me at pattiegl@ptd.net for future columns. Thanks and Happy Writing!

Pattie Giordani is an editor at a national nonprofit association and freelances for newspapers and magazines. Previously she was assistant features editor at a daily newspaper, and has taught noncredit courses in grammar and writing at a local community college. She is president and publicity chair for the Pocono-Lehigh Romance Writers and writes a grammar column for the monthly newsletter.

PRO SOUND-OFF with Maria Connor

The Question: You recently achieved PRO status, which means you completed and submitted a book! What advice do you have for those who are still struggling to finish their manuscripts?



I recently read a comment from a published author about a motivational writing challenge organized by an RWA chapter designed to encourage aspiring writers to finish an entire manuscript within a set period of time. Essentially, the gist of her message was that writers who need to be prodded to write or finish a manuscript lack the self-discipline to ever become published.

Truly critical and disheartening words for any writer struggling to pursue a career as a romance novelist. First, it implies that simply cranking out 55,000, 75,000, or 120,000 words is enough to get you across that threshold to publication. But even more than it, it undermines any effort put forth by those who dream of walking into a bookstore to see their name next to the likes of Nora Roberts, Julia Quinn, and Jayne Ann Krentz.

Having been a member of various chapters for a number of years, I've encountered many, many talented writers who struggle with finishing their WIPs. I believe the "three-chapter" syndrome (writers who only finish the first three chapters before abandoning the manuscript) is a common ailment, and I don't think the single cause for it is a lack of motivation. Quite frankly, I think motivation has very little to do with it. I think perhaps writers don't know how to channel their motivation effectively; in other words, "How do I write this book?"

So if it isn't a lack of discipline or motivation keeping writers from completing their manuscripts, what is? Maybe it's one of the following:

- Unrealistic expectations
- Lack of a firm deadline
- Lack of time
- Lack of skill
- Overwhelmed by magnitude of the project

- Fear of failure
- Distracted by new ideas and challenges
- Trying to write to the market and/or unable to find their "voice, niche"
- Lack of confidence
- Feeling like the chances of actually getting published are too slim
- Discouraged, frustrated by lack of progress
- Distracted by workshops, how-to books, etc.
- Writing process is still evolving and/or trying to find a writing process
- Perfectionism
- Being swayed by outside influences (i.e. "Do it like this, not like that.")

I think the key to finishing a book—and bringing yourself that much closer to a chance at getting published—is analyzing what’s holding you back and then developing an alternative route around that road block.

Personally, I write to deadline. Without a deadline, I’m like a little puppy that is first distracted by the pretty butterfly only to veer off in the other direction when she catches sight of a kitty cat but then stops to roll in a patch of clover. I’ve learned I have to create deadlines for myself like entering contests, participating in writing challenges, critiquing with a partner, and submitting my work to agents.

My 10-year journey to PRO (and a full manuscript) was derailed by several of the items on this list, but the number one obstacle was—and is—fear of failure. As a published journalist, I know I can meet the requirements set forth by my editors. Therefore, I fully expect that same result when it comes to my fiction. Yet, for some incredible reason, my romance writing wasn’t coming out all clean and perfect and dazzling like I assumed it would. I’ve had to come to terms with the fact that writing is 1) a learning process which everyone has to go through, even me, and 2) editing is part of writing, especially good writing. When I finally gave myself permission to write less-than-perfect prose, the pages started accumulating, and soon I had 10,000 words, then 25,000 words, then a full-length novel.

Writing a book is no easy feat, especially when combined with the ego

and emotion that go into it. I think some of the people who struggle the most with finishing a WIP are those with genuine talent—they know it takes more than words on a page to make for quality work, and they bear the burden of not just writing but writing well.

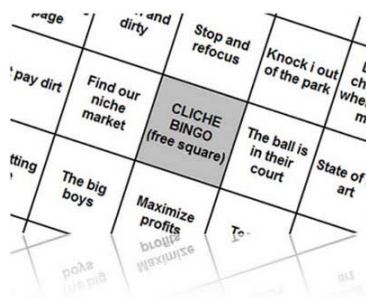
Aside from the internal issues that hold writers back from finishing a project, there are sometimes external circumstances that complicate things: family demands, illness, technology, distractions, lack of know-how. Again, the key is identifying these issues and developing an action plan to circumvent them.

With a family of five living in 1,300 square feet and a husband who works 80 hours a week, I am forever battling the soundtrack of family life and a schedule rife with interruptions—time to make dinner, time to take the 16-year-old to work, time to supervise homework. And while I sincerely want to be published, getting up at 5 a.m. simply isn't an option that works for me. Instead, I've learned to work in bursts and tune out the joyful noise of children by donning headphones. I've also found it helpful to arrive at work an hour early to dash a few thousand words.

Sure, writers need to be self-motivated, but I think it is unfair to assume that any writer struggling to finish a manuscript simply doesn't "want it bad enough." A comment like that belittles the effort that it takes to even attempt to write a book. Instead, published writers, those that have achieved PRO status, and anyone else who has made it to The End can better serve their aspiring peers by offering encouragement and sharing how they overcome the challenges that lie between page 1 and page 250.

For those writers yet to make it through an entire manuscript, take a break from the hamster wheel of futility. Spend some time analyzing what's working for you, what isn't, and what's holding you back. There are lots of workable solutions to these issues, but first you have to know what your issues are. Remember, everyone's process is unique, and it may take some experimentation to find what works for you. Whether your inspiration comes from participating in a writing challenge, writing in 15-minute increments, getting up at 5 a.m., or writing on your lunch hour, the most important factor in determining success is perseverance.

Maria Connor is a freelance journalist and writer. She is active in numerous RWA chapters and also serves as assistant chair of the RWA Membership Committee. Her manuscript, *Willing to Learn*, a sexy, sassy romance about a brothel that caters to women, won second place in both the First Coast Romance Writers unpublished Beacon contest and RWA-San Diego's Spring Into Romance contest in the contemporary series category. Learn more about Maria by visiting www.maria-connor.com.



Creating Extraordinary Writing from Ordinary Phrases

By: Sandra Ferguson

The following was published in the Sept. issue of Heart to Heart, the newsletter for the North Texas Romance Writers, Alley Hauldren, Editor. Permission to reuse with credits.

Writers are cautioned again and again to avoid clichés in finished work. Something close to the kiss of death, the publishing community warns. A worthy writer will try to ignore those tasty little tidbits, and come up with more creative twists when a catchy phrase is needed.

So, is that to assume clichés serve no purpose?

While thumbing through an old magazine, I unearthed an article which listed and explored a number of TIME clichés. Bending time, slipping through time, and sheer manipulation of time are vastly popular ideas. Hollywood and little Hollywood, the small screen, have enticed the viewing public for years with these themes. I spent my own time studying the clichés listed in the article. Were these trite diatribes destined for nothing more than witty dialogue? Could they revolutionize, perhaps, characters, plot, or even universal themes? Upon closer examination, each nugget seemed to identify a specific trait. Or at least highlight an aspect which could be enhanced, emboldened, even emblazoned to illuminate better writing. As students of human behavior, writers must continually seek ways to broaden characters and bring truisms to page. To that end, those who capture the written words should consider how to manipulate an effective cliché.

Try this one . . .

Better late than never. This one probably strikes home for most. Every family seems blessed or cursed with members who believe, nay, cherish the opportunity to make the mantra of 'better late than never' into gospel. These are the individuals who have never been punctual, indeed, can arrive thirty minutes to an hour late and still consider themselves on time.

Sound familiar?

Step beyond the personal and take it to a character level. Would this particular flaw round out a formally flat or static character? Could this trait be reminiscent for the hero or heroine? One he/she dealt with their entire life? One the character emulated? Or perhaps one the character

spurned with each breath? Could constant tardiness be a source of fun in a romantic comedy between the hero and heroine? Flip it and consider a suspense book. Characters that are consistently late might well endanger their own lives, or more dramatically that of a supporting character.

Next, try plot. By integrating the famous phrase, 'better late than never', a writer can employ a number of 'believable' story twists. Remember, coincidence might work in real life, but never on the printed page. A writer must carefully create a world in which events seem reasonable. If readers question how an occurrence could take place in the story, the writer has squashed reading momentum. Always a bad thing. However, the use of 'better late than never' could place the hero/the heroine in the worst place at the worst possible time and successfully move the story forward in an inconspicuous manner.

Is it possible to take this popular idiom and tweak it for actual use as a theme? Are some things worth waiting for? Even the things that show up late? Really late? Perhaps almost beyond patience? From Jules Vern's, *The Magic Time Machine* to the *Back to the Future* series, time is crucial to the plotline and one of the reoccurring themes for these films.

History repeats itself. Considering that the human body regenerates itself with new cells every seven years, perhaps it's inevitable that individuals do not remember all their mistakes and kill their 'bad-choice' repetition. Or perhaps, life really is a circle and everyone ends up where they began. Ever met someone who's married more than once? Twice? Three times? Talk to them about their exes. Chances are there will be startling similarities. What about the person who constantly changes jobs? Always on the move, seeking greener pastures? Again, personality traits are clear with this type of behavior and this cliché. In my romantic suspense, *HARM'S WAY*©, the security specialist hero holds to the belief that he has badly botched a former job guarding a woman. To that end, he's sworn off the female-protection squad. In this case, history repeating itself is actually what the hero struggles to avoid. His initial conflict is central to this issue. By using this cliché as a tool, it was much easier to nail down his dialogue along with his internal and external reactions when he was finally forced to take on another female client.

"Alex Harmon remembered, would always remember the woman he almost hadn't saved. As long as breath powered his lungs, he'd never forget his race against a mad-man's intent on extinguishing another female's life. The high speed pursuit into a secluded section of deep woods, the loss of the suspect, and then a frantic search were little more than bad memories from his federal protection days. But finding the hidden cottage, seeing the structure engulfed in angry orange and

roasting red flickers of fire-a burning execution- that wasn't a memory that went away, ever. Four years had passed since Jaycee Donovan's kidnapping and the murder attempt on her life, but it wasn't enough. There might never be enough time.

Alex gave his pat answer. "I don't handle women clients. Not anymore. Not ever."

From a plot stand point, 'history repeating itself' could be applied to villains. Think serial killers, for instance. A federal task force exists solely for the purpose of interpreting the maze of these brutal individuals. That said, certain consistencies run through serial killers' behaviors. Utilizing the well-known phrase, 'history repeats itself', would work into plot lines and build believability. On a more subtle level, children who are raised in foster care typically exhibit certain mannerisms. The very essence of their behaviors can be woven into story fabric, allowing characters to stay true to their nature while driving the plot in a forward motion.

Need more time-oriented clichés? Consider these:

Let bygones be bygones

Time and tide wait for no man (or woman)

To every thing there is a season

Each cliché is more than a song verse or a string of simple words.

By first studying the underlying meanings of these catchy slogans then applying to human tendencies, characters can be enriched. Depth is what makes each individual fascinating. The same is true - more than true, it's mandatory - for characters. Without layers, back-stories, idiosyncrasies, flaws, blemishes, and assets, characters are, look-out here's the 'B' word -- BORING!

More than any cliché has ever been the kiss of death, a boring character will execute a good story -- perhaps even a great story. Clichés exist because they spotlight typical behaviors. By twisting and turning these common expressions, writers can helium-charge characters and plots, and add layering to themes. Writers are required, should be by a universal writing law, to use every tool at their disposal, which includes observing and then committing to page the faults and follies of the human race. Clichés are one-sentence forays into that world.

~ Sandra Ferguson calls Texas home. {That and her computer desk} When not under deadline for the next project, she chases after her three kids, the dog, the vacuum, and

her husband. A good day is when she finishes her edits and still finds time to spend with her primary hero -- her husband. Sandra's first Romantic Suspense, HARM'S WAY, has been e-book released by The Wild Rose Press (www.wildrosespress.com) and is also available in print, ISBN # 1-60154-047-7. HARM'S WAY is available through Barnes & Noble, Borders, and Amazon.com. Drop by for a Texas visit with Sandra at <http://lone-star-meanderings.blogspot.com> or her website: www.slferguson.net

As you Send, so shall you Receive: How to write Email to your Chapter Loop
By Suzanne Stengl



This article first appeared in the September edition of The Writer's Saddle, the newsletter of CaRWA (Calgary). Permission to forward with proper credit please!

Email is many things to many people depending on the context. A message to Great Aunt Annette will be different than a message to your critique partner will be different than a message to your Chapter Loop.

Your Chapter Loop is a communication tool so sometimes lengthy Emails are appropriate. For example, when you are soliciting discussion about a topic, getting feedback on a workshop, or giving directions on a “how to get rid of that pesky line in Word”.

Your Chapter Loop is also a motivational tool. It's there for those times when you need reassurance after a rejection or objectivity after a bad review. Your loop can give you a nudge to start you writing or a reward when you finish for the day.

But in general, your Chapter Loop needs to be concise. Concise so that the volume of Email Received does not result in Email Bankruptcy — a condition whereby someone gets so many messages, especially long messages, that they end up needing to delete everything and start over.

There are 5 easy ways to make Sending and Receiving more pleasurable.

1. The Subject Line

You are entitled to change the subject. “RE: Last Subject” does not have to be Your Subject. You are a writer so you can be creative with your subject lines. Some boring subject lines I have received include: “Digest Number 458” or “New file uploaded” — unless it really is a new file uploaded. Often, it's not. It's just a “Reply” that no longer serves the purpose of a subject line.

Changing the subject line to reflect the content of your Email saves your chapter mates time – especially if the Email is about “Directions to the Party” and it’s buried in a string of Emails all titled “Re: great article”.

2. The <Snip>

As you reply, so shall you snip. Just copy and paste the relevant part of the message you are replying to. If the subject line is doing its work, you can reply with nothing else in the body of the Email.

Take pity on your digest members. If you simply hit Reply and don’t trim off unnecessary electrons, the digest recipient will have to scroll through many repeat messages.

3. The Body

Be brief. If you are writing a pseudo letter, like to query a magazine, you use paragraphs and full sentences. But for your Chapter Loop communiqué, sentence fragments are acceptable.

Try to limit yourself to the real estate available. If you have to scroll to read the whole message, you’re talking too much. Get back to the novel.

4. The Signature Block

Use it. All Email programs have a Signature Tool. You can have just one or several. Great Aunt Annette gets the signature that says, “love, Great Niece Suzanne” whereas your Chapter Loop Signature may advertise your personal website or your next book. Often you can include a catchy log line. If you are taking a course with another chapter, sign off with your home chapter’s website or your location.

Don’t abuse it. Most RWA loops limit you to 3 lines.

5. On the Receiving End

Check your Email once per day. Skim subject lines. Delete the obvious. If Matilda always sends jokes and you don’t like them, just delete. If Sue sends long Emails, but you thoroughly enjoy them, click on them later, when you are giving yourself a reward for work done.

That’s it. Create useful subject lines, snip, be brief, use a signature and download once a day. Remember, Email is a tool – don’t let it bankrupt you.

Suzanne Stengl is a charter member of the Calgary Association of the RWA. She tries to limit her Emailing as she works to produce a manuscript worthy of publication.

FOOTNOTE: In addition to these great tips your ORWA Chat Moderator would like to suggest that any congratulatory e-mails and thank you replies be sent to the individual concerned and not to the whole membership loop.



Seven Things That Can Sabotage Good Writing by Dr. Lin Stepp

The following article first appeared in the September 2009 SMOKE SIGNALS newsletter for the Smoky Mountain Romance Writers. Permission granted to forward and reprint with proper credit given to author and newsletter.

We all want to create wonderful books, right? And we all want to avoid things that could negatively affect our writing. Yet, sometimes we sabotage our own possibilities for having good writing by a number of factors. In a sense, we sabotage our own future – and our own possibilities for success.

According to Sherri Zapelli, author of *Sabotage to Success*, self sabotage includes any acts we engage in that either consciously or unconsciously hinder our efforts or block our own success. The key to changing any type of self-sabotaging behavior is awareness. We must become aware of the ways we utilize self-sabotaging techniques – and then work to stop self sabotage before we engage in it.

In my journey as a writer, creating fiction and non-fiction works, and as a professor, teaching research writing and guiding students through subject papers in other classes, I've begun to see factors that consistently sabotage what might other

wise be good writing results. In examining what other experts in the field of creative writing had to say in this area, I also found these same issues appearing in advice books and articles again and again. So – in this article I've addressed seven of the main problems that can sabotage effective writing. My advice is to think about each of these carefully and to examine how they might be sabotaging your own work and progress.

(1) LACK OF ADEQUATE PLANNING

A well-known editor, Alan Rizler, said that inadequate planning often is a

key factor behind the success of successful writers he has worked with. He wrote, "The finest writers I've worked with, including best-selling literary stars, begin with a clear chapter-by-chapter structure that gives them a preliminary map of the steps along the way towards climax and closure." Rizler says the structured plan may shift as a writer moves along – but held that the original map can be a writer's best friend. An interesting point Rizler made was that "the inability to finish a book can often be traced back to a lack of adequate initial planning." Writers start with a plot and book idea, write with enthusiasm for a time and then fizzle out. Author Phyllis Whitney wrote: "The more preparation you do, the better the writing will be when you finally write the story."

(2) WEAK CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

Writer Jacqui Bianchi said that "the start of every story is the characters themselves...You have to visualize them so clearly that they become independent people." This character development means developing your hero and heroine – and your secondary characters – to such a degree that you know them like real people in your life. You should be able to describe everything about them – their looks, personality, past, friends, school and work history, where they were raised, how much they have traveled, their experiences, their strengths and weaknesses – with consummate ease. Many books fail because the characters don't seem to come alive on the pages – often because they were poorly developed before the book began. Maggie Osborne wrote that 'unless the characters are fully developed – and are characters the reader can care about –the work is unlikely to be memorable.'

(3) BOUNCING, UNCLEAR POINT OF VIEW

Point of view (POV) is the person from whose perspective the story is viewed. Generally in romance books, the point of view is narrated in third person with either a single perspective given – the heroine's – or an alternating perspective given – the hero and heroine's. Marissa de Zavala stressed that 'through the eyes of the heroine we see the central drama of her heart's experience'. Her view and perceptions are critical. In most popular romances, the hero's perspective is given, too. It is important that an alternating point of view follow a pattern the reader can feel comfortable with. Usually, this is either with an ongoing, back-and-forth point of view between hero and heroine – as Nora Roberts writes so skillfully – or with an alternating point of view from chapter to chapter, moving from his to her perspective with each new chapter – like Jane Ann Krentz pens so well. Writers need to find the method that works best for them. What is confusing is popping in other characters' points of view – who are not the hero or heroine – confusing the reader, or in not making it clear to the reader who is speaking or thinking. Many works

are sabotaged with bouncing point of view or unclear perspective that makes the reader stop and wonder whose perspective is being presented.

(4) PROBLEMATIC NARRATION

Narrative is the story of a novel and narrative mode is the set of methods an author uses to create the story or narrative. William Zinser, says we often forget the importance of narrative – or good story telling. He calls narrative "the oldest and most compelling method of holding someone's attention" – and there's the key. Without a good story, well told, there won't be a good book. Every scene, piece of dialog, or happening must move the story forward and keep the reader engaged and involved. George Angus wrote that "smooth narration is one of the hardest skills for an aspiring writer to master." A key is to tell "just enough but not too much" – and not to bore the reader with too much unneeded information. In addition, many stories are hindered by inaccuracy – in grammar, consistency of names, personalities, time, facts. Romance writer Lois Walker says narrative gives background information, describes the scenery, and shares secrets with the reader. It also serves as a method to carry readers from one time and place to another. She stresses that "the writer must be careful in balancing the use of dialogue with narrative." Too much description of surroundings or background information will cause impatient readers to lose interest and begin to skim, looking for some more action.

(5) BORING, UNREALISTIC DIALOGUE

Telling a fact in narrative is not nearly as effective as letting a character's voice show it. Good dialog makes a novel sing – and holds the reader's attention. Many novels are sabotaged by boring, unrealistic dialog – by conversation that doesn't ring true to the book's characters or to the setting and time period of the novel. Author Ginger Chambers wrote: "To a great many people ... dialogue is a major stumbling point....Telling a story in its narrative form is easy for them, but when it comes time for a character to speak, they freeze." Writers often don't let the character's voice come through naturally. Dialog feels contrived, unnatural – or authors impose their own voice into the characters, making the different voices too similar. A key problem here is in not knowing the characters well before the writing begins ... and, then, in simply not relaxing and letting the characters talk as the writer knows they normally would. Ginny Wiehardt said that "nothing puts the reader out of a story faster than bad dialog." Dialog should be natural and read like real speech. Writers should also strive to alternate attributions - descriptor beats and speaker tags - so that neither is overdone or intrudes in the ongoing dialog. The best advice by many experts is to write dialog freely and to read dialog out loud after it is written to see if it feels and sounds right

for the story.

(6) UNCLEAR VOICE

Editor Alan Rinzler stresses that "voice is what gives writing energy, authenticity ... it animates the narrator and characters with a unique personality. It grabs your attention and keeps you turning the page." Too many writers are trying to write like someone else or trying to write to please someone else. In result, their work loses its individual sparkle. Rinzler says successful writers "have a voice that reflects who they are and reflects the voice of their characters." All good writers have a strong voice that comes through loud and clear in their work. Striving to please friends, critique group members, the market, or what a writer perceives is wanted by someone else is a quick way to lose personal voice. As psychiatrist Dr. Lonnie MacDonald affirms "Creative writers are most successful when they are simply being themselves." He believes writers must tap their own individuality – and must believe that they are special, unique, and have something to say.

"To know thyself", according to McDonald, "is the most important step to improving your writing." The better a writer knows themselves, the more confidence they have in themselves and the better drawn their heroine and hero will be.

(7) UNRESOLVED PSYCHOLOGICAL ISSUES

The concept of "knowing thyself" leads readily to the last issue of self-sabotage – an author's own personal unresolved psychological issues. Nothing can sabotage the dreams to write – or the ongoing writing life – more than an author's own, unresolved problems. As McDonald states, these can include problems with procrastination, self-discipline, time management, negative attitudes and feelings, excuses or justifications for poor progress, and other blocks and inhibitions to working with disciplined focus and regularity. Diana Brown, regency writer, said "there is nothing sadder or more unsalable than an unfinished manuscript." This is the one area that all the advice articles, craft books, writing groups and conferences cannot fix. Until you give yourself permission to succeed and to do what is necessary to write with regularity and discipline – your dreams of publication will continue to be sabotaged.

In conclusion, the ways writers self-sabotage their writing and personal writing life are often not well-analyzed. As Zappelli says "what is familiar is comfortable, even if it's unhealthy or self-defeating." We often don't like change – or even like to examine the possibility of change. More often, writers, and wannabe writers, are seeking affirmation to continue in the methods and manner they've become familiar with – even if those

methods aren't getting them where they want to go. If editors, successful writers, psychologists and psychiatrists all suggest that these seven areas are often problem areas for most writers ... it would probably be a good thing to carefully consider each of these factors to see how they might be affecting our own production and success.

Dr. Lin Stepp is a writer, faculty member, and business woman. She is the author of The Smoky Mountain Series, a regional, series of warm contemporary romances - with a dash of suspense, a touch of inspiration, and a big dollop of Appalachian flavor - all set in different regions around the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. The first book in the series, *The Foster Girls*, was published this summer and the second book, *Tell Me About Orchard Hollow*, will come out in the spring. For more information about Lin and her novels, see her author's website at: www.linstepp.com

Editor's Message

Please send any upcoming releases, news, and articles to tammyplunkett@sympatico.ca by the 20th of October.

Have a great month full of learning and writing.
-Tammy