

The Essential Elements of Writing a Romance Novel

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Even if you're a seat-of-the-pants, explore-as-you-go sort of writer, there are a few things you need to know about your story before you start seriously writing chapter one. Unsuccessful romances—especially the many that writers start but never complete—stall out because the writer didn't know enough about the basic framework that holds every romance novel together.

Though it's nearly impossible to have every detail worked out ahead of time, if you don't have a pretty good idea of your framework, you'll be apt to wander in frustration with a story that goes nowhere. Or you'll write chapter one over and over, trying to make it work, until you're heartily sick of your characters.

So what are the basics you need to know up front?

Let's review the definition we established for the romance novel: A romance novel is the story of a man and a woman who, while they're solving a problem that threatens to keep them apart, discover that the love they feel for each other is the sort that comes along only once in a lifetime; this discovery leads to a permanent commitment and a happy ending.

This definition summarizes the four crucial basics that make up a romance novel:

1. a hero and a heroine to fall in love
2. a problem that creates conflict and tension between them and threatens to keep them apart
3. a developing love that is so special it comes about only once in a lifetime
4. a resolution in which the problem is solved and the couple is united

These things are the girders that hold up your entire story. Like the steel skeleton of a skyscraper, each piece depends on the others. If one is weak or flawed, the whole structure is apt to fall down.

What your hero and heroine have experienced in their pasts will influence how they react to the problem they face in your story. The nature of the conflict between them will influence their relationship and how the