

School of Plot

Writing Romance Workbook





Dear Writer,

Congratulations on deciding to write a story!
Whether it's your first story or your 100th,
and whether you started years ago or this
morning, **your words are valuable.**

Writing isn't always easy, but by committing
to this project, you've already done better
than anyone who's just dreaming about it.

Finally, I want to **thank you** from the bottom
of my heart for supporting this small
business (actually, a super small business
...it's just 1 person!)

Wishing you all the best!

School of Plot

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ROMANCE WORKBOOK

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BEFORE YOU START

This workbook is split up into 3 acts. However, if your story doesn't follow a 3-act structure, don't worry! This is just there to make the workbook easier to follow.

Everything discussed is still applicable if you choose to write your book (or subplot) with a different structure.

Don't forget: If you want to delete any pages that you find unhelpful, you can and should! This workbook is about helping you to write your love stories. Adapt it to suit your unique needs.

Best of luck on your writing adventure!

Happy writing!



TYPICAL 3 ACT STRUCTURE IN ROMANCE

ACT 1

Lay the groundwork. Introduce the characters and setting. Show their goals, fears, flaws, etc. End with the inciting incident.

ACT 2

Build tension & momentum.
They get to know each other.
The love is deepening.
But so is the conflict!
Ends with the darkest moment.

ACT 3

Resolution of whatever the darkest moment was. Winning the person back. They come together stronger, having learned lessons.



MORE DETAIL ON STRUCTURE

ACT 1	
Inciting Incident	Characters meet for the first time, or are thrown together in strange new circumstances.
ACT 2	
Rising action	As the story's events unfold, your characters' relationship deepens and develops.
Crisis	Something threatens the romance. Perhaps they even decide not to be together, or have a fight, or break up.
ACT 3	
Climax	Problem solved / big romantic gesture. They finally get together! (or not)
Denouement	Happily ever after (or not)

Feel free to deviate from this. It's just a guide. The following pages will contain a template of this structure. Feel free to save it until the end or use it to brainstorm.

WRITING A ROMANTIC SUBPLOT

Your subplot should support your overall story.

Here is a blueprint of plot structure:



Your subplot **can** complement your main story and follow this structure loosely, although it **doesn't have to**.

Subplots can be used in **counterpoint** to the main plot, with events rising in the subplot when they fall in the main plot, and vice versa. They usually converge together at the climax.

Of course, you don't have to follow this structure. You can deviate as much as you want.

TEMPLATE FOR YOUR ROMANCE'S

STRUCTURE

ACT 1	
Inciting Incident	
ACT 2	
Rising action	
Crisis	
ACT 3	
Climax	
Denouement	



SETTING THE
FOUNDATIONS
OF YOUR STORY

DESIGNING YOUR CHARACTERS

We won't re-hash what you've already learned in the character workbook. However, you should make sure your characters have **motivations, fears, goals, and desires** that have nothing to do with the romantic subplot.

You want them to feel fleshed out.

They should think about other things than just love. The more well-rounded your characters are, the more real they will feel, and the more your readers will enjoy reading about them.

They should also have **flaws and limiting beliefs** that might make a romantic relationship difficult. For example, perhaps they're scared of letting people get close to them. Perhaps they're smothering and meddlesome. Perhaps they're inflexible and unwilling to compromise.

When designing your two characters, try and see how their flaws and merits will challenge each another. See where they're similar vs different.

WHO ARE YOUR MAIN COUPLE?

The main characters of romance novels tend to have two aspects to them...

Contrast

When you create a couple that are opposites in many ways, it can lead to a dynamic filled with tension, excitement, and personal growth.

Contrasting characters have the potential to learn from each other. They may help each other step out of their comfort zone or view the world from a different perspective. The differences between the characters can lead to conflict, but this conflict can also generate intense chemistry.

Harmony

Even if they seem like polar opposites, your couple will have some points of likemindedness that allow them to bond, even if it takes a while to discover these similarities.

Even characters who are opposites will have some similarities, and very likeminded characters will still have differences and points of conflict.



POPULAR MAIN COUPLE DYNAMICS

When designing your main couple, think about how they'll play off each other. Popular dynamics include...

Dynamic	Explanation
Sunshine + Grumpy	One character is cheerful, optimistic, and full of energy (the "sunshine"), while the other is more reserved, serious, or grumpy
Wild Child + Responsible	One character is adventurous, impulsive, and often takes while the other is responsible and cautious.
Nurturer + Protector	One character is nurturing, compassionate, and caring, often taking care of others while the other is protective, willing to defend and support their loved ones.
Pragmatist + Dreamer	One character is practical and focused on achieving tangible goals, while the other is a dreamer who revels in imagination and creativity.
Energetic + Calm	One character is full of energy and enthusiasm, while the other is calm and collected, often providing a sense of balance

WRITING YOUR COUPLE'S NAMES

When naming your leading couple, remember that their names should be distinct. Avoid naming them things like John & Joan, Michael & Michelle, Ana & Hannah, etc.

Of course, your story your rules, but keeping the names of your leads distinct will help your story to read better, avoiding confusion.

Besides this, when naming your characters, try and consider:

- **Time Period:** You can use a census to verify name popularity if your story is set in the past
- **Culture:** Resources like BehindtheName can help you find names that match your characters' cultures
- **Personality:** More reserved personalities can be reflected by classic or traditional names. Characters who are more free-spirited or unique might have unconventional names.
- **Association:** Names can evoke various expectations due to associations. For example, readers might expect a character named Juliet to be romantic.



WRITING YOUR COUPLE'S NAMES

	<i>CHARACTER 1</i>	<i>CHARACTER 2</i>
Cultural Heritage		
Personality Traits to Reflect in Name		
Any Literary / Myth / History Figures You Want to Compare them to?		
Brainstorm Names		

CHARACTER 1

What is their goal in life at the start of the story?

What are some of their positive traits?

What are some of their negative traits?



CHARACTER 1

What do they fear most in the world?

What fundamental mistruth do they believe about the world/themselves?

What lesson do they need to learn?

How can the other character help them learn that lesson?

CHARACTER 1

How does their relationship with their parents/family influence the way they form romantic relationships?

Have they ever been betrayed by a partner? How?

How have their previous relationships changed their views on love?

CHARACTER 1

What do their friends think about the way that this character dates/loves people?

How does this character deal with rejection?

What makes them feel loved?

CHARACTER 1

Are they a skilful communicator when it comes to emotions? Why / why not?

How do they show others that they love them?

What does a successful relationship look like to them? Why?

CHARACTER 1

How do they handle disagreements with a loved one?

What do they think are the most important qualities in a romantic relationship?

What are their thoughts on commitment?

Do they believe anything toxic about love? What?

CHARACTER 1

How do they handle arguments?

What aspect of relationships do they find rewarding?

How do they handle insecurity?

What makes them feel connected to someone?

CHARACTER 1

What aspect of relationships do they fear, if any? Why?

How do they handle being overwhelmed in a relationship?

Are they looking for a relationship? Why / why not?

How would their loved ones describe them?

CHARACTER 2

What is their goal in life at the start of the story?

What are some of their positive traits?

What are some of their negative traits?

CHARACTER 2

What do they fear most in the world?

What fundamental mistruth do they believe about the world/themselves?

What lesson do they need to learn?

How can the other character help them learn that lesson?

CHARACTER 2

How does their relationship with their parents/family influence the way they form romantic relationships?

Have they ever been betrayed by a partner? How?

How have their previous relationships changed their views on love?

CHARACTER 2

What do their friends think about the way that this character dates/loves people?

How does this character deal with rejection?

What makes them feel loved?

CHARACTER 2

Are they a skilful communicator when it comes to emotions? Why / why not?

How do they show others that they love them?

What does a successful relationship look like to them? Why?

CHARACTER 2

How do they handle disagreements with a loved one?

What do they think are the most important qualities in a romantic relationship?

What are their thoughts on commitment?

Do they believe anything toxic about love? What?

CHARACTER 2

How do they handle arguments?

What aspect of relationships do they find rewarding?

How do they handle insecurity?

What makes them feel connected to someone?



CHARACTER 2

What aspect of relationships do they fear, if any? Why?

How do they handle being overwhelmed in a relationship?

Are they looking for a relationship? Why / why not?

How would their loved ones describe them?



DEFINING YOUR CHARACTERS' VIEWS

YOUR CHARACTERS VIEWS WILL INFLUENCE HOW THEY MAKE ROMANTIC CHOICES, AND HOW THEIR RELATIONSHIP EVOLVES. THEIR VIEWS MAY ALSO GIVE SOME OPPORTUNITIES FOR BONDING/CONFLICT. ESTABLISH/HINT RELEVANT VIEWS EARLY ON.

	<i>CHARACTER 1</i>	<i>CHARACTER 2</i>	<i>CONFLICT / BONDING POINTS</i>
FAMILY/ FRIENDS			
WORK/ SCHOOL			
SOCIAL ISSUES			
RELIGION			
LIFESTYLE			

SELECTING YOUR SETTING

Setting helps establish the emotional tone of the story. It can convey warmth, excitement, nostalgia, or any other desired emotional atmosphere, which in turn, influences the reader's emotional response to the characters and their relationships.

A well-described setting immerses readers in the story, making them feel like they are right there with the characters. This level of engagement can heighten emotional involvement and investment in the romance as well as being more immersive and enjoyable.

Settings often carry symbolic meaning in romance novels. For instance, a palace may represent fairy-tale romance, while a cabin in the woods can reinforce themes of intimacy and self-discovery. The setting can emphasise the themes and messages the author wants to convey.

Let's develop your story's setting.

WRITING YOUR SETTING

Where does the story take place? Which place and which time period?

How does the setting impact the mood or atmosphere of the story (e.g. is it cosy, dark, etc.)?

Does the setting have any cultural or societal norms that impact the romance?

WRITING YOUR SETTING

Are there any specific local traditions related to courtship or dating?

Are there any social taboos or restrictions in the setting that impact the characters' daily lives?

How does the setting affect the characters' values and beliefs, if at all?

WRITING YOUR SETTING

Keep track of any spots in your wider setting where your characters might go (e.g. flats, coffee shops, etc.)

WRITING YOUR SETTING

To immerse your reader, engage their senses when you describe the setting of your romance novel. The following examples will give you some ideas of how to describe some popular settings. in romance novels, then you'll be given a template to develop your own setting.

SEASIDE TOWN

Sights: Rolling horizon, sunbathers, children building sandcastles, lighthouse, seashells, driftwood, coastal cliffs, fishermen's boats

Smells: Salty breeze, sunscreen, beachside bonfires, saltwater, briny sea air, fish & chips

Sounds: Crashing ocean waves, seagull screeches, splashing in the water, waves lapping at the shore, fishermen selling their catch

Touch: Warm sun on the skin, cool sand underfoot, gentle sea breeze, wet bathing suits clinging, light mist from crashing waves.

WRITING YOUR SETTING COFFEE SHOP

Sights: Steaming cups of coffee, leather armchairs, shelves of books, chalkboard menu, glow of soft pendant lights, art-lined walls, coffee beans in burlap sacks.

Smells: Freshly brewed coffee, fresh pastries and baked goods, toasted sandwiches, roasted nuts, hints of cinnamon and chocolate

Sounds: The hiss and gurgle of espresso machines, hum of conversations, clinking of porcelain cups, the rustle of newspapers being turned, grinder's whir, the chatter of friends

Touch: The warmth of a cup in your hands, texture of a cozy knit sweater

Tastes: Rich, velvety coffee, frothy cappuccinos, buttery croissants, tangy lemon tarts, the crunch of biscotti dipped in your drink.

WRITING YOUR SETTING BALLROOM

Sights: Crystal chandeliers, glittering evening gowns, polished marble floors, grand staircase, ornate ceiling frescoes, gilded mirrors, candlelit sconces, couples twirling on the dance floor

Smells: Fragrant bouquets, expensive perfumes, waxy glow of lit candles, polished wooden floors, faint smell of sweat

Sounds: Classical music from a live orchestra, the rustle of silk gowns, the soft murmurs of conversation, the clinking of crystal glasses, the rhythmic swish of dancers' movements

Touch: Warmth of a partner's hand, cushioning of plush velvet chairs, chill of a champagne flute, the weight of jewelry and tiaras

Tastes: Fine wines and champagnes, oysters and caviar, the richness of chocolate truffles

WRITING YOUR SETTING BOOKSHOP

Sights: Shelves lined with weathered books, antique wooden bookcases, leather-bound tomes with gold lettering, dust floating in the sunlight filtering through small windows, soft lamp glow

Smells: The earthy scent of old pages and leather bindings, a hint of mustiness that's oddly comforting, subtle smell of ink and aged paper

Sounds: The soft creak of wooden floors underfoot, rustling of pages as someone turns a book, the distant hum of city life outside, the soft chime of a bell when the door opens

Touch: The embrace of an armchair as you sink into it, the crispness of paper as you turn a page, the weight of a book in your hands

Tastes: Sips of freshly brewed coffee or tea from a nearby cafe, the occasional taste of dust

WRITING YOUR SETTING SMALL TOWN

Sights: Cobbled streets lined with cottages, quaint storefronts with hand-painted signs, ancient stone churches with ivy-covered walls, thatched roofs, cosy tearooms with floral china,

Smells: Freshly baked bread, the earthy aroma of the countryside after rainfall, blooming flowers in cottage gardens, pub food cooking smells

Sounds: Birds chirping, the distant hum of a tractor in a nearby field, the clip-clop of horse hooves on cobblestones, the muffled chime of a church bell, occasional rumble of a passing car

Touch: Uneven cobblestones underfoot, texture of well-worn leather armchairs in the local pub, refreshing coolness of a pint glass

Tastes: Crisp bite of locally grown apples, homemade jams and preserves, hearty stews



WRITING YOUR SETTING

Sights	
Smells	
Sounds	
Touch	
Tastes	

SIDE CHARACTERS

Side characters are often an important part of romantic novels. They can introduce conflict or obstacles to the budding romance. This can be in the form of a disapproving friend, a meddling family member, or a rival for one of the main characters' affections.

Side characters may have their subplots that intersect with the main plot. These subplots can provide opportunities for character growth, add layers to the story, and ultimately influence the development of the main romance.

Well-developed side characters can be endearing to readers. They create a sense of familiarity and connection, making readers invested in their stories and relationships, not just those of the main characters. It might create a cosy vibe or add a layer of realness or comedy.

Comedic side characters can lighten the mood and provide a break from the emotional intensity of the romance.



COMMON TYPES OF SIDE CHARACTERS

Type	Explanation
Foil	Contrasts with the protagonist, highlighting their strengths / weaknesses. Offers a different perspective on love / relationships, challenging the protagonist's beliefs. More often the two love interests are each other's foils, but sometimes it can be someone else.
Mentor	Guides the main character in matters of love. Acts as a source of support & guidance.
Matchmaker	Characters who actively or unintentionally play a role in bringing the main characters together, a catalyst for the romance
Comic Relief	Provides humour and levity to balance emotional intensity. Delivers witty one-liners, engages in amusing situations, or exhibits eccentric behaviour.
Confidants	Characters with whom the main characters share their deepest feelings, often serving as a means for emotional catharsis. They may encourage the characters to take a risk in the name of love.

SIDE CHARACTER SHEETS

NAME

Relationship to main characters

Positive Traits	Neutral Traits	Negative Traits

Appearance	
Unique Quirks	
Role in the Plot	

SIDE CHARACTER SHEETS

NAME

Relationship to main characters

Positive Traits	Neutral Traits	Negative Traits

Appearance	
Unique Quirks	
Role in the Plot	

SIDE CHARACTER SHEETS

NAME

Relationship to main characters

Positive Traits	Neutral Traits	Negative Traits

Appearance	
Unique Quirks	
Role in the Plot	

ROMANCE ANTAGONISTS

Antagonists in romance novels are characters who serve as an obstacle or source of conflict in a romantic relationship.

Unlike the traditional antagonist in a story who may be a villain or adversary, a romance story's antagonist doesn't often have malicious intent but plays a role in creating tension or challenges within the romantic plot.

Antagonists are not necessarily villains; they are often complex characters with their own motivations and emotions. Their role in the story is to challenge the main characters' relationship and provide opportunities for character development, growth, and exploration of the themes of love and commitment.

Not all romantic stories have antagonists. Sometimes the conflict stems from external circumstances (e.g. distance) or internal obstacles (e.g. commitment phobia).

COMMON TYPES OF ROMANCE ANTAGONISTS

Type	Explanation
Love Rival	A character who competes for the affections of one of the main characters, often forming a love triangle. They are often depicted as a viable alternative to the primary love interest.
Familial Opposition	Family members can oppose the romantic relationship for various reasons. This can stem from differences in social class, cultural background, or personal prejudices.
Ex-Partner	They may still have unresolved feelings, creating tension and jealousy. This can lead them to try and break the couple up or win back their original partner.
Best Friend	A close friend of one of the main characters. They might offer well-intentioned or malicious advice about the romantic relationship, leading to conflict.
Rival	One of the characters may have a rival (e.g. in the workplace) who wants to break them up out of spite.

ANTAGONIST SHEET

NAME

Relationship to main characters

Positive Traits	Neutral Traits	Negative Traits

Appearance	
Motivation For Antagonism	
Actions That Impact Plot	

WHAT'S THE DEAL WITH TROPIES?

Tropes in romantic novels are recurring themes, plot devices, character types, or narrative elements that are commonly used in fiction.

Popular examples include enemies to lovers and second chance romance.

Tropes often provide a sense of familiarity to readers. People may seek out specific tropes because they enjoy the comfort of knowing what to expect. This can help with marketing your novel, as readers may favour certain tropes. For example, some romance readers actively seek out (or actively avoid) novels with certain tropes.

However, overuse or poor execution of tropes can lead to cliché or formulaic storytelling, which can turn readers away. When tropes are used without creativity or depth, they can make a story feel predictable or uninspired.

You can choose to lean into tropes, subvert them, or avoid them altogether.

HOW TO WRITE TROPIES

Before you can use a trope effectively, it's essential to understand it thoroughly. Study examples of the trope in other works to see how it has been used, what makes it work, and how it can be subverted or modified.

Tropes can serve as a solid foundation for your story, providing a familiar structure that readers can connect with. However, don't stop there. Your characters are the heart of your story. Invest time in developing well-rounded, believable characters, regardless of tropes.

One effective way to use tropes is to subvert reader expectations. Introduce twists or variations that challenge the typical outcomes associated with the trope. If you go down this route, identify the most predictable aspects of the trope and consider how you can challenge them. For example, you might subvert a love triangle trope by ending it in the two potential love interests rejecting the main character.



POPULAR ROMANCE TROPIES

Name	Examples
Grumpy/ Sunshine	One character is grumpy, cynical, or reserved, while the other is cheerful, optimistic, or outgoing. Their contrasting personalities lead to romantic tension and eventual connection.
Enemies to Lovers	Two characters start as adversaries or enemies and gradually develop romantic feelings for each other over the course of the story. This trope uses the tension of the rivalry to create romantic tension and an aspect of forbidden desire.
Fake Dating	Characters pretend to be in a romantic relationship, often for various reasons such as to make someone jealous or gain an advantage. This pretence usually leads to genuine romantic feelings.
He falls first	The male main character falls in love before the other (usually female) main character. They may or may not confess. Readers often see the male main character's PoV with this trope.



POPULAR ROMANCE TROPES

Name	Examples
Marriage of Convenience	Characters enter into a marriage for practical reasons, such as a business arrangement or to fulfil a political obligation. Over time, they may discover true love in their unconventional union.
Bodyguard Romance	One character is a bodyguard responsible for protecting their love interest. As they spend time together, romantic feelings develop amid danger and intrigue.
Only one bed	Characters find themselves in a situation where they must share a single bed, often due to limited accommodations. This close proximity can lead to intimacy.
Second Chance Romance	Characters who were once in a romantic relationship but broke up due to various reasons get a second chance at love.
Forced Proximity	The central characters may not get along, but they are forced to spend a significant amount of time in close quarters due to situations beyond their control (e.g. delayed flight), and they grow close.

WRITING YOUR TROPEs

Does your story use any tropes? If so, list them.

What do readers typically come to expect if they pick up a novel with the tropes yours may include?

Will you subvert your readers' expectations of any tropes? If so, how?



YOUR NOVEL'S NAME

You might want to come back to this at the end,
but here are a few strategies you can use to
develop your romance novel's name:

Strategy	Explanation
Motif	Titles can draw from motifs or symbolism in your story. For example, "Hearts in Bloom" for a story with a floral theme.
Contrasts	Titles that juxtapose opposites or contrasts can be good for stories where opposites attract. E.g. "Fire and Ice"
Question	Pose a question or hint at a mystery in your title to pique readers' curiosity. E.g. "What Happened to Emma Rose?"
Setting	If the setting plays a significant role in your story, you can incorporate it into the title. E.g. "A Coffee Shop in Paris"
Numbers	E.g. "7 Ways to Lose Your Soulmate"
Alliteration	Many novels play with alliteration in their titles. E.g. "Lover's Lane", "Royal Rebel"



YOUR NOVEL'S NAME

What kind of mood or vibe are you trying to convey with your novel's name? (e.g. funny, tragic, etc.)

What are some key themes, characters, locations, or ideas that you might want to use for your title?

Use this space and the answers above to brainstorm titles for your project:



ACT I

THE SETUP

WRITING THE OPENING

Your main characters typically start a romance novel wanting something. Something about their life is not fulfilling them. This could be a job, a relationship, a boring town, etc.

We often get to see one or both of the characters grappling with their day to day lives at the start of the story. This gives us a chance to get to know the characters and their surroundings, as well as introducing side characters.

You may be tempted to rush to the meet-cute (valid - you absolutely can do that!) but this part of the story gives us an opportunity to show readers just how much the romance changes each character's life by contrasting it with their regular old life.

In this part of the story, show readers enough details to make characters relatable and intriguing, but leave room for growth and development throughout the story.

WRITING THE OPENING

What does character 1's regular life look like? What are they struggling with, whom do they speak to, etc.?

What does character 2's regular life look like? What are they struggling with, whom do they speak to, etc.?

THE MOMENT YOUR CHARACTERS

FIRST MEET

The way your characters meet can set the tone for their relationship, and for the story.

Not only that, but readers love unique first meetings.

When you design their first meeting, think about: whether it **makes sense** for your characters to be in the situation they're in. Does it make sense with their personality? What led to them being in that situation.

Brainstorm this here:

IDEAS FOR YOUR

FIRST MEETING

CONTEMPORARY

- | | |
|------------------------|------------------------|
| Strangers share a taxi | Share a jail cell |
| Fighting for rare book | Actor & stunt double |
| Got on wrong flight | Con artist & victim |
| Job interview | Strangers on train |
| Trapped in snowstorm | Robbing the same house |
| Set up by their mums | Drunk on holiday |
| Sports tournament | Bumpy plane ride |
| Laundromat | 2 sides of a protest |
| Emergency room | Actors on movie |
| New bodyguard | Spilled drink |
| Trespasser | Medical emergency |
| Mixed-up drink order | Dancing class |
| Got into wrong Uber | Tattoo shop |
| Coffee shop | Costume party |
| Florist | Archeological dig |
| Mistaken for an ex | Red carpet event |
| Paint store | New flatmates |
| Accidental break-in | |



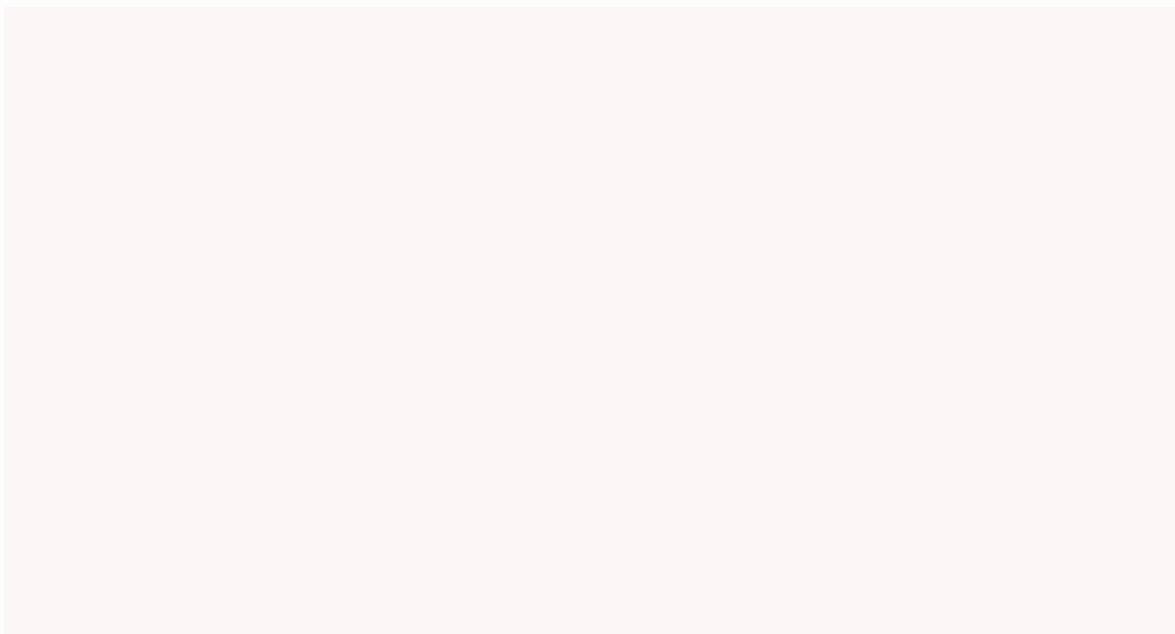
IDEAS FOR YOUR FIRST MEETING

FANTASY/HISTORICAL

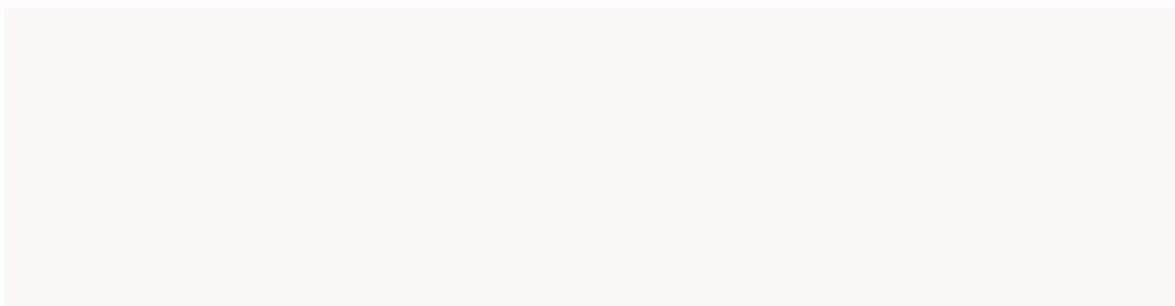
- | | |
|--------------------------|-------------------------|
| Rival rulers at war | Dungeon-mates |
| Rival covens | Accidental portal |
| Masquerade ball | Gambling in tavern |
| Boarding school | Accidental summoning |
| Assassin and target | Knight training |
| Witch's new apprentice | New crew-mates |
| Mermaid gets fished | Seeking same relic |
| One sees other in vision | Magical heist |
| Knight goes to healer | Both kidnapped |
| Rescued from fairies | Rescued by knight |
| Both hunting a dragon | Palace kitchens |
| Ancient library | Arranged royal marriage |
| Both are in disguise | Travelling circus |
| Fortune teller's shop | New apprenticeship |
| Bandit ambush | Under a spell |
| Both escaping guards | Captured by pirates |
| Excavating treasure | Prophesied love |
| Both hired by king | Magic shop |

WRITING YOUR CHARACTERS' FIRST MEETING

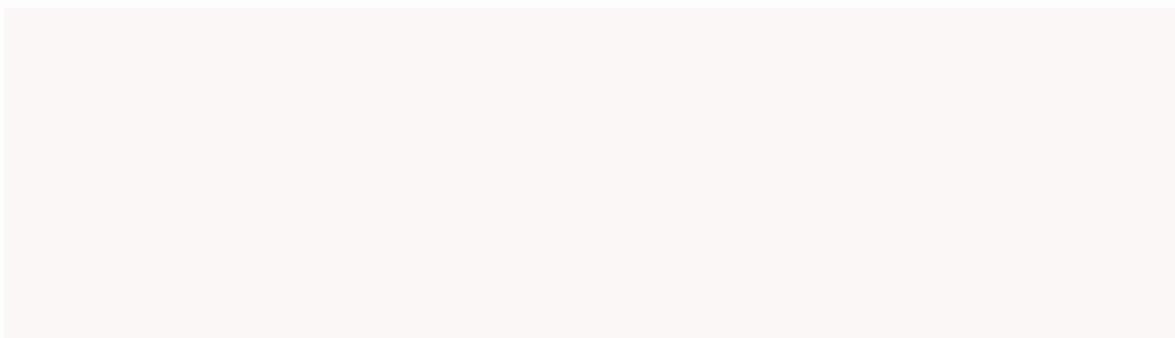
Where do your characters meet? And how?



What does the first character think of the second?



What does the second character think of the first?



WRITING THE INITIAL CONFLICT

You've set up your world, your characters have met, now it's time to force them to spend some time together. Think about which event sets the story in motion. For example, two royals may meet and take an immediate dislike to each other, but the conflict that propels the plot is the moment they're told that they will need to wed to secure a political alliance.

This key event often forces the characters to make a choice - one that will drive the plot.

For example, when a plane crash forces two characters to spend time together. This forces them to decide whether to team up and improve their chances of survival, or go their own ways.

Another example is that two characters are invited to the same wedding, single. They can either go as each other's fake dates or go alone and risk being criticised by their judgemental families.

WRITING THE INITIAL CONFLICT

What is the initial conflict or obstacle?

What question or decision does it force the protagonists to make?

What do they think will come of this, and how do they feel about it?



HOW DOES ACT I END? *

Act 1 usually ends with the characters accepting the call to adventure.

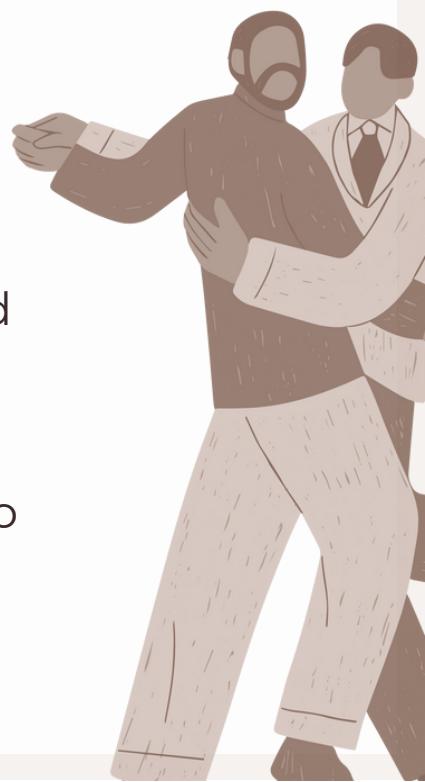
For example:

- Protagonists agree to be each others fake dates for their mutual enemy's wedding
- Rival protagonists decide to team up during a competition to take down the frontrunner
- Two characters both agree to go on an arctic expedition together

You don't need to announce the end of act 1 with trumpets and balloons.

Just be aware, as a writer, that from this point on, you're going to be spending some time communicating the characters' growing closeness and attraction.

Act 2 is also when the conflict starts to increase.





OVERVIEW OF ACT 1

	<i>CHARACTER 1</i>	<i>CHARACTER 2</i>
How they start the story		
What they want		
What they need		
Thoughts upon meeting		
Accepting the call to adventure		



ACT II

CONFRONTATION

STARTING ACT II

The first half of act 2 is a crucial phase in a romance story, as it's where the characters' connection evolves and deepens despite the obstacles they face. This phase is essential for readers to become emotionally invested in the characters' love story.

This phase often begins with the characters spending more time together voluntarily or due to circumstances. We see the first seeds of attraction grow into something more solid, even for couples who are still bickering at this point.

They may start slowly opening up to each other and noticing more things they like about each other as this part of the story progresses..

Often characters are reluctant to give way to their emotions at this point, which is what allows writers to maintain a level of tension. However, the growing attraction reaches a point where it becomes undeniable.



AS THE RELATIONSHIP DEVELOPS

Your characters will be spending more time together as the novel goes on.

	<i>CHARACTER 1</i>	<i>CHARACTER 2</i>
Why are they spending more time together?		
How do they feel about this?		
What (if anything) are they attracted to in the other person at first?		

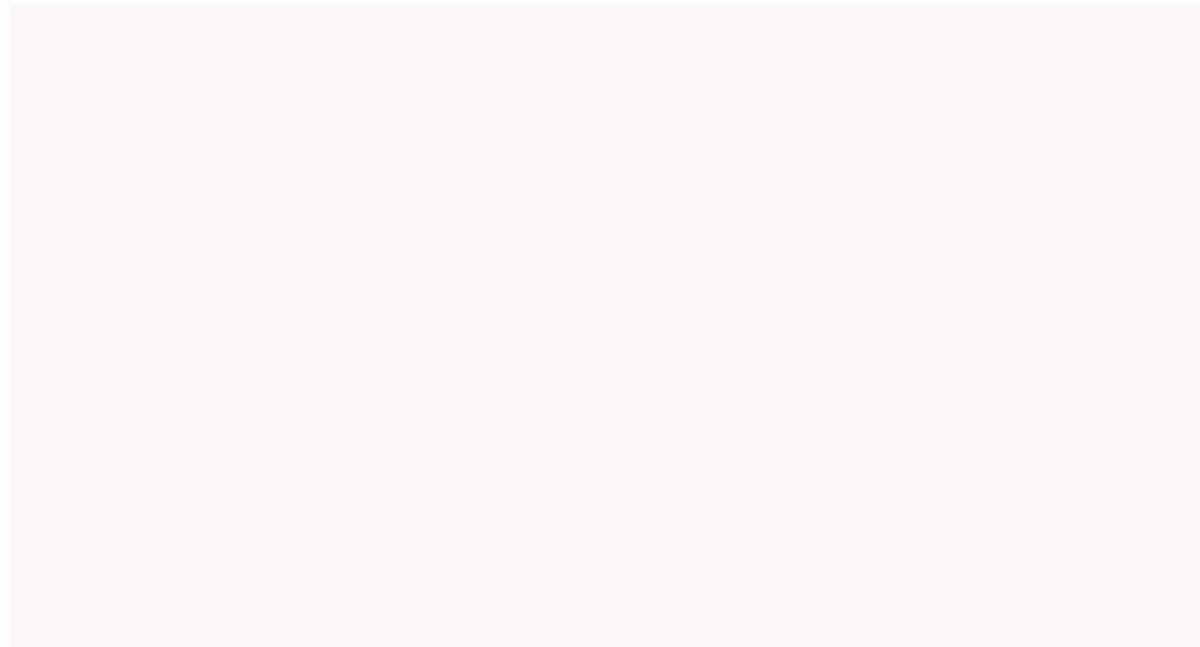
AS THE RELATIONSHIP DEVELOPS

What pivotal moments of trust-building will occur in this act?

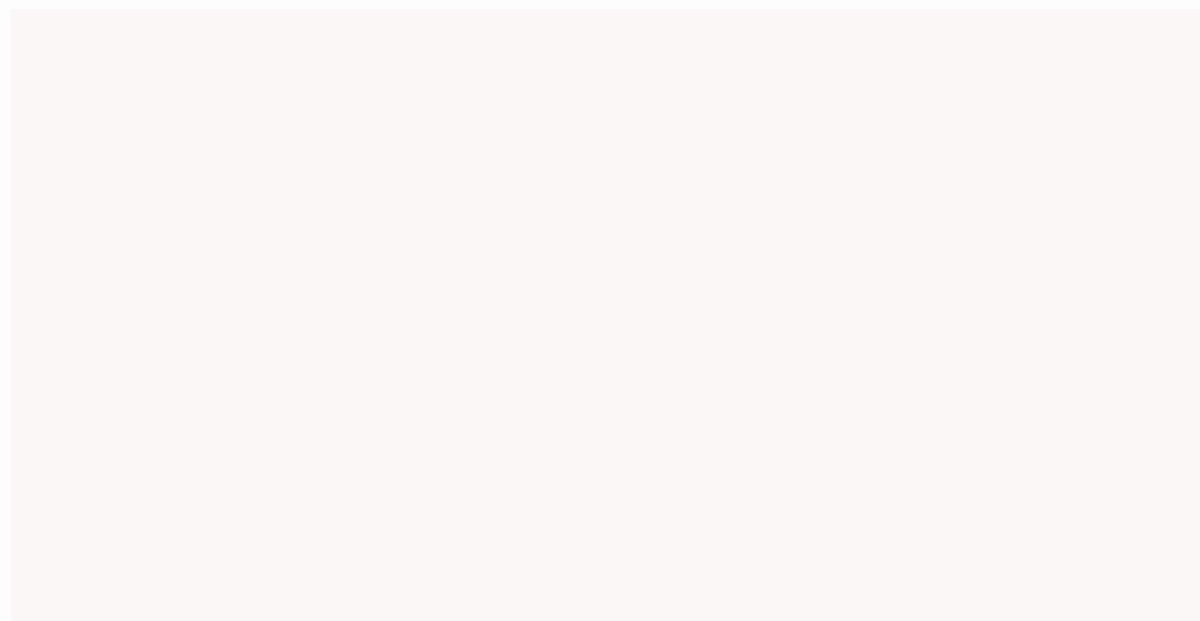
What vulnerabilities will the characters reveal to each other in this part of the story?

AS THE RELATIONSHIP DEVELOPS

How do the characters' feelings about each other begin to change after more time spent together?



How will physical intimacy, if included in your story, evolve over the course of this act?



HOW TO WRITE ATTRACTION

Act 2 shows the characters getting to know each other better. Their attraction will be building, whether or not they want to fight it.

There is often a special sort of tension here: The characters want each other, but they may not want to state this desire aloud.

Romance readers tend to love this tension. As a writer, you can play into it, balancing the character's desire with their inability (or unwillingness) to speak it aloud.

Usually in act 2, intimacy also grows.

Emotional intimacy should grow during act 2. It's up to you whether or not you want to increase the physical intimacy too.

There are plenty of tame ways to do this.



WRITING ROMANTIC TENSION

The tension between your characters is the palpable anticipation of a romantic or physical encounter. It's the feeling that something intense and intimate is about to happen, but it's not quite there yet.

This tension creates a strong engagement for readers. The allure of what might happen is exciting for readers, and it keeps them hooked.

This tension doesn't necessarily need to lead to explicit content. It's about the build-up, the chemistry, and the emotional connection between characters. Where you go from there is up to you!

, Tension is often rooted in anticipation. Readers should eagerly anticipate the moment when the characters confess their feelings, share their first kiss, or overcome the central obstacles to their love. This anticipation keeps readers turning the pages to see the resolution of the romantic arc.

HOW TO WRITE ROMANTIC TENSION

Body language: Show how characters react to each other physically - e.g. leaning in, holding prolonged eye contact, or how their heart rate quickens when they're near each other.

Inner monologue: You can show characters' internal struggles, longing, and fantasies.

Build-up: Describe the characters' increasing physical closeness and the electric anticipation that precedes a moment of intimacy when/if it finally comes.

Building anticipation is crucial for tension. You don't need to rush to resolve the tension or fulfil the characters' desires. You can allow it to simmer and linger throughout the story, leaving readers eagerly awaiting the eventual payoff.

To heighten the tension, you can create moments when the characters come close to giving in to their desires but then pull back, heightening the anticipation.



BODY LANGUAGE OF ATTRACTION

Aspect	Explanation / Examples
Touch	Light, incidental touches (e.g., brushing fingers, accidental contact), purposeful touches (e.g., hand-holding, placing a hand on the arm while laughing), holding on longer during a hug
Smiling & Laughing	Laughter or playful smiles during conversation, playful teasing and banter, shared in-jokes
Self-Grooming	Tucking hair behind the ear or playing with strands while talking, fixing clothing or jewellery, adjusting posture
Mirroring	Subconsciously copying each other's gestures and postures, picking up each other's speech patterns by accident
Eyes	Frequently glancing at the other person's lips during conversation, holding eye contact while speaking, even during vulnerable moments



CREATING CHEMISTRY THROUGH DIALOGUE

Here are ways you can use dialogue to show romantic chemistry:

Banter	Teasing, humour, and light banter in which there's a witty push and pull.
Play With Silence	Sometimes, what characters don't say can be as powerful as what they do say. Use silence, pauses, and lingering glances to convey unspoken emotions.
Dialogue Tags	Dialogue tags (like "said" and "whispered") can be used to convey a sense of chemistry, or a double meaning to the character's words ("they stammered", etc.)
Parallel Thoughts	Show how characters can continue each other's thoughts or ideas. This implies a strong connection and understanding.
Vulnerable Chats	Vulnerable conversations should come after some intimacy is built. When they confide in one another, it deepens their emotional connection.
Callbacks	Characters show they paid attention to an offhand comment the other made earlier, remembering a small detail, showing they care

IDEAS TO SHOW THE GROWING EMOTIONAL INTIMACY

- Opening up about their pasts
- Discussing their fears
- Thoughtful gestures
- Facing and resolving conflicts together
- Teaching each other about their customs
- Remembering things about the other (e.g. how they take their tea/coffee) without asking
- Physiological ease/relaxation when together
- Whispering late at night, sharing stories
- Taking the other to emotionally significant places (e.g. the house where they grew up)
- Private jokes
- Turning to the other one in times of crisis
- Feeling safe to share their most vulnerable thoughts and secrets

Remember, these moments **need to be earned**.
They come after some time spent getting to know and trust one another.

IDEAS TO SHOW THE GROWING

PHYSICAL INTIMACY

- Braiding someone's hair
- Taking someone's hands to console them
- Fixing someone's wounds
- Raising someone's knuckles to your lips in greeting (e.g. before a dance)
- Borrowing clothes and noticing the smell
- Falling asleep with their head on your shoulder/lap
- Big warm greeting hug that last too long
- Wiping away their tears
- Fixing someone's clothes / tie / hair
- Sharing a blanket and being over-aware of your physical proximity
- Doing someone's makeup and noticing their eye colour
- Checking their temperature with the back of your hand when they're sick
- Teaching someone to dance
- Holding someone while they cry
- Wiping the dirt/blood away from their face



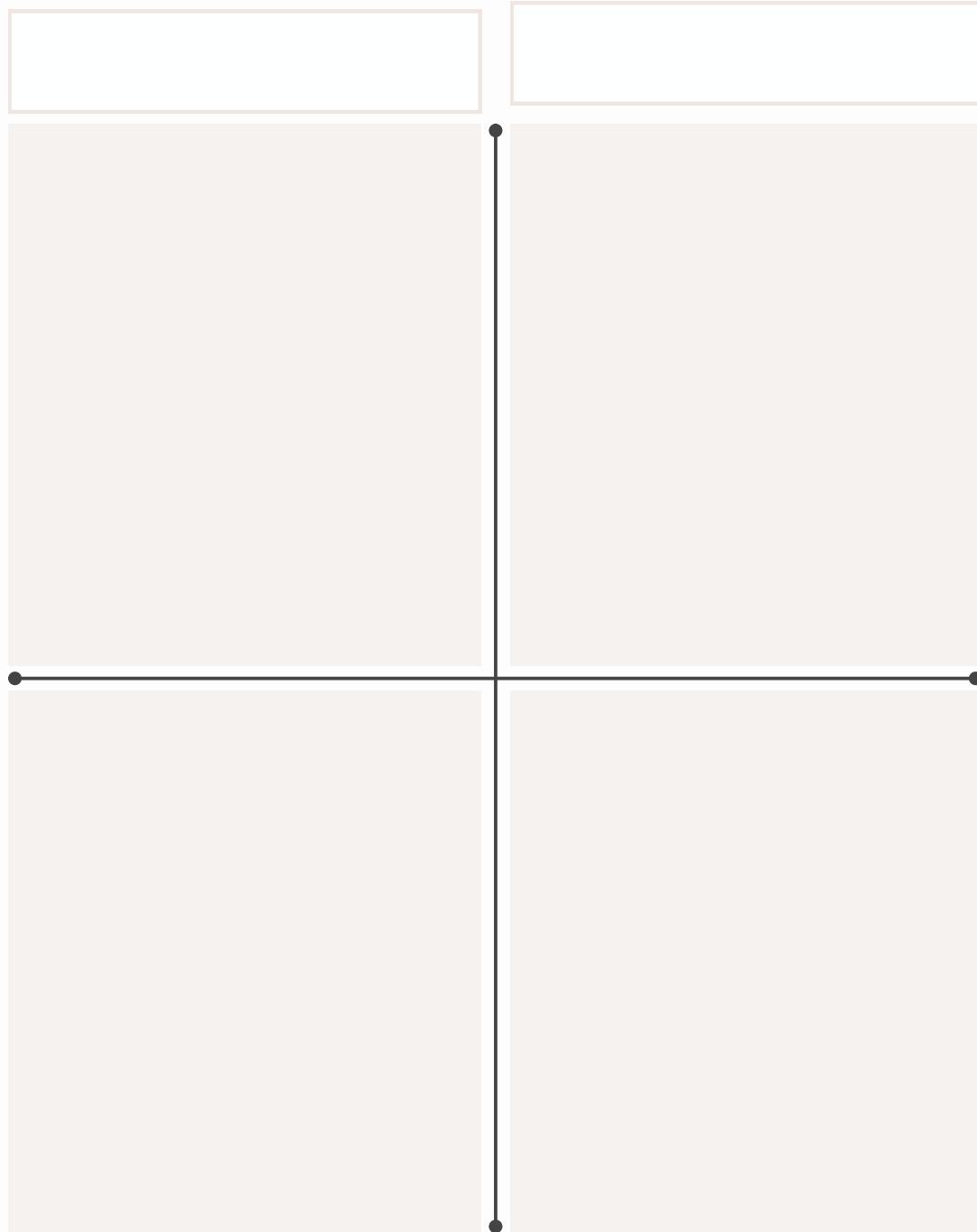
HOW DO YOUR CHARACTERS EXPRESS INTIMACY?

CHARACTER 1

CHARACTER 2

EMOTIONAL

PHYSICAL



WRITING YOUR CHARACTERS' ATTRACTION

How does Character 1 start exhibiting signs of attraction?

Do they acknowledge their own attraction? If so, how do they feel about it?

Do they act on it or suppress it? Why? How?

WRITING YOUR CHARACTERS' ATTRACTION

What does Character 1 initially like about Character 2?

What do they slowly begin to appreciate that they didn't initially?

What is holding them back from acting on their desire?

WRITING YOUR CHARACTERS' ATTRACTION

How does Character 2 start exhibiting signs of attraction?

Do they acknowledge their own attraction? If so, how do they feel about it?

Do they act on it or suppress it? Why? How?

WRITING YOUR CHARACTERS' ATTRACTION

What does Character 2 initially like about Character 1?

What do they slowly begin to appreciate that they didn't initially?

What is holding them back from acting on their desire?

HOW TO WRITE CONFLICT

Act 2 is often when conflict starts to grow.

Your characters have spent some time getting closer. However, their differences (or some external factors) challenge them, and force them to make difficult decisions. This pressure causes your characters to change and grow - i.e. to be **dynamic**, not static.

If your characters want love, they need to first work on a flaw. This flaw has always been there from the start, but this new relationship shines a spotlight upon it. The characters either need to change, or to accept that they'll lose out on the love of their life.

This flaw can be anything - workaholism, commitment issues, passivity to their overbearing family, etc.

Overcoming the obstacle will force **character development**. It's make or break!

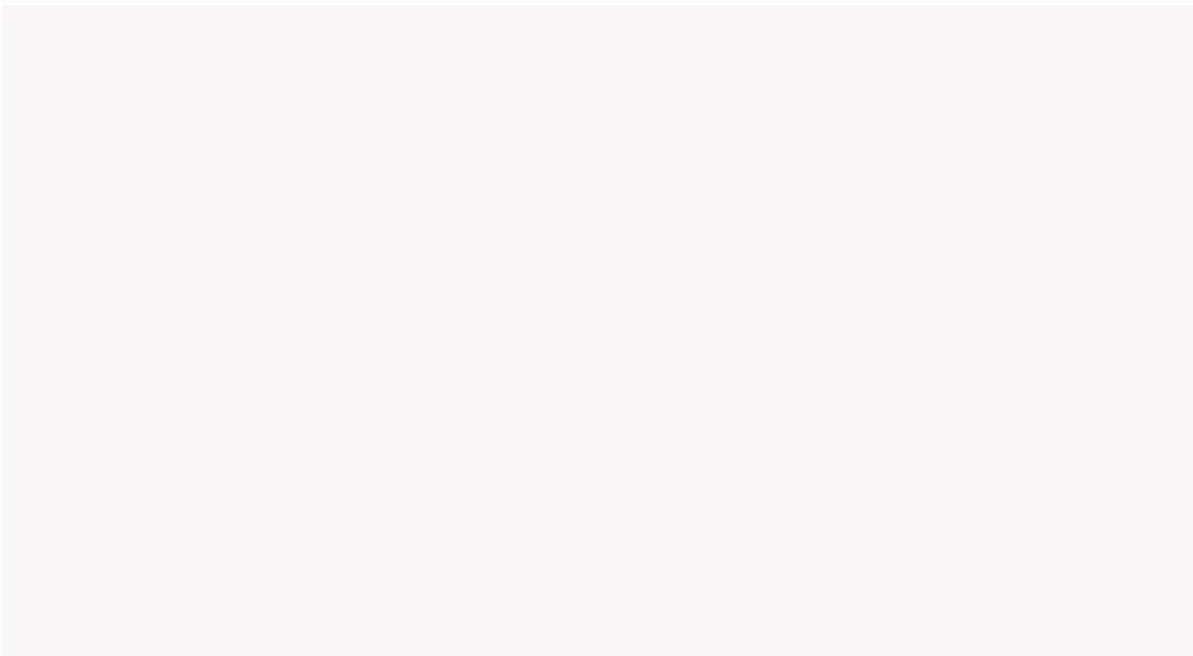
IDEAS OF ROMANTIC OBSTACLES

WHAT IS STOPPING THEM FROM BEING TOGETHER? THESE OBSTACLES CAN BE INTERNAL OR EXTERNAL.

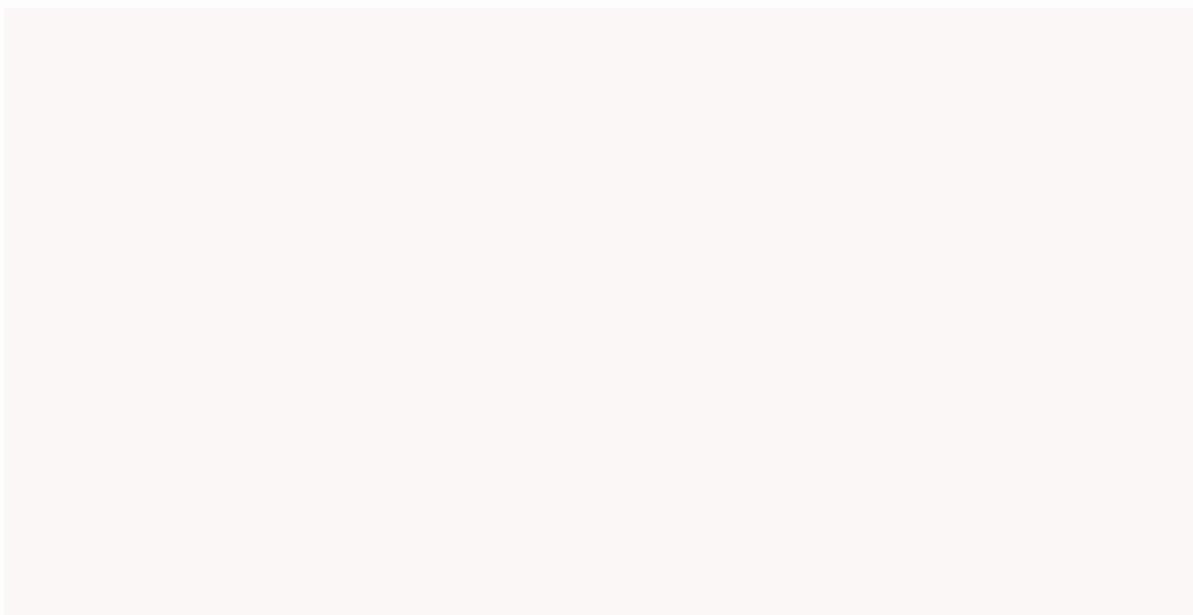
- | | |
|-----------------------|-------------------------|
| Social conventions | Wealth difference |
| Family pressures | Class difference |
| Cultural differences | Two sides of a war |
| Insecurities | Lack of trust |
| Poor communication | Ethical differences |
| Fear of commitment | Ex tries to interfere |
| Long Distance | Duty prevents them |
| Inflexible goals | External obligations |
| Prejudices | Past baggage |
| Irresponsibility | Lack of self worth |
| Over-seriousness | Fear of change |
| Disbelief in love | Different values |
| They've been lied to | Incompatible lifestyles |
| Issues with shame | Rival jobs |
| A law prevents it | Fear of vulnerability |
| No time for love | Pride prevents them |
| They've been hurt | Financial barriers |
| Struggle to be honest | They're from 2 worlds |
| Friends disapprove | Refusal to compromise |
| Past trauma | Physical danger |

WRITING THE ROMANTIC OBSTACLES

What internal obstacles (e.g. commitmentphobia) hold the characters back from love?



What external obstacles (e.g. meddling family) hold the characters back from love?



HOW TO WRITE INTERNAL CONFLICT

Stories are more engaging when there are internal conflicts complementing the external ones.

Readers enjoy it when the love interests like each other for reasons beyond just 'they're so hot'. The characters should be able to learn from each other. They should be able to challenge each other's limiting beliefs and grow together.

Alternatively, if you're writing a toxic romance, you can show what draws them together but also where their unsolvable conflicts arise from.

Writer Sophie Penbrooke uses an 'emotional conflict square' to achieve this. This workbook presents a slightly adapted version of Penbrooke's square. First you'll see a filled in example, then you'll have your own modified conflict square that you can fill in for your characters.

HOW TO WRITE A MODIFIED CONFLICT SQUARE

RELATIONSHIP CHARACTER 1 CHARACTER 2

WEAKNESS

Limiting trait/beliefs
E.g. They can't trust people.

+

Limiting trait/belief.
E.g. They're too much of a pushover.

=

Do these flaws create conflict?
How?

STRENGTHS

What can they teach the other?
Carefulness? Resilience? Etc

+

What can they teach the other?
Optimism? Openness? Etc

=

Do these traits bring them closer together?
How?

LESSON

What do they need to learn?
E.g. To open up and let people in



+

What do they need to learn?
E.g. To stand up for themselves.

=

Do they learn from each other? What, and how?

YOUR CHARACTERS' CONFLICT SQUARE

WEAKNESS

STRENGTHS

LESSON

CHARACTER 1

CHARACTER 2

RELATIONSHIP

+

+

+

==

==

==



HOW TO WRITE ALL TIME LOW

Act 2 usually ends with an all time low. The obstacle almost breaks the couple up in many romantic stories.

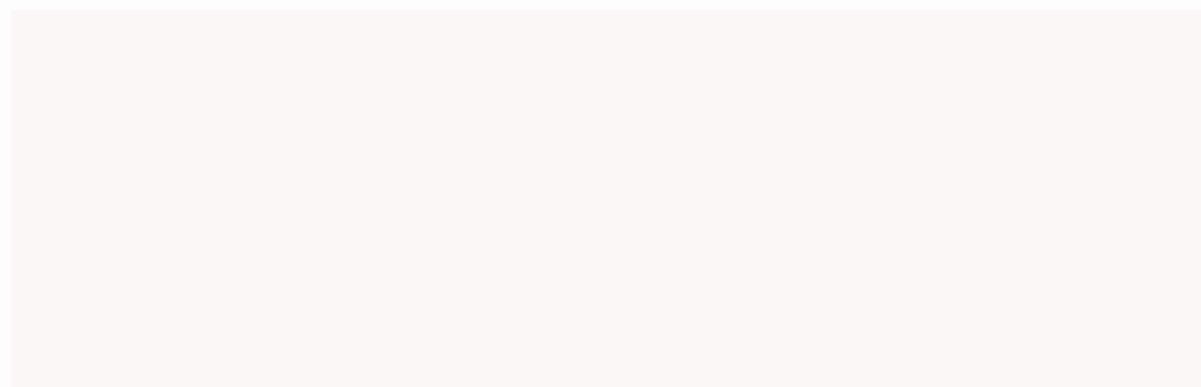
You don't need to have an act 2 breakup, but this is usually the point in a 3 act structure where things get dire.

The challenge is huge, and it requires the couple to make a huge change in their mindset/actions/life if they ever want to salvage the relationship. This conflict should be significant enough to challenge the relationship but not insurmountable.

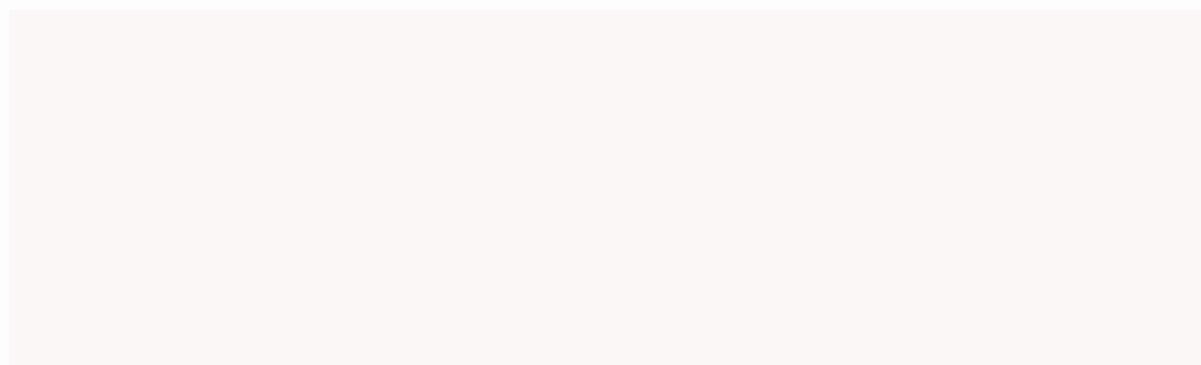
A lot of romance stories choose to hinge the story's all time low around a misunderstanding or miscommunication, but it can often be stronger to base the all time low around a flaw or choice that characters are making.

WRITING YOUR CHARACTERS' ALL TIME LOW

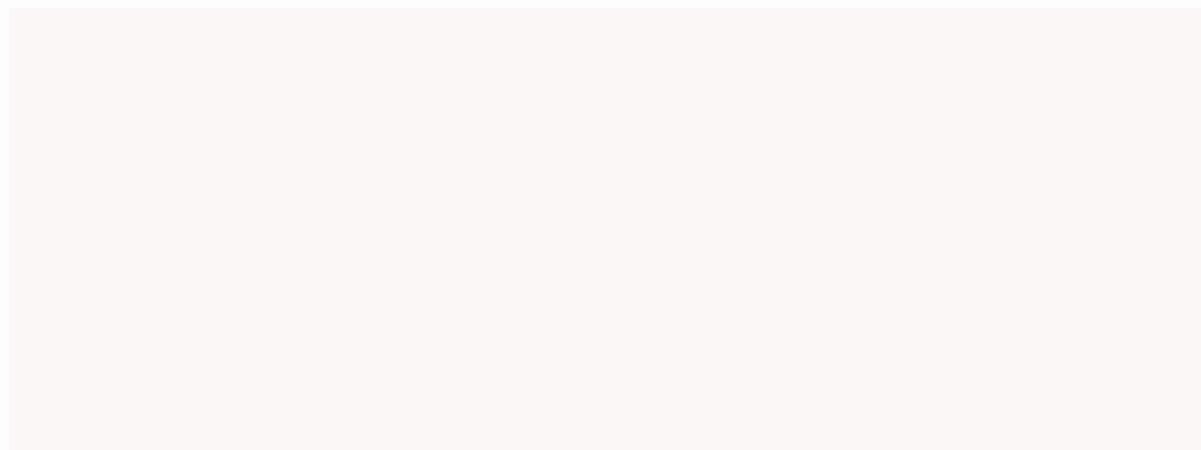
Clearly define the central issue that leads to the all-time low.



How does each character feel about this?



How does each character deal with this? (e.g. booking a flight, reaching out to their ex, etc.)





AFTER THE CLIMAX, THEY RECOVER

Usually, after the 'all time low' of the relationship, some effort is put in to recovering the relationship.

Usually, characters need to **sacrifice something** in order to be together (e.g. a relationship with a family member / their claim to the throne / their white collar job).

Usually this sacrifice is a culmination of the **lessons they learned**. For example:

Lesson that needed to be learned	Character 1 needed to learn how to grow a spine and stand up to their overbearing mum.
Conflict	Character 1's mum keeps meddling and doing things that hurt Character 2. Character 2 is sick of not being defended and breaks things off.
Recovery	Character 1 finally confronts their mother, asserts their independence, and goes to win their love back.



SURPASSING THE ROMANTIC OBSTACLES

Conflict allows characters to grow and improve. Here are some ways that obstacles can be used to provide character growth in stories:

Obstacle	Character Growth (Example)
Workaholism	Prioritise personal relationships by recognising the importance of work-life balance. Establish clear boundaries between work and personal life, respecting partner's needs: Allocate quality time for loved ones.
Stubbornness	Growing to learn the importance of compromise in relationships. Develop active listening skills to understand the partner's perspective and needs. Learn to meet in the middle.
Perfectionism	Realise that love accepts imperfections and that no one is perfect. Share feelings of inadequacy with the partner, allowing them to offer support and reassurance.
Fear of Abandonment	Communicate openly with the partner about the fear and its origins, seeking reassurance and support. Develop trust in the partner's commitment.



SURPASSING THE ROMANTIC OBSTACLES

Obstacle	Character Growth (Example)
Commitment Phobia	Explore the root causes of commitment phobia through introspection. Gradually open up and allow oneself to become vulnerable in the relationship. Maintain open and honest communication with the partner about fears and concerns. Allow positive relationship experiences to gradually ease commitment fears.
Trust Issues	Build trust in the relationship through consistent, reliable behaviour from the partner. Address past traumas and work on rebuilding trust in oneself and others. Communicate openly with the partner about trust issues, seeking reassurance when needed. Let positive experiences with the partner slowly rebuild trust.
Insecurity	: Experience unconditional love and acceptance from the partner. Engage in self-improvement activities to boost self-esteem and confidence. Share insecurities with the partner, seeking reassurance and Address deep-rooted insecurities alone and work on unravelling them.

WRITING YOUR ACT 3 RECOVERY

Lesson that needed to be learned	
Conflict	
Recovery	



HOW TO WRITE THE ENDING

Your characters had other goals than just their relationship. Once the relationship is back on track (or not), you still need to tie up these loose ends.

You could also give a preview of how their relationship is going. What's next for the couple? Are they buying a flat together? Did they start seeing a couple's counsellor?

There are no wrong answers to these questions. Whatever you choose to write still needs to reflect the previous themes of the story.



WRITING YOUR CHARACTERS' ENDINGS

Did Character 1 achieve their non-romantic goals?

Did Character 2 achieve their non-romantic goals?

What's next for the relationship?

WRITING YOUR CHARACTERS' ENDINGS

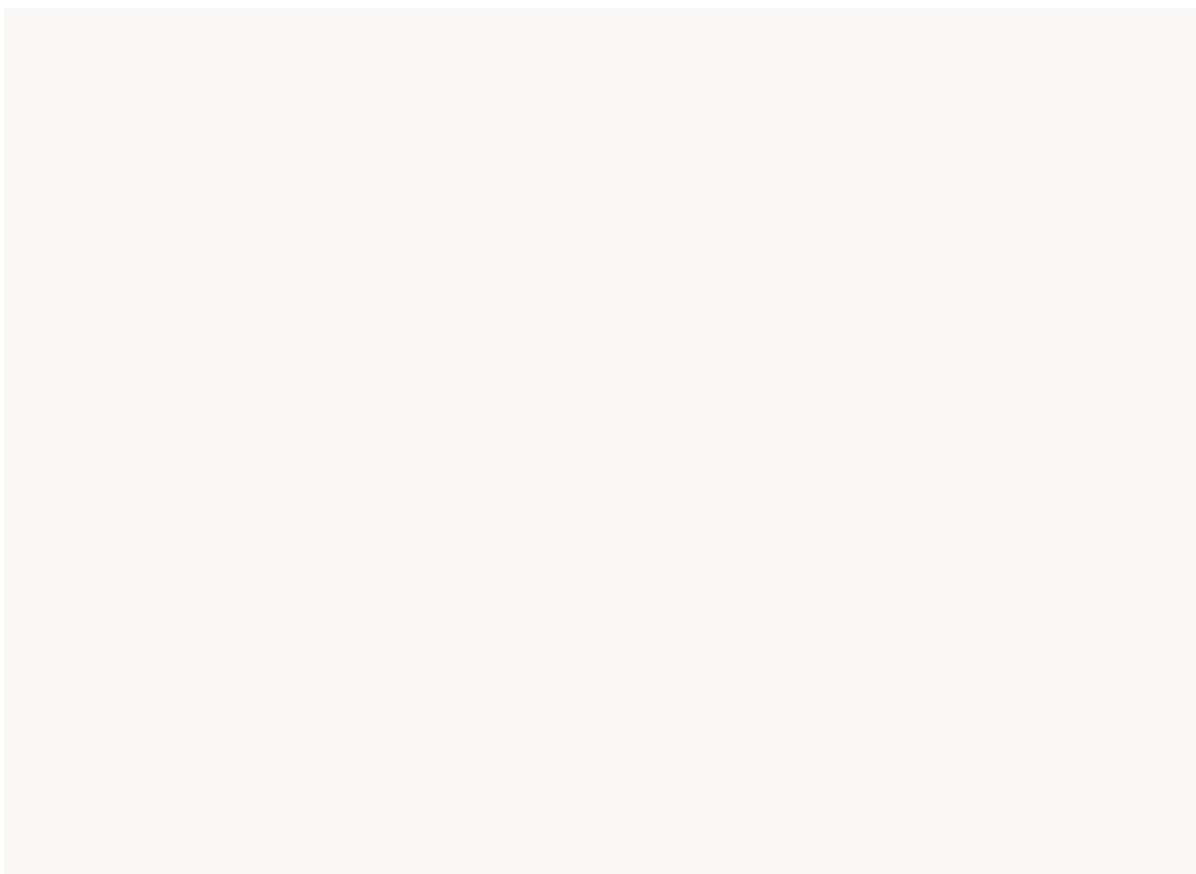
Did either character have to sacrifice anything? What?

How will things be different for your characters now?

Do your characters still have any regrets?

TYING UP THE LOOSE ENDS

Take stock of all the loose ends in your story. This can include unresolved side character arcs, lingering subplots, unexplained conflicts, and unanswered questions. Make a list to ensure nothing is overlooked.



Prioritise those that have a direct impact on the main characters' development or contribute significantly to the overall narrative or themes.

TYING UP THE LOOSE ENDS

Side Character	How They End Up

TYING UP THE LOOSE ENDS

Subplot	How It Resolves

ROMANCE WRITING CHECKLIST

AFTER WRITING, REVIEW THIS CHECKLIST

01	Do your characters respect each other's boundaries?	YES	NO
02	Do they communicate honestly and openly with each other?	YES	NO
03	Do they both feel like they have time to express their individual wants/needs?	YES	NO
04	Do they feel like they can openly challenge the other's opinions/choices?	YES	NO
05	Do they give each other compliments?	YES	NO
06	Do they listen proactively and remember what the other said?	YES	NO
07	Are they loyal to each other, even when their relationship is struggling??	YES	NO
08	Do they share meaningful conversations together?	YES	NO
09	Do they feel safe enough to be vulnerable with one another?	YES	NO

ROMANCE WRITING CHECKLIST

AFTER WRITING, REVIEW THIS CHECKLIST

10	Do they take time to show gratitude for one another?	YES <input type="checkbox"/>	NO <input type="checkbox"/>
11	Do they know (or learn) how to compromise and be flexible?	YES <input type="checkbox"/>	NO <input type="checkbox"/>
12	Do they offer each other support and encouragement?	YES <input type="checkbox"/>	NO <input type="checkbox"/>
13	Do they like multiple things about their partner - intellectual, emotional, physical, etc?	YES <input type="checkbox"/>	NO <input type="checkbox"/>
14	Do they recognise and accept each other's flaws?	YES <input type="checkbox"/>	NO <input type="checkbox"/>
15	Does the relationship change your characters?	YES <input type="checkbox"/>	NO <input type="checkbox"/>
16	Is their attraction to each other conveyed clearly?	YES <input type="checkbox"/>	NO <input type="checkbox"/>
17	Throughout the story, do they experience an array of emotions together?	YES <input type="checkbox"/>	NO <input type="checkbox"/>
18	Do they develop a deeper understanding of the other as the story progresses?	YES <input type="checkbox"/>	NO <input type="checkbox"/>



ROMANCE WRITING CHECKLIST

AFTER WRITING, REVIEW THIS CHECKLIST

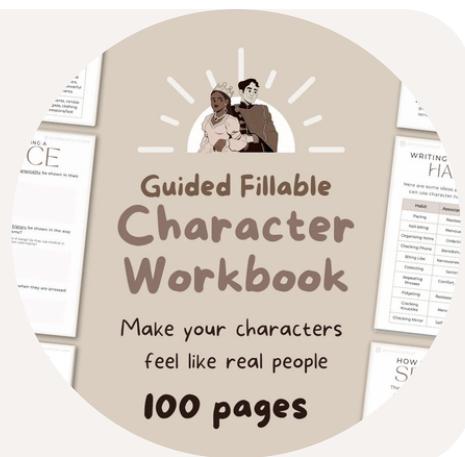
19	Do your characters' core personalities remain consistent?	YES <input type="checkbox"/>	NO <input type="checkbox"/>
20	Are your side characters' views about the main romance clear?	YES <input type="checkbox"/>	NO <input type="checkbox"/>
21	Does your story have a strong sense of setting?	YES <input type="checkbox"/>	NO <input type="checkbox"/>
22	Is the romance's resolution coherent with the rest of the story?	YES <input type="checkbox"/>	NO <input type="checkbox"/>
23	Did your characters have to change/grow to earn their ending?	YES <input type="checkbox"/>	NO <input type="checkbox"/>
24	Are your characters' non-romantic wants and needs addressed?	YES <input type="checkbox"/>	NO <input type="checkbox"/>
25	Do your characters' decisions feel plausible?	YES <input type="checkbox"/>	NO <input type="checkbox"/>
26	Is it clear at the start of each scene whose POV we're seeing it from?	YES <input type="checkbox"/>	NO <input type="checkbox"/>
27	Do your supporting characters feel like real people or do they just exist to push the story forwards?	YES <input type="checkbox"/>	NO <input type="checkbox"/>

If this workbook was helpful,
please consider leaving a review!



MORE RESOURCES...

By the end of this 100-page workbook, you'll be able to write a strong character arc, design well-rounded backstories, create unique voices, & craft traits and physical appearances to bring your characters to life.



By the end of this 85-page workbook, you'll be able to turn your story idea into a structured outline. This workbook guides you through every step of a story, including the messy middle!.

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