



# *Write* ON!

QUARTERLY MAGAZINE OF THE  
WOMEN'S FICTION WRITERS ASSOCIATION

*Winter 2018*

## **BRING YOUR CHARACTERS TO LIFE!**

*Plus*

**HELLO WFWA!**

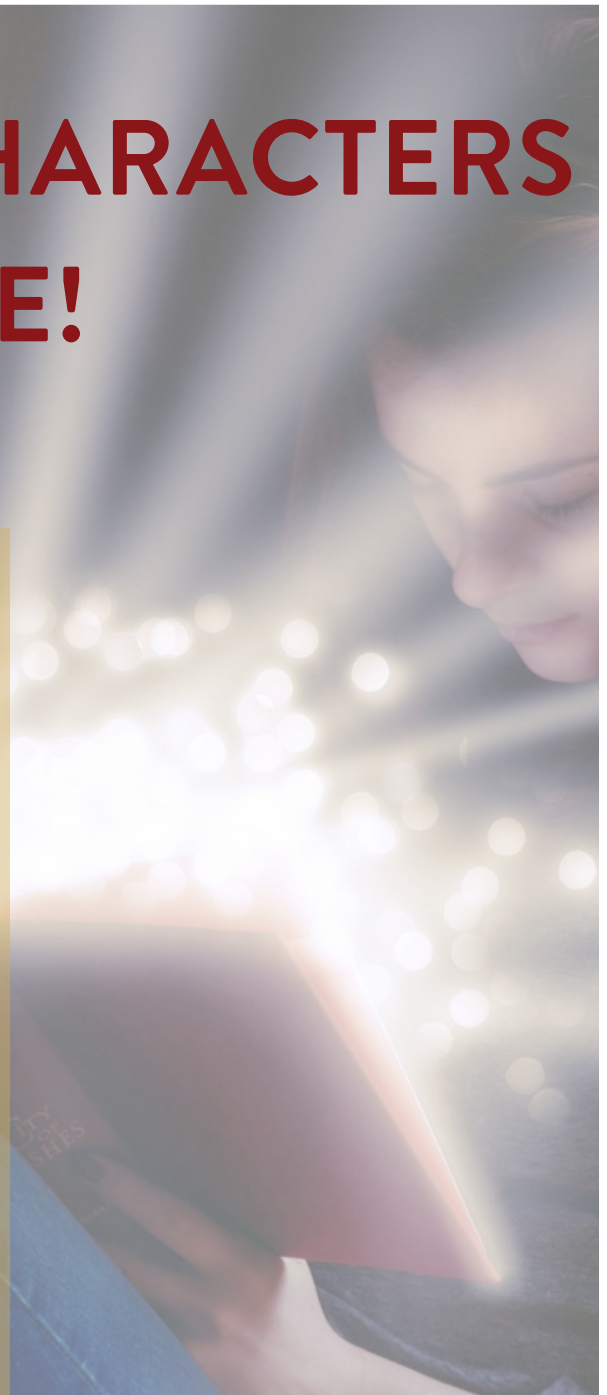
**FIGHTING DIRTY**

**WHO'S IN YOUR REPERTORY  
COMPANY?**

**FINDING THE TRUTH IN FICTIONAL  
CHARACTERS**

**GRAMMAR LIGHT- SOME THOUGHTS  
ON PUNCTUATION**

**THE NOT-SO-LONELY REJECT**





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## *President's Note*

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The clouds outside my window are heavy and grey, and the wind is relentlessly howling. Yet despite the signs that we should be hibernating, there's something about the new year that whispers, let's do this! Maybe that's why we set resolutions and goals and begin fresh projects in January. We're handed a clean slate, and the possibilities seem only as limited as our imagination.

One of my writing goals this year is to establish a plan for my new project that will take me from idea to research, synopsis to draft, all the way through to edits and submission. I crave a process I can follow like a formula, step by step, to get from beginning to end. This means I'll be experimenting with different [tools](#), [craft books](#), and methods. My past novel projects have been great learning experiences. But they've also been mostly trial and error, and I'd rather spend that time being effective. Will such a process make for a better book? Who knows? But like anything else, I won't know unless I try. And I'm sure I'll learn something along the way.

Very soon, a goal the Board of Directors has had for some time is finally going to be met. WFWA has a new website coming, one that will allow us to provide more programs, tools, and community connections for our members than ever before. Like anything new, though, it will require training as we get to know the platform and teach our volunteers how to use it. We hope you'll enjoy the new look and feel of the site, and that you'll be patient with us as we learn the ropes.

In the past year, we've seen our members' success stories increase. Watching them provide [feedback](#) and advice, share information gained by experience, and encourage each other to keep going is inspiring. We've all heard how our paths to publication look different, and no two experiences are alike. The ride can disappoint, frustrate, and intimidate even the most seasoned writer, whether you are in the query trenches, the editing cave, or pitching a proposal for your fourth book to your agent. But knowing you have close to 1,000 fellow scribes in your corner is reassuring, and can help you keep going even on those days you feel like giving up. Sometimes finding a new craft book that works, or discovering ways to deepen your characters' points of view, can be just what you need to break through a period of writer's block.

Whatever your writing goals are for this year, kudos to you for setting them, and for challenging yourself and aiming high. Don't be afraid to learn from others, or to ask for help. Know that WFWA volunteers will continue to do all we can to bring you the resources and support you need to help you become better writers, and aid in your journey. And when you're ready to volunteer yourself, we'll happily welcome you to the team.

Write On!

*Christine Adler*  
WFWA PRESIDENT



# Editors

## MANAGING AND COLUMNS EDITOR

Stephanie Knipper is the author of *The Peculiar Miracles of Antoinette Martin*. She lives in Kentucky with her husband and six children, where she is currently at work on her second novel.

## FEATURES EDITOR

Cara Sue Achterberg is a novelist, blogger, creative writing teacher, and rescue dog foster mom who lives on a hillside farm in New Freedom, Pennsylvania with her family and far too many animals. She is the author of *I'm Not Her*, *Girls' Weekend*, and *Practicing Normal*. Her memoir, *Another Good Dog: one family and fifty foster dogs*, will be released August 7, 2018 from Pegasus Press. For more information, blog links, and plenty of puppy pictures, visit [www.CaraWrites.com](http://www.CaraWrites.com).

## CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

Patricia Friedrich is Professor of English at Arizona State University. She is the author/editor of six nonfiction books including *The Sociolinguistics of Digital Englishes* (Routledge, 2016), the award-winning *The Literary and Linguistic Construction of Obsessive-compulsive Disorder* (Palgrave, 2015), and several published short stories. She is currently working on revisions to her first novel-length manuscript, *Artful Women*.

## COPY EDITOR

Sara Dahmen is a metalsmith of vintage and modern cookware and manufactures pure metal kitchenware in tin, copper, and iron. Her debut novel, *Widow 1881*, inspired her company, House Copper & Cookware. The cookware is manufactured entirely in America, with most of the copperware made by Sara in her garage in Port Washington. She has published over 100 articles as a contributing editor, has written for *Edible* and *Root + Bone*, among others, and spoke at TEDx Rapid City. When not sewing authentic clothing for 1830's reenactments, she can be found hitting tin and copper at her apprenticeship with a master smith, reading the Economist and reference books, brainstorming with her husband, or playing with her three young children.

## LAYOUT EDITOR

K.L. Romo writes about life on the fringe: teetering dangerously on the edge is more interesting than standing safely in the middle. She is passionate about women's issues, loves noisy clocks and fuzzy blankets, but HATES the word normal. Her historical novel, *Life Before*, is about two women separated by a century who discover they've shared a soul. Web: [KLRomo.com](http://KLRomo.com) or @klromo.

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## ABOUT THE WFWA

We began this organization in 2013 with the idea to create a safe, nurturing place for male and female writers of women's fiction. The publishing industry is morphing—with new opportunities and, as yet, unknown futures. The founders of the Women's Fiction Writers Association wanted somewhere to amass and disseminate information to and about our chosen genre.

Defining Women's Fiction has proven as subjective as the types of books we prefer. For that reason, our guiding statement is broad and comprehensive:

Stories that are driven by the main character's emotional journey.

Our stories may have romance. Or they may not. They could be contemporary. Or historical. But what binds us together is the focus on a main character's emotional journey.

*Write on!*



Join the closed WFWA Facebook group by sending an email to:

[membership@womensfictionwriters.org](mailto:membership@womensfictionwriters.org)

## READER LETTERS

Like what you've read in *Write On!*? Send us a letter! We'd love to hear your feedback and reactions on the stories and features. Email them to [writeon@womensfictionwriters.org](mailto:writeon@womensfictionwriters.org). Submitted letters are considered for publication and may be edited for clarity or space.

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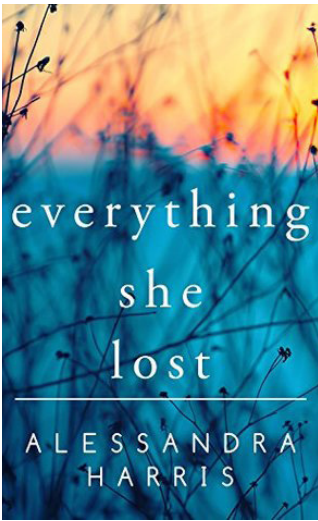
# MEMBER Releases



**AIMIE K. RUNYAN**  
**DAUGHTERS OF THE NIGHT SKY**  
**JANUARY 1, 2018**

Russia, 1941. Katya Ivanova is a young pilot in a far-flung military academy in the Ural Mountains. From childhood, she's dreamed of taking to the skies to escape her bleak mountain life. With the Nazis on the march across Europe, she is called on to use her wings to serve her country in its darkest hour. Not even the entreaties of her new husband—a sensitive artist who fears for her safety—can dissuade her from doing her part as a proud daughter of Russia.

After years of arduous training, Katya is assigned to the 588th Night Bomber Regiment—one of the only Soviet air units comprised entirely of women. The Germans quickly learn to fear nocturnal raids by the daring fliers they call “Night Witches.” But the brutal campaign will exact a bitter toll on Katya and her sisters-in-arms. When the smoke of war clears, nothing will ever be the same—and one of Russia's most decorated military heroines will face the most agonizing choice of all.

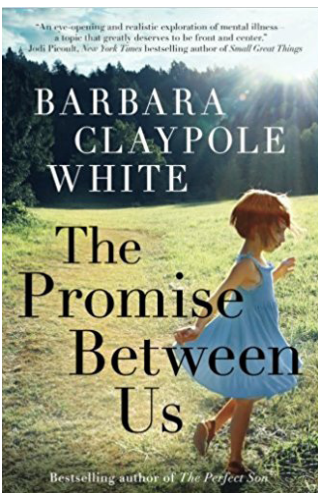


**ALESSANDRA HARRIS**  
**EVERYTHING SHE LOST**  
JAN 2, 2018

After suffering a mental breakdown that nearly destroyed her marriage, Nina Taylor works hard to maintain her tenuous hold on sanity and be a good mother to her two young daughters. Despite her best efforts, she questions the possibility of a full recovery.

Single mom Deja Johnson struggles to overcome her troubled past and raise her young son. But her friendship with Nina brings more complications. What Deja is hiding could not only destroy relationships, but endanger lives.

One traumatic night threatens to shatter Nina's mind. With Deja's help, she strives to maintain her mental balance. But as events spiral out of control, the women must find out if Nina is losing her sanity or if someone is plotting against her.

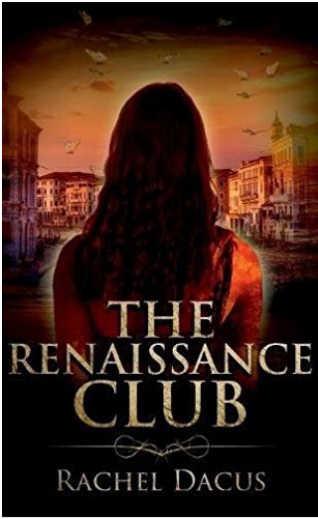


**BARBARA CLAYPOLE WHITE**  
**THE PROMISE BETWEEN US**  
JANUARY 16, 2018

Metal artist Katie Mack is living a lie. Nine years ago she ran away from her family in Raleigh, North Carolina, consumed by the irrational fear that she would harm Maisie, her newborn daughter. Over time she's come to grips with the mental illness that nearly destroyed her, and now funnels her pain into her art. Despite longing for Maisie, Katie honors an agreement with the husband she left behind—to change her name and never return.

But when she and Maisie accidentally reunite, Katie can't ignore the familiarity of her child's compulsive behavior. Worse, Maisie worries obsessively about bad things happening to her pregnant stepmom. Katie has the power to help, but can she reconnect with the family she abandoned?

To protect Maisie, Katie must face the fears that drove her from home, accept the possibility of love, and risk exposing her heart-wrenching secret.



**RACHEL DACUS**  
**THE RENAISSANCE CLUB**  
**JANUARY 16, 2018**

Would you give up everything, even the time in which you live, to be with your soul mate? That's the question in my novel, *The Renaissance Club*.

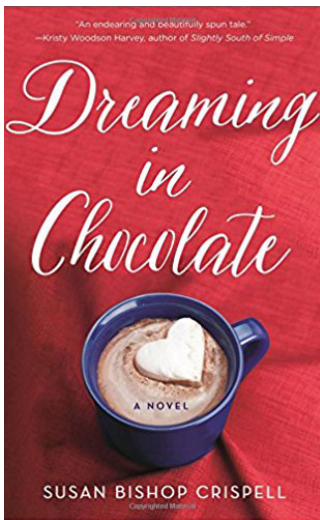
May Gold, a college adjunct teacher, often dreams about the subject of her master's thesis—Gianlorenzo Bernini. In her fantasies, she's in his arms, the wildly adored partner of the man who invented the Baroque.

But in reality, May has just landed in Rome with her teaching colleagues and older boyfriend. She considers herself a precocious failure and yearns to unleash her passion and creative spirit. Over the course of the tour, she realizes she has to choose: stay in a safe but stagnant existence or take a risk. Will May's adventure in time ruin her life or lead to a magical new one?



**ELENA MIKALSEN**  
**WRAPPED IN THE STARS**  
**JANUARY 19, 2018**

Struggling with guilt over her sister's death and the stress of her medical residency, Maya Radelis runs away to Scotland. A robin seems to lead her to an antique shop, where she finds a century-old engagement ring. But what is the ring's history? She follows the slim paper trail, wondering if it is only coincidence that her dreams reveal the story of a Swiss woman physician who wore the ring during World War I. In Paris she meets fellow New Yorker David Fischer, a lawyer with family in Switzerland as well as America. He helps Maya follow the memories stored in the ring as they lead her around Europe. The attraction between David and Maya grows, and when they discover a connection between the ring and David's family, they learn, bit by bit, more about the ring's earlier owner. Will Maya's own life have the same tragedy of lost love?



**SUSAN CRISPELL**  
**DREAMING IN CHOCOLATE**  
**FEBRUARY 6, 2018**

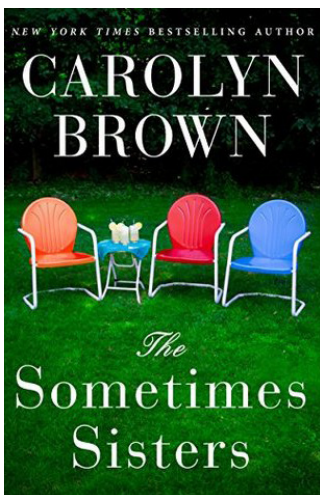
A story of love, hot chocolate, and one little girl's wish for her mother that will make your heart swell.

At twenty-seven, Penelope Dalton is quickly ticking off items on a bucket list. Only the list isn't hers. After her eight year-old daughter Ella is given just six months to live thanks to an inoperable brain tumor, Penelope is determined to fill Ella's remaining days with as many new experiences as she can.

With an endless supply of magical gifts and recipes from the hot chocolate café Penelope runs alongside her mother in a small town nestled in the Appalachian Mountains, she is able to give her daughter almost everything she wants. The one sticking point is Ella's latest addition to her list: get a dad. And not just any dad. Ella has her sights set on Noah Gregory, her biological father and the only person Penelope knows to have proved her true love hot chocolate wrong.

Now Noah's back in town for a few months—and as charming as ever—and the part of her that dreamed he was her fate in the first place wonders if she made the right decision to keep the truth of their daughter from him. The other, more practical part, is determined to keep him from breaking Ella's heart too.

But as Ella's health declines, Penelope must give in to her fate or face a future of regrets.

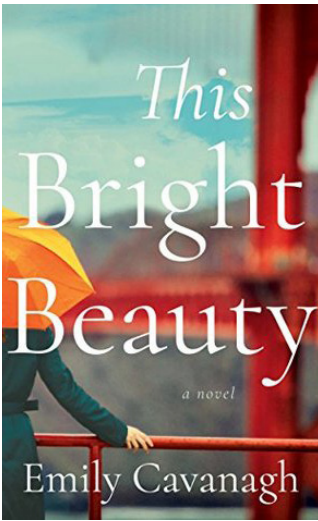


**CAROLYN BROWN**  
**THE SOMETIMES SISTERS**  
**FEBRUARY 27, 2018**

When they were growing up, Dana, Harper, and Tawny thought of themselves as “sometimes sisters.” They connected only during the summer month they'd all spend at their grandmother's rustic lakeside resort in north Texas. But secrets started building, and ten years have passed since they've all been together—in fact, they've rarely spoken, and it broke their grandmother's heart.

Now she's gone, leaving Annie's Place to her granddaughters—twelve cabins, a small house, a café, a convenience store, and a lot of family memories. It's where Dana, Harper, and Tawny once shared so many good times. They've returned, sharing only hidden regrets, a guarded mistrust, and haunting guilt. But now, in this healing summer place, the secrets that once drove them apart could bring them back together—especially when they discover that their grandmother may have been hiding something, too...

To overcome the past and find future happiness, these “sometimes sisters” have one more chance to realize they are always family.

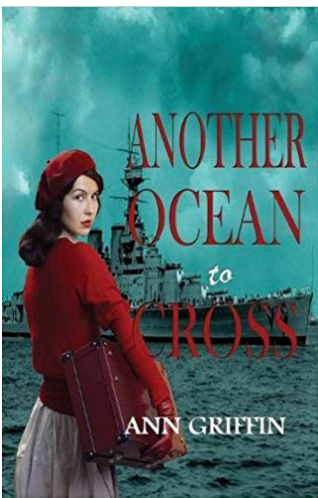


**EMILY CAVANAGH**  
**THIS BRIGHT BEAUTY**  
**MARCH 1, 2018**

Franci and Lottie may be identical twins, but that's where the similarities end. Franci has always been the stable one, while Lottie has bipolar disorder, constantly battling depression and mania. After years of taking care of her sister, Franci moves across the country to build a life for herself. Now, all the two share is distance.

But when Lottie gets in an accident, Franci reluctantly steps back into her familiar role as protector. She returns to find her sister's life in complete disarray and makes a shocking discovery: Lottie has an infant daughter she never told Franci about. Although Franci swore she wouldn't get sucked back in, she can't leave the baby alone in Lottie's care.

As Lottie further unravels, a secret is revealed that she has kept since childhood—one that has the power to reframe the sisters' entire relationship, forcing Franci to ask herself if the secret was too much for Lottie to bear. Was the accident really an accident, and who has been protecting whom all these years?



**ANN GRIFFIN**  
**ANOTHER OCEAN TO CROSS**  
**MARCH 17, 2018**

Germany, 1938: Talented Jewish teen artist and secret activist, Renata Lowenthal, convinces her reluctant parents that they must leave, before conditions for Jews worsen. Her father, Karl, a doctor no longer allowed to practice, and Lea, her mother, depressed over the loss of a child years before, decide to head to Palestine. After a hazardous journey, they find themselves in Egypt. Using her ingenuity and artistic talent, Renata gets her parents into Alexandria, the headquarters of the Royal Navy's Mediterranean Fleet. But war's tentacles reach to Egypt, and the family is still in danger, with nowhere to go. Renata looks to the Allied sailors and soldiers, thinking a husband will provide an opportunity to move out of harm's way. After a steamy courtship, she marries Ray Stern, a Canadian, shortly before he is deployed to war service. Not long after the birth of their child, Renata is faced with an agonizing decision that will have repercussions many years into the future. Determined to keep her family together, she must dig into the depths of her being, to find a resourcefulness and courage she never knew she had, and travel half way around the world, to save her marriage and her family.



HUSBANDS AND OTHER SHARP OBJECTS  
MARILYN SIMON ROTHSTEIN  
MARCH 6, 2018

After a lifetime of marriage, March Hammer is ready to get herself unhitched—just as everyone else in her life is looking for a commitment, her new boyfriend wants to get serious and her soon-to-be ex-husband, Harvey, is desperate to get back together. When her head-strong daughter announces a secret engagement to Harvey’s attorney, Marcy finds herself planning her daughter’s wedding as she plans her own divorce. From petty skirmishes over an ever-growing guest list to awkward confrontations with her sticky-fingered new in-laws, pulling off the wedding is going to be a challenge; seeing her divorce though is going to be a trial. And trying to make everyone happy might prove to be impossible—because in the end, March alone must make a choice between something old and something new.

If you have a Women’s Fiction novel being published in the next quarter (April through June), and would like *Write On!* to feature it, please [fill out the submission form here](#).



## From Our New Features Editor

# *Hello WFWA!*

by Cara Sue Achterberg

I'm excited-yet-a-wee-bit-intimidated to be the new Features Editor for *Write On!*. I'm following in the very deep and competent footsteps of Erin Bartel. I've gobbled up every word in *Write On!* since joining WFWA, so when I got the email asking if I'd consider taking the features editor position, I was floored. *Me?*

Instead of questioning the decision-making process, I decided to jump in and figure it out as I go along. I've got a long history of not just writing, but living by the seat of my pants. When I was a child, my parents refused to pay for riding lessons (they wanted me to play tennis), so I learned to ride by mucking stalls in exchange for the opportunity to ride. The only horse available to me was a large, black, retired racehorse named Trojan—a horse no one else wanted to ride because not only was he difficult under saddle, he was nearly impossible to catch. Being ten and thrilled at the opportunity, I spent long hours following Trojan around a muddy field, a carrot in hand and a leadrope behind my back. Eventually, I learned not only how to catch a difficult horse, but also how to ride a difficult horse—primarily by falling off. I learned how to read the shift in a horse's balance, what it means when a horse drops



a shoulder, how to stay above or behind (but never in front of) its center, and that when things get crazy remember the first thing your instructor taught you: keep your head up and your heels down. I learned to write the same way I learned to ride. The hard way. By doing it. Even when it lands you on your butt.

I'm a firm believer in 'we teach best what we most need to learn.' I know I still have a lot to learn about writing a good story. But rather than worrying about all the ways I feel unqualified to take this position, I'm focused on how much we can learn together.

Past issues of *Write On!* (which can be accessed via the website), have been filled with wisdom and instruction and encouragement. I will do my best to keep that tradition rolling. Please don't ever hesitate to reach out ([carasueachterberg@gmail.com](mailto:carasueachterberg@gmail.com)) if you have an idea for an article or a subject you'd like us to tackle. And I promise I'll try to figure as quickly as possible how to ride this horse. (No promises that I won't hit the ground a time or two.)



**Cara Sue Achterberg** is a novelist, blogger, creative writing teacher, and rescue dog foster mom who lives on a hillside farm in New Freedom, Pennsylvania with her family and far too many animals. She is the author of *I'm Not Her*, *Girls' Weekend*, and *Practicing Normal*. Her memoir, *Another Good Dog: one family and fifty foster dogs*, will be released August 7, 2018 from Pegasus Press. For more information, blog links, and plenty of puppy pictures, visit [www.CaraWrites.com](http://www.CaraWrites.com).



# Amp Up Your Story's Conflict With a *Down and Dirty Fight*

by Jenny Hansen

What is Dirty Fighting, and why do you want your characters to do it?

It escalates tension in your story by deepening both your external and internal conflict. Plus, recognizing these techniques might help your own interpersonal relationships.

Dirty Fighting isn't a how-to guide on Jujitsu or Street Fighting. Nope, it's actually a list of twenty-three items given to my husband and me by our pre-marital counselor to teach us the difference between the Dirty Fighting techniques practiced by most couples and the clean-as-a-whistle fighting he wanted us to strive to apply.

## **Before we get dirty, what is “clean fighting?”**

### **A clean fight in 4 easy steps:**

1. How you feel? (use an “I” statement for this)
2. What behavior prompted that feeling?
3. Why it's important/the background? (i.e. what button did the person push)
4. What would you want them to do differently next time?

Sounds simple, doesn't it? I promise you, it's almost impossible to do when you are angry. Clean fighting takes rigorous training. Your characters are unlikely to have had this training unless they are psychologists or social workers. It's much more likely that your characters will be ignorant and flawed like the rest of us.

## **Important reasons to have your characters fight:**

**1. Unique Dialog.** Every character is unique, which is why dialog is such an art. How do you think of creative things to say that would apply only to *your* character? One answer is to make him or her fight, especially if they don't want to. Family members, significant others, even co-



workers—they're all fair game if they advance the story.

**2. Insight into character motivation.** Gratuitous fighting in a story is like gratuitous sex. It's boring if there's no real connection or stakes. So, find a great reason for the conflict to ensue. You're an amazing author. You can do it!

Here's an easy trick to upset your characters and pave the way for this kind of snappy dialog: dig down for what your characters *really* want. (DON'T give it to them.) Then, flake away more layers to uncover what your character really fears. DO be sure to give them that! Upset characters generate conflict and engage readers.

## Dirty Fighting Makes Great Fiction

A really great book makes you see yourself inside its pages. Great books filled with conflict, and flawed characters who learn important lessons, are guaranteed to rip emotion out of readers.

Dialogue steps up the pace of your story and ramps up the conflict between characters. Plus, you can logically work in some of that important backstory with dialogue, both in what the characters do say, and what they don't (subtext). Understanding the difference between clean and dirty fighting will make the dialogue in your stories sparkle.

Every single one of these Dirty Fighting techniques is guaranteed to make at least one of the characters in your book see red. Take your time reading through these. Trying to absorb them all at once is like drinking from a fire hydrant.

Note: Be sure to flex your sarcasm muscle—which is *always* used in a Down-and-Dirty Dogfight—before you begin.



## Dirty Fighting Techniques

These are the low-hanging fruit for firing up tensions and twisting up the interpersonal relationships in your story.

**#1 – Triangulating:** Don't keep an issue only between you and your conflict partner. Pull everybody in. Quote well-known authorities who agree with you and list every person in your circle who has already taken your side. Lie about the ones you haven't spoken to yet.

Uses: Triangulating lets you expand the discussion and stir up some real drama. Let's not keep this issue between just us, says one character to the other. Oh no, lets involve *everybody*.

A person with extreme Dirty Fighting Talent can stir the pot and then step back and play a new game called, "Let's watch the other two people fight." That's good times.

**#2 – Escalating:** Quickly move from the main issue of the argument to questioning your partner's basic personality, and then move on to wondering whether the relationship is even worth it.

Uses: Escalating also allows for plausible use of back story. When you're moving from the main issue to the real issue (this often happens at the black moment / end of Act 2), escalating the argument will make someone lose control enough that they blurt out something juicy. Way to go, Author!

**#3 – Leaving:** No problem is so big or important that it can't be ignored or abandoned all

together. Walk out of the room, leave the house, or just refuse to talk. Sometimes just threatening to leave can accomplish the same thing without all the inconvenience of following through.

Uses: Why not do this when your two characters really need each other? The betrayal factor will drop a mushroom cloud of doubt into your protagonist's psyche. *I can't depend on you. I don't trust you. You've let me down.*

You noticed how "dirty" those last three statements were, right? This is a character who has waded right into the Dirty Fighting Swamp and mastered the Escalating technique. Fantastico! The farther your character falls, the harder the journey is on the way back up.

**#4 – Timing:** Look for a time when your partner is least able to respond, or least expects an argument and then, *Bang*. The fight is on.

Uses: From a story point of view, one of the best times to pick a fight is just before the main character embarks on a journey, has a new murder to solve, or is called on to save the world. Anytime the external conflict has clicked up a notch is a wonderful time to throw this technique into the mix.

**#5 – Rejecting Compromise:** Never back down. Ever. Stick with the philosophy that only one person can win.

Uses: This is a smoking Dirty Fighting trick to use on the main character. If there is only one winner, automatic conflict ensues for the person who "loses." The solutions are endless.

## Strip off those "Nice Writer" gloves.

We're just getting warmed up here. Get ready to take off those Nice Writer gloves and really roll around in the Dirty Fighting Swamp. *Be the bog*, people.

**#6 – Brown Bagging:** Never let your character stick to the original issue. Be sure they bring up as many problems as possible, and in great

detail. Think of every complaint from past history and lay them all on the other person at the same time. An overwhelmed person cannot fight back effectively.

**#7 – Cross Complaining:** When Character #1 complains about something, make sure Character #2 raises a complaint of his or her own. Example: "I forgot to make the bed? How about all the times you haven't given me an orgasm?"

**#8 – Over-Generalizing:** Be sure to spice up a fight with words like "never" or "always." This forces a sparring partner into defending his or her overall actions, taking the focus off the issue at hand.

**#9 – Pulling Rank:** Don't address the real issues—have the character discuss demeaning topics like who brings home more money, has more friends or more education, or who does more around the house. "When you make as much money as I do, then I'll listen to you" works like a charm. Equality in a relationship? Bah!

**#10 – Using Sarcasm:** Sarcasm is difficult to perfect on the page, but you are Awesome Author, so you can pull it off. "Well, lookee who's so perfect all the time!" If you use just the right tone, the character at the butt-end of the sarcasm may not have a good comeback.

## The Final "Dirty Thirteen"

For the knockout, because I love my WFWA peeps, here are the other thirteen Dirty Fighting techniques, in alphabetic order.



**#11 – Asking Why:** Have one character treat the other like an irresponsible child. "Why didn't you clean up after dinner?" "Why don't you love me like Rolando loves Miriam?" Instead of work-

ing through the issue that started the fight, make your character feel that he or she is incapable of an adult relationship.

**#12 – Avoiding Responsibility:** Any disagreement can screech to a stop with the two words: I forgot. Other wiggle-out-of-responsibility excuses include: “I had too much to drink,” or “I guess I was tired.” Statements like this allow a character to kick the discussion down the road to another scene.

**#13 – Be Inconsistent:** Keep characters off-balance by having their sparring partner change position. Have an influential supporting character who rarely holds the same opinion twice. “You never speak to me, so why should I listen to you now?” This technique can be successful paired with Over-generalizing.

**#14 – Blaming:** One character insists that they are the victim and could not possibly be at fault. Do not let them admit they played any part in the difficulty (so they don’t have to change). “I don’t have a problem. If *you* have a problem, you should deal with it.”

**#15 – Crucializing:** Exaggerate the importance of an issue by having a character extrapolate it to form conclusions of great magnitude about the relationship. “If you loved me, you would never have done this” is a great one.

**#16 – Fortune Telling:** Like mind-reading, this technique gives one character a chance to demoralize the other. Plus, statements like “You will never change” blocks any resolution of a problem.

**#17 – Giving Advice:** When your protagonist wants to talk over an issue, be sure to allow another character to act like “the expert.” The expert tells the protagonist how to act, think, and feel. If their expertise is ever questioned, the expert’s likely answer: “I was only trying to be helpful.”

**#18 – Labeling:** Negative terms like “neurotic,” “alcoholic,” “immature,” or “paranoid” are great to use whenever you want a character to impress upon another person that the problem isn’t *their* fault. That the labeled person is inher



ently flawed and has no power to change their behavior.

**#19 – Mind Reading:** When a character feels they are the expert in how another character feels or thinks. This is the Jedi method of crazy-making. “You don’t really feel angry right now.” “You didn’t mean to say you wouldn’t be home for dinner.”

**#20 – Not Listening:** Having one character hear only what they want to hear and ignore the rest allows several things to happen. They can reinterpret what the protagonist says, depending on their needs in that moment. Better yet, have them interrupt whenever your protagonist speaks. Leaving is a great combination move with this one.

**#21 – Personalizing:** Shifting away from the discussion topic, into personality and character issues, can usually generate enough defensiveness between two people to keep the conflict going forever. Name calling and “never” statements also help take the focus away from a healthy debate of the issues and into real character assassination.

**#22 – Playing the Martyr:** If timed properly, this technique can completely disorient a sparring partner. “You’re right, honey, I guess there really is no hope for me.” How can someone respond to that? If all other options are exhausted, a good martyr will pretend to be sick until their sparring partner’s behavior changes—and blame the illness on the partner.

**#23 – Self-Righteousness:** Characters who list every slight, injustice, and inequity they've suffered through and every sacrifice they've made will experience a renewed sense of self-righteousness. This technique is a major morale builder for them. These are also the characters who give advice on how to think, act, and feel so they can maintain the superiority they need.

If you want to create a dysfunctional world for your characters, where conflict abounds, these are the best ~~torture~~ communication techniques I can offer.

Enjoy!



By day, **Jenny Hansen** provides training and social media marketing for an accounting firm. By night she writes humor, memoir, women's fiction, and short stories. After 20+ years as a corporate software trainer, she's delighted to sit down while she works.

When she's not at her personal blog, [More Cowbell](#), Jenny can be found on Twitter, [Instagram](#) and Facebook, or at [Writers In The Storm](#).



# Who's In Your *Repertory Company?*

by Cara Sue Achterberg

*“Each writer is born with a repertory company in his head. Shakespeare has perhaps 20 players. ... I have 10 or so, and that’s a lot. As you get older, you become more skillful at casting them.”*

—Gore Vidal

Do you write the same characters again and again?

Unless you are in the midst of a series, you’d probably like to think not.

When I happened upon the Gore Vidal quote, I dismissed it. Later, while mucking stalls (which is when my best thinking gets done), I reconsidered.

I do have a few regulars. There’s always a red-head with green eyes who doesn’t know she’s beautiful. There’s usually a quirky boy with a heart of gold. There’s a misguided mother who messes up her kid. There’s many times a wise, older supporting character who holds the key for my hero. Are these my repertory company? Is that bad?

If you’ve got complicated characters in your company and you’re a talented director, you can likely create masterpiece after masterpiece. Think of the best-selling novelists you know. Many have their own company. Readers flock to these writers for the same reason so many Americans go to McDonalds: they want to know what

they’re going to get. Maybe there’s no shame in having a repertory company, especially if selling books is your goal.

I asked Molly Campbell, who wrote *Characters In Search of a Novel*, about how she creates so many different characters. She said it’s in the idiosyncrasies, rather than the actual physical appearance—nail biting, strange hobbies, hating children. Bland people aren’t interesting or memorable. She says writers shouldn’t be afraid to create characters who are odd or out of step with the world. “The same things that make a character unusual can also make for great likeability.”



One of the greatest challenges we have as writers, is to make our characters memorable. Introducing too many at once, especially at the beginning before the reader has context, can frustrate the reader. As a creative writing teacher, I see it

all the time. The writer who has done her homework knows her characters well, tosses out five or six new characters in that very first chapter intent on getting the action going, forgetting that the reader isn't privy to all her homework and character studies. The reader needs a strong visual or a memorable trait that sticks so the new character is planted firmly in her mind.

**Sometimes it can be as simple as characters names.** I have an awful habit of giving my characters names that all begin with the same letter. In one story there is an Everett and an Evelyn. They're both bad guys, so maybe my mind was unconsciously linking them up, but I wish to this day, that an editor had made me change one of them. In another story I wrote about three women, all the same age with much in common (hence, their friendship). My beta readers kept insisting they were mixing two of them up. I'd worked hard to clearly create very different women (One was a chunky, curly-headed blond with a pleaser personality and the other was a determined, green-eyed redhead....), so I was frustrated until one reader suggested, "Maybe it's their names. They're both sweet." The names were Meg and Grace, one syllable sweet, charming, *similar* names. I changed Grace to Dani and bingo- no one got them mixed up any more.

**How a character speaks and what he or she says also helps define the character for the reader.** As Molly put it, "Dialogue brings characters to life and gives readers a glimpse into their psyches." What characters say and how they say it can tell a reader more about a character than any lengthy backstory or list of characteristics. It's showing, not telling. Characters reveal themselves through how they speak and what they say. Use of curse words, contractions, nick names, teasing, overexplaining, giving orders, and apologizing convey attitude, social position, economic status, educational background, age, and emotional state.

Many people have recognizable verbal habits and patterns. You peg a character as a teen simply by repetitively using the word, 'like' in dialogue. My husband tends to end every direction/explanation with the word, "right?" kind of like the Canadians with their 'Eh?' It's his filler

word. Someday I'm certain it will worm its way into one of my characters. Listen to the people around you—note their speech patterns, habits, filler words.

The same can be said of actions like fidgeting, twirling hair, biting a lip, winking, slumping shoulders, raising a chin, picking a nose, fussing with a sleeve. These odd quirks and weird habits are memorable. Don't know any? Look around you. Check out the lady in line at the Walmart, the guy behind the glass at the DMV, the teacher at the front of the classroom. Everybody has their habits.

**Characters are in the details.** Here's what Molly says about it: "It's not the amount of detail, it's THE RIGHT detail. Knowing the color of someone's hair isn't as important as the texture or the fact that the person hates that her hair is too curly or thin. The details that are important are the ones that affect who the character is or what he does."



**Showing, not telling our characters make them memorable.** Take a character I just created—Marv—as an example. Instead of listing his characteristics for a reader, show the reader who he is by action and reaction. Maybe when Marv arrives at Grandma's for dinner, he leaves his gun and his badge on the counter before he sits down. Or just his gun and his bag of weed? Or how about his baseball hat and his pack of cigarettes? Epi-pen and inhaler? Who is this guy? So many ways to dice him. Maybe when Marv sits down to dinner, he bumps his belly on the table and knocks over a water glass. Later, Grandma frowns when he asks for seconds.

When they finish eating, she dabs at the food stuck in his mustache and quizzes him on his latest date. From all this activity, what do you know about Marv?

Actors in a repertory theater can play many characters simply by putting on a wig or a fat suit. If Vidal is to be believed, maybe we do the same in our stories.

Several of my favorite women's fiction writers recycle the same woman. Sometimes she has varying eye color or height or even age, but at her core she's the same 'spunky, firebrand who means well but gets in her own way too often.'

Obviously, I like spunky firebrands. Maybe I like to think I am a spunky firebrand. Judging by the best-selling status of these authors, so do a lot of women. We root for them and laugh at their self-inflicted predicaments, cry at how misunderstood they are, and raise our fists at the people who stand in their way.

How do we keep ourselves from repeating our characters? Here are five tips:

1. Be conscious of your own darlings. Pay attention to the characters you use. Maybe even create a file or a notebook of them. Be intentional about stretching your writing to include characters outside your usual repertoire.
2. Watch people with a writer's eye and ear. Pay attention to their idiosyncrasies, habits, hairstyles, moles, birthmarks, laughs, eye-shape. Consider investing in a book to help you design your characters like *The Descriptor's Dictionary* by David Grambs. Sure, maybe your characters are inspired and come to you in your dreams, but you can tweak them. They don't ALL have to have twinkling eyes and dimples.
3. Copy other writers. A professor once told me that copying was the sincerest form of flattery. I believe that truth. Whenever I see one of my graphics or posts shared on Facebook, I'm always flattered. In your reading, take note of the characters you encounter. Copy down their unique features and habits. Add



them to your own repertoire.

4. Interview your characters so you know them intimately, but don't blast your readers with all that extra info. Make a list of questions or find one in a good book like *The 90-Day Novel* by Alan Watt or an online quiz like the [Gotham Character Questionnaire](#). Answer the questions, but keep in mind that all your answers don't necessarily belong in your story. You need to know the back story on all your characters, but your reader doesn't . . . unless she does. *Huh?* Don't bog your reader down with unnecessary information about your characters. Is it necessary to tell your reader that the character stole change out of the pockets of other swimmers clothes in the locker room at his country club when he was eight? Maybe. But only if this is critical to the kind of person he's become.

Same goes for your character's appearance. If it matters that your character has lumpy knees—maybe it bothers her to the point of seeking plastic surgery or it's the reason her husband is divorcing her—mention it, otherwise, it might be a detail you keep to yourself and save her the embarrassment. All the details of her appearance, history, habits, fears, affections are important, but only if they're important to the story and who she is in the story.

5. This tip comes from Molly Campbell: If you're coming up blank on your image, go to a web site that provides stock photos and enter in the search bar the general parameters of your characters, such as 'drug-addicted mother' and all sorts of photos will pop up

that will help you envision your character and bring her/him to life.

6. How about you? Who is in your repertory company? Is it time to expand your cast?
7. I'm still considering my own.. There are certain characters we connect with—the ones we love and hate, the ones who hit our buttons and keep us up at night, or sit on our shoulder as we type. It would be hard to write 80,000 word about a character you didn't connect with, so maybe it's not a terrible thing to have a well-developed repertory theater of characters. A good story is a good story so if the character you love can tell a good story, let them tell it, but perhaps consider a few costume changes and maybe a stick-on mustache.

### **Some Advice from the Experts on Characters:**

**Donald Maass:** “Secondary characters often do not stand out. Giving them the qualities that make them memorable involves violating our expectations, making them deeply human and pushing boundaries...the problem in most manuscripts is that secondary characters are too tame.”

More than just knowing the physical characteristics, **Lisa Cron** of Story Genius, instructs us to know the agenda of every characters, particularly how it relates to the protagonist. “You are going to create them, and their agenda, with one purpose in mind: to help facilitate the protagonist's story . . . the more you know your characters, the more your novel begins to write itself.”

**Stephen King** acknowledges that every character in your repertory theater would like to be the star of the show. That should come across in how we portray them. There are no throw-away characters.

“Nobody is “the bad guy” or “the best friend” or “the whore with a heart of gold” in real life; in real life we each of us regard ourselves as the main character, the protagonist, the big cheese; the camera is on us, baby. If you can bring this attitude into your fiction, you may not find it easier to create brilliant characters, but it will be harder for you to create the sort of one-dimensional dopes that populate so much pop fiction.”

When **Jodi Picoult** was asked about her characters, she replied, “Let's just say I am the world's worst friend. Tell me something and it's likely to end up in a character's mouth.”



# Finding the Truth in *Fictional Characters*

by Sharon Ritchey

Understanding what makes a character a whole person is important in creating stories that, while possibly far-fetched, still feel plausible. One way to achieve that authenticity is with research. Some writers, particularly those who write historical fiction, dive into research and breathe in the details. Other writers break out in hives at the thought of research, preferring a trip to the salon for an eyebrow waxing.

Regardless of your interest or tolerance, your characters and their stories will benefit from time spent learning about their entire world. Mark Twain once said, *“Truth is stranger than fiction, but it is because Fiction is obliged to stick to possibilities; Truth isn’t.”* When research is planned and baked into the writing process, it’s easier to tackle than stopping halfway through a story, or after you get comments back from your beta readers asking *why, why, why?*

Let’s look at a character development model using a what-if story idea for a contemporary story. (\*TK is a proofreading notation for “to come.” It’s a great device to use to keep writing while leaving a reminder that information is needed.)

*A female air traffic controller is blamed for a mid-air crash. Her significant other is a firefighter with some job/personal issue, TK. There will be a fire, TK she is burned. She suffers something, TK. Conflict and plot ensue.*

The truth of these real-life professions will help

develop the characters and inform the story. To start, put aside the dramatic back story and the inciting incident and concentrate on the characters.

## ***How do you become an air traffic controller?***

- What skills do you need?
- What does the job entail?
- Is it more difficult to be a woman in this position than a man?
- What airport/city does she live in?
- How old is the character?
- What’s it like to be a burn victim?
- Etc.



## For the Firefighter

- How do you become a firefighter?
- What skills do you need?
- What does the job entail?
- What type of equipment is used?
- What problems/issues do firefighters face?
- How old is he?
- Etc.



## Beware of Squirrels

The internet is the easiest place to start most research. From the comfort of our favorite writing perch, we can find almost everything. But beware of squirrels. (Like Dug, the talking dog in the movie, *Up*. The internet can suck up time and send us on unhelpful tangents.

Start with what we know the least about in our example above. How many women work in aviation and what's it like? Aviation careers require education and training.

- [Degree requirements to be an air traffic controller - Embry Riddle Aeronautical University.](#)
- [Salary numbers in the work force.](#)
- [Women air traffic controller gender roles.](#)

## Research Tip

All professions have trade associations with information-packed websites. (There are five trade associations for janitors!) Association websites will have publications, member lists, press releases, industry statistics, and people whom you can reach out to and potentially interview.

For the female ATC character, we'd look at the [\*\*Air Traffic Controller Association.\*\*](#)

This will lead to other sites, like this industry publication, *Flying Magazine*, with an [article on how to schedule a tour of an air traffic control site.](#) This means we could actually visit your character's workplace, see, smell, hear the environment, and talk to real ATC workers.

Since Atlanta's Hartsfield airport is one of the busiest in the country. It seemed as good of a location as any to locate the story. On Zillow.com, a real estate research site, we can look at neighborhoods and properties to get a sense of where she could live. We can also check out [maps.google.com](#) for some street-level images of neighborhoods and determine how long her commute would be to get to work. Driving and moving around could be important. Maybe there would be someone following her, a favorite bar for her work buddies, or the fire station where she surprises her troubled significant other.

And though we started by ignoring the plot and inciting incident, research may bring up more questions. For instance, [this story on whistleblowers and a plane collision](#) risk might explain how she could be blamed.

## What's Under the Hood?

For the firefighter, we'll repeat some of this research. However, for the sake of this story, let's look for the problem he may have. We need to learn about the profession and the temperament of someone brave enough to run toward danger.

We could visit a firehouse, see if we could shadow a firefighter, and interview some of them. But, before making that visit, it would better to

form an idea and answer some basic questions. We could research uniforms and find out what gear a firefighter uses. How heavy is it? How does it work? Do firehouses actually have fire dogs?

You Tube is a great place to start. [Here we find short clips on being a firefighter](#). This particular clip reveals how one man struggled from the trauma of not being able to help everyone. Ah ha! He turned to alcohol. Guilt, addiction, loss of professional identity, etc. These are powerful problems. This man's truth could be used to develop an authentic problem for our character.

### Burning Questions



We also need to learn about our air traffic controller's potential burn injury. We can reach out to a burn unit at a hospital and see if we can talk to a medical professional. However, our character's outward burns and treatment are not as important as what it does to her mental state. For this, we can look to online forums.

#### Research Tip

Just like with professions and trade associations, there are online forums and chat rooms for scores of communities where you can find real-life experiences and discussions.

[Here's one for burn victims](#). The pieces below are anonymous excerpts from forum threads.

- 1. It was suggested that I take a bath instead of a shower. Showers are painful but I don't feel like I get clean in a bath. I don't think I can relax during the bath, scars are so gross.**
- 2. I am a burn victim. I guess that's what you could call me. It's all so new to me**

**opening up like this. 9 months and it still haunts me, I feel like I should be stronger.**

- 3. My boyfriend was lighting a fire with some petrol when it happened, I was standing so close when it happened. Burns all over the right side of my body from my hip to my forehead. I can't look at myself anymore, I am lost beneath these scars. I should be thankful that my face didn't scar but the marks are all I see. I am broken physically and emotionally. It has and will be a long journey for me and my boyfriend.**

These three threads, from three different people, create a vivid and painful image of what it means to be a burn victim and the need to deal with pain, scars, activities of daily living, and relationships. "Scars are so gross," and, "I am lost beneath these scars," are charged lines of dialogue that can be used to bring the pain of the character to the page. It's through pain and authenticity that characters can help others connect and heal.

Sharing that human experience, whether it's real or fictional, is why we write in the first place. We now have a professional background and education for our character, how she works and gender issues at her job, where she lives, troubles with her significant other, and the life changing issue of being a burn victim. It's all based on real-life experiences and data. Now our job is to make her come to life.

#### Research Tips for Historical Fiction

For all of you dreaming in the past, research can transport you to a world of excitement or one dead alley after another. An [article by Sarah Johnson](#) from the Historical Novel Society states, "**A 'historical novel' is a novel which is set fifty or more years in the past, and one in which the author is writing from research rather than personal experience.**"

Research is right there in the definition. And when it comes to historical novels, characters count.

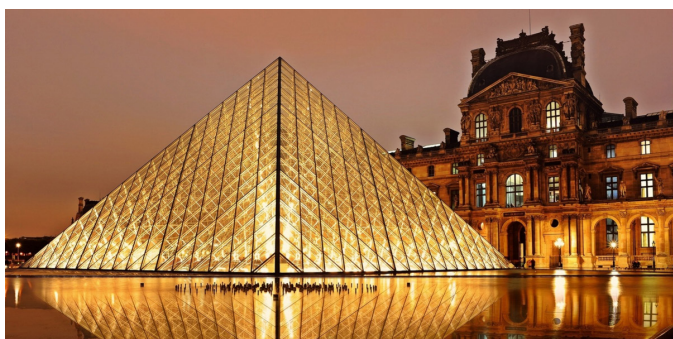
The further back in time you travel, the more challenging your research. Historical fiction does well with some “old school” research techniques.

### Follow the Leaders

Your story idea may have come from a non-fiction book about an event or a biography. Return to the book or books and dig into the notes and bibliographies. Where did the author find his or her material? You can pick from a variety of curated sources and retake the same steps. You can also reach out to the author. (Twitter anyone?) Explore the author website and see if you can connect with the author to ask your direct questions.

Subject matter experts (SMEs) can be found at universities, historical societies, and museums, and local Veteran of Foreign Wars (VFW) halls. There are history buffs everywhere who are eager to talk to people about what they love and what they know best.

Search for a museum related to your character or time period. You can find museums for toys, Civil War medicine, antique cars, textiles, knots and sailors rope work. Seek out period preserved sites such as the battlefields in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. Visit the Wright Brothers in Kitty Hawk, North Carolina and learn about the immigrant experience at Ellis Island in New York.



You can also find living history tours online, such as this [example from Louisa May Alcott’s home](#).

Of course, traveling to a character’s home city is a great way to walk in her shoes. Cities like Barcelona with its Gothic Quarter, and Venice with its maze of streets and canals still evoke their origins. But, what if you don’t have the time or resources to travel? Again, online you can gather

information about cities, exploring street-level viewing and videos. You can also head to your local library and page through travel guides, language books, and cook books.

Libraries are fantastic sources of information. If your local library is a little thin on materials, head over to a university library. Many house specialty subjects and maps such as the [Guy Burnham Map and Aerial Photography Library at Clark University in Worcester, Massachusetts](#), or the [film archives at New York University](#) in New York City. And while you’re there, check out the Tenement Museum, your next great character may have lived there.



**Sharon Ritchey** has been known to research the heck out of anything. As the owner of Home Row Editorial in Northern Virginia, she has been writing and researching for over twenty years. She earned an MFA in creative non-fiction writing from George Mason University, a Publications Specialist certification from George Washington University, and a million years ago, a BA in Political Science from Clark University. She publishes fiction as Sharon J Wishnow. Connect with her on twitter at @sjwishnow or online at [www.sharonwishnow.com](http://www.sharonwishnow.com).



## Grammar Light

# SOME THOUGHTS ON *Punctuation*

by Patricia Friedrich

It is not uncommon for writers to think of punctuation in intuitive terms. That is, sometimes writers will simply follow the cadence of a sentence and use punctuation where the natural breaks fall. However, English has clear punctuation rules that should be known before they can be broken. Here are a few:

1. Compound sentences get a comma, but subjects with two verbs do not.

Therefore, “Jane bought a necklace, and she wore it to the ball.” is correct as is “Jane bought a necklace and wore it to the ball.”

2. The colon should be used after a complete independent clause preceding lists.

Therefore, “In the meeting, the staff discussed the following: pay raises, vacation time, and the new schedule.” is correct, but “My three favorite kinds of fruit are: apple, banana, and pear.” is not.

3. The semi-colon is used where a period could be, but where the writer wants to indicate a close association between the two clauses. Other uses, such as separating higher order items when commas are already in place, also exist.

Therefore, “I live in a house; however, my sister lives in an apartment.” is correct as is “Pamela visited Indianapolis, Indiana; Los Angeles, California; and Phoenix, Arizona.” (If there were only commas, it would seem like the cities and states belonged to the same hierarchy).



4. Oxford commas are optional, but they make a lot of sense.

Consider the following sentence: “While I was in London, I saw the twins, Margie and Ann.” According to this sentence, did I meet four or two people in London? It is actually impossible to tell (the names of the twins could be Margie and Ann, or I could have met twins, whose names are not mentioned, and, in addition, Margie and Ann). If I indeed met four people, I can disambiguate by using the Oxford comma as follows:

“While I was in London I saw the twins, Margie, and Ann.”

Happy Writing!



**Patricia Friedrich** is Professor of English at Arizona State University. She is the author/editor of six nonfiction books including *The Sociolinguistics of Digital Englishes* (Routledge, 2016), the award-winning *The Literary and Linguistic Construction of Obsessive-compulsive Disorder* (Palgrave, 2015), and several published short stories. She is currently working on revisions to her first novel-length manuscript, *Artful Women*.



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# The Not-So-Lonely Reject

## HOW TO MASTER THE *Art of Rejection*

by K. L. ROMO

Rejection is alluring, isn't it? Getting that email filled with euphemisms that send us crashing to earth is what we live for, right?

*No?*

Most of us feel defeated when we get the all-too-familiar “your manuscript isn't right for my list” or “the story just didn't grab me.” But you know what? Unless you're a true writing superhero, we all get them.

*Is that supposed to make me feel better?*

Yes, in a way. I think knowing we're not alone gives us a feeling of belonging; we're not the only one who hasn't been accepted.

Recently, a writer's forum I belong to started a group whose goal is to amass as many rejections as possible. Yes, you read that right. The POINT is to get rejections. And people are happy to be included in the group. Why? Here are three reasons:

1. They are sharing their journey with others who know what it feels like,
2. The premise is that the more rejections you receive, the more queries you must have sent out. Sheer numbers make the probability of agent/editor/publisher's interest in your

manuscript go up, and

3. Celebrating rejection puts a positive spin on something that is naturally negative and can sometimes feel soul-crushing.

The goal of this column is to celebrate the WFWA members who struggle with the fear and heavy weight of rejection. While I don't want to take anything away from our fellow writers who've had publishing success, I want to give a *shout-out* and *you-go-girl* to the rest of us who haven't gotten the kind of success we're hoping for yet.



I am a veteran of the rejection game, having collected over 300 rejections (or worse, no responses) from my queries. Even though the “not-right-for-my-list”s and the “not-for-me-but-good-luck”s were killer words at the time, I've learned a lot – about my writing and how to make it better, about my query letter and where it was lacking, and about the process in general. So,

there is a silver lining to rejection, if you can see through the tears to find it.

My hope is to make rejection not so dreaded. To make fun of it, to use it, and to overcome it. Do you have a funny rejection story or a “brag-your-brushoff” announcement to share? Please send me a line at [klromo@klromo.com](mailto:klromo@klromo.com). We can share our misery (I mean, our big learning curve) together.

And remember – you are definitely not alone!



I'll start our bragging with my first humiliation:

When I look back at my first query, I have to laugh at my naivete. I'd spent more than ten years (30-minutes here, 15-minutes there, between full-time working and full-time motherhood), writing what I just knew would be the world's next sensation. It had a social justice theme, humor, beautiful writing (I was sure), and inspiration. How could anyone not love it? I had this in the bag!

After the final draft, I was ready to share my masterpiece with the world.

I did my homework and decided on the perfect agent. She seemed quirky and witty; I had to have HER, and ONLY HER. I bought her book about “how to write and sell your novel,” followed her advice to the last labored detail, especially the instructions for writing the greatest query letter on the planet. Everything was perfect! I was ready! Her offer of representation would be a no-brainer. I snail-mailed my query (this was back in 2008) and waited for my phone to ring with the good news, simultaneously calculating the amount of advance I'd need to quit my day job.

Yep, I know what you're thinking.

I received my first lesson in humility on July 28, 2008, when I opened my mailbox to find an envelope with my dream agent's name in the upper-left-hand corner.

My whole body buzzed with excitement. Then confusion quickly set in. *Didn't agents usually call authors with the good news? Wouldn't we need to actually talk?*



I opened that envelope as if it were a bomb about to explode. Unfortunately, I didn't have my hazmat suit on.

*“I appreciate you thinking of my agency to represent you, blah, blah, blah...but I don't think your manuscript is right for my list, blah, blah, blah...opinions are subjective, blah, blah, blah... Good Luck!”*

What in the holy hell had happened? My book was well-written and captivating (well, of course, it was!), and I'd done my homework. I'd followed all of the instructions. The contract should have been a slam-dunk.

I stood on the street curb in front of my mailbox, just staring at the letter that had catapulted me into the harsh realities of the publishing world. The rosy success story I saw through my pretty pink writer-glasses was a mirage. That summer day, reading that letter (uh...rejection, but I couldn't bring myself to use the word) was my initiation into the writers' club.

After the tears finally dried up, I logged into Amazon, ordered the tactical body armor every writer must have, suited up, and kept on going.



K.L. Romo writes about life on the fringe: teetering dangerously on the edge is more interesting than standing safely in the middle. She is passionate about women's issues, loves noisy clocks and fuzzy blankets, but HATES the word normal. Her historical novel, *Life Before*, is about two women separated by a century who discover they've shared a soul. Web: [KLRomo.com](http://KLRomo.com) or @klromo.

***SAVE THE DATE!***

**The 2018 retreat will be returning to Hotel Albuquerque at Old Town, September 26–30, 2018. Workshop presenter and schedule will be posted on the WFWA website prior to registration opening in February. | Albuquerque at Old Town, September 26–30, 2018. Workshop presenter and schedule will be posted on the WFWA website prior to registration opening in February.**

