

FALL 2020



The Quarterly Magazine of the Women's Fiction Writers Association

WRiTEON!

EMPOWERING ENDINGS

**ENDINGS:
START AT THE BEGINNING**

**HOW TO END
A SERIES**



IN THEIR WORDS: JACKI KELLY



**GET TO KNOW
YOUR 2021 WFWA
BOARD CANDIDATES**

FALL 2020

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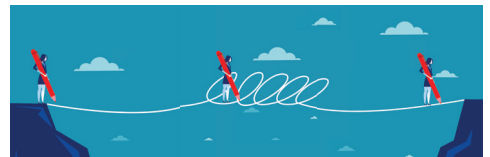
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**DID YOU KNOW? IF YOU PUT
THE LAST THREE COVERS OF
WRITE ON! TOGETHER YOU
GET A VISUAL TRIPTYCH OF
THE WRITER'S JOURNEY.**

ABOUT THE WFWA

We began this organization in 2013 with the idea to create a safe, nurturing place for 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 read. 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.



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@womensfictionwriters

Join the closed WFWA Facebook group by sending an email to:
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www.womensfictionwriters.org

IF YOU 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. Submitted letters are considered for publication and may be edited for clarity or space.

STAFF

KAY ARTHUR Managing Editor

Kay is a retired healthcare administrator who is enjoying early retirement and writing full-time. She lives both in Phoenix and a cabin in the mountains of Arizona with her husband and dogs — a griff and a doodle of some kind. She is a featured writer for the online publication *Sixty&Me*, and is querying her debut novel, *Beautifully Strange* while working on her second novel.



SHERI TAYLOR-EMERY Art Director

Sheri is an art director who longs to be a novelist. She's still in awe that her *Rising Star* manuscript, *The Fifty-Week Wife*, landed her an agent. When she's not grinding her teeth from stress, she's rejoicing in seeing her son and daughter turn into amazing young adults, working at a dog rescue once a week, and corralling two dogs and three cats at home. She lives with her husband outside of Atlanta. She's repped by Carly Watters of P.S. Literary.



BROOKE WILLIAMS Copy Editor

Brooke is a novelist, childcare provider, fitness instructor, and Girl Scout leader. When she isn't writing or devouring stacks of good books, she's helping out at the local elementary school, working on her MFA, or haunting her favorite local taco joint. She lives in Ohio with her husband and four children.



PATRICIA FRIEDRICH Contributing Features Editor

Patricia is a writer, professor and associate dean at Arizona State University. A bit of a grammar nerd, she is the author of seven non-fiction books, including *The Literary and Linguistic Construction of Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder* and *Applied Linguistics in the Real World*; the romance novel *A Love Made to Measure* (as Eliza Emmett); and two forthcoming Women's Fiction novels—*The Art of Always* and *All the Parts of Your Soul*. She can be found on Instagram as [eliza.emmett.author](https://www.instagram.com/eliza.emmett.author).



PRESIDENT'S LETTER

“There is no real ending.
It's just the place where you stop the story.”
Frank Herbert

How do you view endings? For some, they conjure a sense of loss, like finishing a great story, or having to say goodbye to something we loved. To others, endings are exciting—they promise culmination, resolution, or a chance for a new beginning.

As 2020 winds down to its calendar end, I admit I'm happy to see it go. The challenges the world faced this year meant the end of many things we once took for granted, and they forced everyone to find ways to adapt. WFWA was not spared.

I'm proud to say our volunteers rose to the task.

While authors had to cancel their launch events, we held our first annual [Women's Fiction Day](#) as a way to raise awareness of our members' books. When writing groups could no longer meet in person, our volunteers created [WFWA Writing Dates](#) to keep members connected to each other and accountable for their writing progress. And while we'll end this year without any in-person writing retreats, we hosted a successful and vibrant [Virtual Gala and Awards Ceremony](#). Finally, with the help of industry experts, we held our first discussion panel webinar, part of our newly-launched Diversity and Inclusion program to promote and continue the important discussion about [diversity](#) in our books and in publishing.

I've read that the end of your book should hook the reader into reading your next novel. For WFWA, the end of 2020 means elections, new board members, and new ideas brewing for 2021.

I hope that, despite the challenges, you've had a great year with WFWA and will stick with us for more community, programming and educational opportunities in the next one.

Be safe, and write on!

Christine Adler



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For most of us, our world is books. We read them. We write them. We think about them. We dream about their future with bright shiny covers, well-worn pages, and, of course, our perfectly posed photo on the back. We love words, period.

I was from an area and time when bookmobiles visited our schools. The bus would roll into the courtyard—a four-wheeled silo of imagination just waiting for our eager young minds to step into its world full of endless possibilities. I even loved the smell harbored within its book-lined walls, as worn and musty pages sifted into my sensors, transporting me to places other than the country road I lived on. I'd come home with my bag full of other worlds and new friends.

The love of books led me to love words and believe I could string them together in a way that means something. A poem. A story. Or a novel that reaches into people's minds or touches their souls. And that maybe, just maybe, one of the sentences I create could be the one that changes things for someone—a sentence written with such beautifully descriptive eloquence, strangers highlight it and ponder the significance of its meaning.

I want to make a difference. We, as writers, want to make a difference.

This year, especially, we've relied on books to transport us to other worlds as we've spent the majority of the year sheltering. Stripped of physical contact, our minds pregnant with anxiety, we've longed to escape. We've craved our books, and the importance of them cannot be overstated. We, as writers, are representatives of the human community. We campaign through our fingers. Our book is our stage.

This final issue of 2020 is about endings. Think of that final period we place with thespian-like flare at the completion of whatever it is we are working on. It is a much-anticipated sign of a goal met, a feat accomplished, a journey completed. It is a stop sign that separates the past from the future, a reason to move on. For us writers, "the end" is a sign of fortitude, strength, and persistence.

You are here reading this page because we are authors that want to make a difference. We, as writers, are in communion with others like us, strong with



desire to use the words we love to insert ourselves into the minds, hearts, and souls of strangers. It's our torch to carry, shining a light for our readers to follow. We take our words and the daily minutiae of living, and we mold a story. We, who are the silent observers, the quiet ones, the introverted souls who notice what others take for granted. We show our readers what we see in a way that says, "It all matters."

Our job, as writers, is to sprinkle hope into the daily mess of living, to give people another world to escape to, where endings become the beacon they long for—a hope for new beginnings. Endings are complex. As we learn from our valued colleagues in this issue, endings are not always easy to write and not always "the end." Sometimes, writing those words is the beginning of a career, the beginning of success, the beginning of something wonderful. Our trophy to hold.

The ending of 2020, a year like none other, is sure to be filled with the wonder of what's to come. We've pulled through it, changed, and possibly even become better. Better readers. Better writers. Better listeners. Better partners, daughters, sons, parents. Better humans longing for the reemergence of normalcy. How will we fare on the other side of this current state of complexity? How will our lives be? What will the new normal look like? The ending of this madness is unknown. But what is known is this:

It is possible that for many of us.....

We are stronger.

We've gained fortitude.

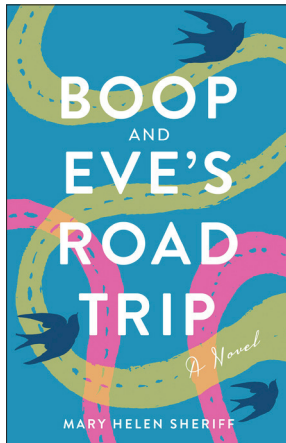
We've learned patience.

We've become better humans.

And we are becoming better writers because of it as we take this all in.

May the ending of 2020 give you peace, love, and happiness AND the beginnings of a best-selling novel your soul is busy creating.

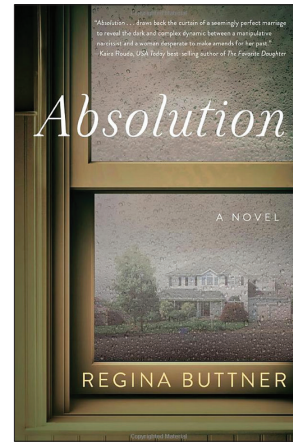
MEMBER RELEASES



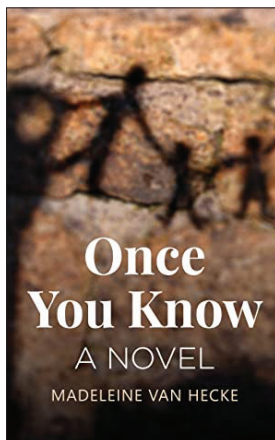
MARY SHERIFF
Boop and Eve's Road Trip
10/6/20



SARAH MCCRAW CROW
The Wrong Kind of Woman
10/6/20



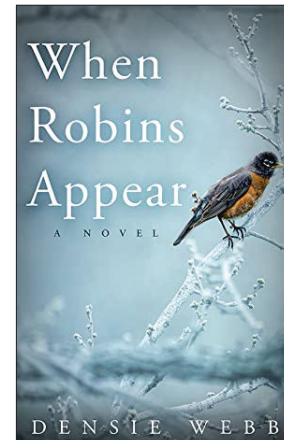
REGINA BUTTNER
Absolution
10/13/20



MADELEINE VAN HECKE
Once You Know
10/15/20



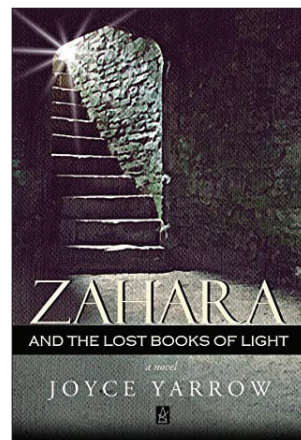
ANDREA NOURSE
After Everything
10/20/20



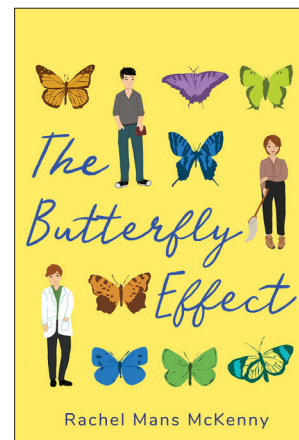
DENSIE WEBB
When Robins Appear
10/20/20



PAULA ADLER
Return to Magnolia Bloom
10/20/20



JOYCE YARROW
Zahara and the Lost Books of Light
12/7/20



RACHEL MANS MCKENNY
The Butterfly Effect
12/8/20

VOTE! 2021 BOARD ELECTIONS

We have a great slate of volunteers this year—all wonderful people prepared to keep this organization moving and growing no matter what the world throws at us. Please read their candidate statements, written in answer to the same series of questions, and check out their online presence to find out more about them. Here is the current slate of candidates for various WFWA board positions.

– *Gabi Coatsworth, Nominating Committee*



YOUR 2021 BOARD OF DIRECTORS CANDIDATES:

Christine Adler

Candidate for President

Sharon Ritchey

Candidate for VP Communications

Jacki Kelly

Candidate for VP Programs

Kathy Dodson

Candidate for VP Finance/
Treasurer

Michele Montgomery

Candidate for Secretary

Wendy Rossi

Candidate for
Membership Director

Jennifer Klepper

Candidate for
Technology Director

CHRISTINE ADLER - CANDIDATE FOR PRESIDENT

I've volunteered with WFWA in multiple capacities over the years: running workshops, contributing to newsletters, providing tech support, then as VP Programs on the Board. I also served as President for a total of three years over the last four. Working in various positions offered me a broad view of how WFWA works, connected me to members and gave me an understanding of where we want to see the organization go and the best ways to get there.

I joined in Fall of 2013, just after WFWA's inception. I was looking for a group of serious, welcoming writers who would teach me how to improve my craft and connect me with like-minded people.

With everyone essentially home this year, and much of our lives shifting to the virtual realm, having WFWA community, programming, and support still within reach has been invaluable. Writing is a large part of my life and self. After all that was lost this year, I'm beyond grateful that WFWA remained.

Despite all that the Board accomplished this year, we always want to achieve more. We're all volunteers, so change takes time. I believe a second year will provide the consistency needed to continue to work toward those goals.

Membership has grown steadily the last couple of years. I'd like to expand the membership team and create more engagement, recognition, and incentives to make new members feel at home and encourage more members to volunteer. With a strong community, we all benefit!



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SHARON RITCHEY – CANDIDATE FOR VP COMMUNICATIONS

I'm Sharon Ritchey, the current VP Communications. Thank you for being part of this amazing organization and community of writers this year. It's been an honor to lead communications. I hope you will allow me to continue.

I am the owner and head pen at Home Row Editorial, a marketing and communications firm. I've been a professional non-fiction writer for close to thirty years. I have a publications certification from George Washington University and an MFA from George Mason University.

I'm proud to say that as a virtual organization, COVID-19 hasn't stopped us. My goals for 2020 were to improve our internal communications, volunteer involvement, and published author support.

Our members and our volunteers needed extra help this year. We restructured teams such as ReadOn, WOW, *WriteOn!* and Inside Weekly. We also launched Wribbles as a place on Facebook to stoke our creative fire when we weren't feeling creative. We began an exciting program with BookTrib to promote our published authors and ran a successful Women's Fiction Day event.

We took a fresh look at the Rising Star and Star awards to improve the judging criteria. We made it easier to enter. Currently, we are creating new programming on diversity and inclusivity and have aired our first webinar.

I say "we" when speaking about my work leading communications, because my teams are what make my ideas for communications possible. Building and promoting the WFWA community has been the best part of 2020, and I hope for the same in 2021.



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JACKI KELLY - CANDIDATE FOR VP PROGRAMS

I have been writing for several years and have belonged to many writing organizations. I've published over fifteen books, along with short stories and some personal essays, so I believe I have something beneficial to offer the organization.

I joined WFWA in 2018 because I love reading and writing women's fiction. Being a member of an organization with like-minded people is appealing to me.

With the country shut down most of the year because of COVID-19, I've grown to appreciate the organization even more. With the webinars and workshops, I've managed to stay connected to this writing community. I love the way WFWA has managed to keep the members involved through this difficult year.

I love the organization and wanted to offer my skills and experience to help. Volunteers power this organization. I want to do my share, and I encourage all members to step up also.

I'd love to see the organization have small area groups, where members who live close to each other gather and encourage, share ideas, or support each other. Writing can be lonely, and the idea of members having someone to reach out to when needed is something I'd like to see.



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KATHY DODSON - CANDIDATE FOR VP FINANCE/TREASURER

I've been fortunate to spend the past year as WFWA's VP Finance/Treasurer. I have an MBA in Global Business and spent twenty-five years in business. I like helping WFWA achieve its goals. Being able to give back to an organization that has given me so much is a joy.

I joined WFWA almost three years ago and found my people. The educational programs are amazing, but I most enjoy the camaraderie. I write with friends from WFWA three times a week, and I can't wait to see them in person again at the next retreat.

Writing can be isolating, and with the lockdown this year, isolation can be overwhelming, but WFWA has helped me stay connected with a supportive community. WFWA continued its wonderful online programming with workshops, mentoring, pitch events, podcasts, etc. They started amazing online write-ins (thank you Michele Montgomery) that I participate in regularly.

I ran for VP Finance/Treasurer last year because I wanted to give back to the organization and I have experience managing nonprofits, including the finances. We implemented some changes that should help the organization in the future, such as the bylaws update and adding an audit committee. I am running again because I believe there are additional ways to streamline and improve the financials.

I'm looking forward to implementing new programs. As VP of Finance/Treasurer, I hope to provide the volunteers with the resources they need to keep our programs strong.



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MICHELE MONTGOMERY - CANDIDATE FOR SECRETARY

Outside of WFWA, I'm a screenplay consultant, businesswoman, and published essayist. That helps me understand story craft and administration. Yet what will help most is my WFWA experience. As a volunteer, I've served on our Board of Directors. I was instrumental in establishing our Critique Program, our Facebook Critique Forum, the Grabbing the Reader workshop, and the mentorship program. In addition, I gave input to the inclusion committee.

Amy Nathan's newsletter first informed me that a Yahoo group was starting for women's fiction—before we were even official. I was ecstatic to find like minds.

This year has been more rewarding than I'd ever imagined. During COVID-19 shutdowns, I am hosting daily WFWA "writing dates" to help members get unstuck and find community. I expected to host them for one week—in early May—and they're still going. The generosity our writers give each other every day has been an enormous source of levity and inspiration. These writers constantly amaze me with their willingness to support each other in a non-competitive, non-judgmental way.

WFWA is an addiction. I'm proud to be a member and am lucky to contribute. I'd love to help steer our 2021 growth.

Our volunteers have been incredible running the workshops, webinars, inclusion committee, publications, social media benefits, and e-zine. While COVID-19 impacted our in-person gatherings, we've grown community through smaller gatherings. I'd like to see more events like writing dates and webinars where members learn and get to know each other more intimately.



WFWA IS AN ADDICTION. I'M PROUD TO BE A MEMBER AND AM LUCKY TO CONTRIBUTE. I'D LOVE TO HELP STEER OUR 2021 GROWTH.

WENDY ROSSI - CANDIDATE FOR MEMBERSHIP DIRECTOR

Previously, I've been active in another professional organization, CREW (Commercial Real Estate Women). As the Vice-Chair, and then Chair of the Career Advancement Committee, I've actively recruited and retained members with an interest in programming for women in that business. WFWA is an organization that I've grown to love since joining in 2016, and I'd like to bring these skills and interests to work for the organization that holds my heart. This year, WFWA has pivoted like no other organization I've seen. Writing dates are going strong online, new groups have formed, and we have come together to support each other while the world was turned upside down.

As WFWA grows, it faces challenges with membership. I believe that my experience with CREW will enable me to help WFWA with those challenges. Further, it gives me an opportunity to be a touchpoint for both new members as well as those who decide not to continue with the organization. I've had a number of conversations with several members of the current Board, and retention is one of the challenges WFWA faces. I would like the opportunity to work with the Board to improve our retention of members, knowing, however, that no organization will suit everyone.

I'd like to engage WFWA members not on Facebook in the overall community. I want to find out what we can do to better serve our current members, and retain members that might not be getting as much from WFWA as they could. And I want to help establish local or regional chapters.



I WOULD LIKE THE OPPORTUNITY TO WORK WITH THE BOARD TO IMPROVE OUR RETENTION OF MEMBERS, KNOWING, HOWEVER, THAT NO ORGANIZATION WILL SUIT EVERYONE.

JENNIFER KLEPPER - CANDIDATE FOR TECHNOLOGY DIRECTOR

I have been the tech lead for WFWA for a couple of years, and the WFWA Technology Director since the position was created. Professionally, I practiced corporate law and was director of operations and director of compliance for a tech company.

In 2016, after writing what would become my debut novel, I reached out to an old attorney friend, Julie Lawson Timmer, who was a published author. When I asked her what in the world I should do with my manuscript, she told me the first thing I should do is to join WFWA. She was right.

This year has shown us how important (and how fragile) human connection is. Having an established network of colleagues and friends built through my involvement in WFWA gave me a source of continuity in my writing life even amidst the upheaval of 2020.

Because technology has wound its way inextricably into just about every aspect of WFWA and I have so much history with it, I want to work to make the position easily transferable and to build out the knowledge base to allow for redundancy.

I'd like to see outreach to expand diversity of membership, continued growth of resources to support published authors and keep them actively engaged, and facilitation of more person-to-person group networking.



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Endings: Start at the Beginning

By Sheila Athens,
Author and Book Coach/Developmental Editor

While the editors of *WriteOn!* asked me to write about endings, I must start at the beginning. These two parts of story are inextricably linked together.

First, though, let's get some basics out of the way. A good opening to a novel contains a promise to the reader. It tells her that the book will be funny or spooky or romantic or quirky or whatever. The ending, therefore, should be the fulfillment of that promise. "[Expectations] will differ depending on the genre," wrote author and bookstagrammer Bradeigh Godfrey recently. "For romance, there has to be an HEA (Happy Ever After) or a happy for now. For mystery, the crime needs to be solved." Even in books where an HEA isn't an expectation of the genre, readers usually like a happy, hopeful ending. They want to feel better about the world once they've invested the time to read the book.

In many well-loved novels, the seeds of the ending are sown into the first page or even the first paragraph of the book. Even if the reader doesn't specifically remember how the book started, a good ending will give her a sense that the story has come full circle, that the journey which started the book has reached a satisfying ending. When I finish reading a novel, I almost always turn immediately back to the first page to see how the ending ties in with the beginning.

Regardless of the type of story being written, the beginning of the novel is where the writer establishes the stakes for the story. Without clearly established stakes, the entire story will fall flat, and a successful ending will be impossible to achieve. As the protagonist makes her way through the story, the stakes get higher, the trouble gets bigger, and the story continues to explore the way the world works. The ending of the story is set up by everything that comes before it. Each of these forces will converge at the climax and come to a conclusion with the ending of the story.

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Author and WFWA member Joan Fernandez recently mentioned to me that a book she read had felt rushed at the end. Two reasons for this can be that a book wraps up too quickly after the climax scene or too much information about the character's backstory and/or growth is held to the end, rather than being woven throughout. The protagonist's change from the beginning to the end of the novel should be a gradual process rather than a sudden event at the end. I think of that change as a long staircase, with each scene being one of the steps along the character's journey.

Continued on page 12



Next, a potentially controversial opinion: I highly suggest that you not withhold information from the reader in order to create a surprise twist at the end. I know this technique is popular now, especially in genres that contain more suspense, but to me it feels like cheating the reader. Why? Because if the reader has been tight inside Claire's head for 300 pages, she would have SEEN the information contained in the twist while she was in there. Instead of relying on a twist that involves information withheld from the reader, keep this in mind: The interesting part of the story is WHY a character does what she does, not WHAT she does. Fiction, after all, is the study of human nature. The story is not in what happens EXTERNALLY. The story is in what happens INTERNALLY. Let us deep inside your POV character's mind, seeing all of her thoughts and understanding why she makes the decisions she makes. We BECOME the character as we read the book. We're navigating the world through her POV, so we should have access to all the information she has inside her head.

As screenwriter Michael Arndt teaches us in his video [Endings: The Good, the Bad and the Insanely Great](#), the climax is where the meaning of the story is revealed. Yes, stories are meant to entertain, but they also teach us to navigate the world around us. The climax and the ending are where we learn things that we can later apply to our own lives, whether those lessons are about romantic love or about our value as individuals or about finding our place in the world.

In a recent webinar titled "The Bigger Canvas and How to Use It", agent and writing teacher Donald Maass encouraged writers to think about how their novel can end in a happy, hopeful way, but not in the expected way. Here is his challenge: "If your happy ending became illegal, what other satisfying ending would you come up

CHECKLIST FOR ANALYZING THE END OF YOUR NOVEL

- Does the ending of the book follow the conventions of the genre in which you are writing?
- Can you/should you tweak the first page of your novel so that it ties more closely to the end of the story?
- How can you engineer your story so that even more meaning is revealed in your climax scene?
- Are all major story threads resolved by the end?
- If you left a story thread unresolved, what is your reason for doing so?
- Does the protagonist have a gradual change throughout the book, rather than lumping all the change at the end?
- When the reader is inside a character's head, is she privy to all the information that character would know?
- As Donald Maass said, "If your happy ending became illegal, what other satisfying ending would you come up with?"
- How can you revise your ending to amp up the feeling you want the reader to have when she finishes the book?

with?" On a similar note, Michael Arndt teaches this in the video referenced above:

- A bad ending = positive + predictable
- A good ending = positive + surprising

For an ending to feel complete, each of the significant story threads needs to have been resolved. The reader is likely to feel unsatisfied if, for example, Hugh and Lindsey have been flirting throughout the entire book, but the ending doesn't tell the reader if they end up together.

Regardless of the type of ending, the way a story ends cements our opinion of the book. Is it a book that we recommend to our friends, or is it one we complain about when our book club members talk about their recent reads? Since so many books are sold via word-of-mouth advertising, this is a critical question. As a writer, it's important to remember this paraphrased saying: "A good hook will sell *this* book. A good ending will sell the author's *next* book."

We come to story to FEEL something, to learn how to make our way in this world. As story consultant Lisa Cron has said, "Emotions aren't the monkey wrench in the system. Emotions ARE the system." I often can't remember the exact details of a book, but I will always remember how I felt when I closed the back cover. It reminds me of that famous quote by Maya Angelou: "People will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel."

With this in mind, what feeling do you want readers to have when they close your book? How will the ending you have planned evoke that emotion in your reader?

My final word on endings: Keep in mind that typing the end of your story does NOT mean that you are finished with your novel. Completing your first draft is cause for celebration, but revision is by far the more important part of the writing process. After several rounds of revisions, your entire manuscript will become richer and more meaningful, from beginning to end.



Sheila Athens is a traditionally-published author and a book coach/developmental editor who specializes in commercial fiction, women's fiction and romance. After several years of training under Jennie Nash at Author Accelerator, Sheila now runs her own private coaching and editing business, where she's edited dozens of manuscripts. Her clients have gone on to gain top-tier agents, contracts with Big 5 publishers and successful sales for self-published books. Her debut novel, *The Truth About Love*, was published in the United States, Germany and Turkey. She's a past chairperson for the Women's Fiction Writers Association Agent Pitch Events. For more about her work, visit SheilaAthens.com.

DEADLINE, DEAD-END, OR JUST PLAIN DEAD: HOW TO RECOGNIZE THE FINISH LINE

A story a dancer once told me: It's opening night. Six dancers wait in the wings, nerves taut. The overture has begun and their entrance is imminent—when the choreographer, heeding an infamous penchant for change, rushes over to them aflame with last-minute inspiration. The dancers do the only self-preserving thing they can do—stick their fingers in their ears and ignore him.

You'd think writing is more set. After a certain point, you are limited to the little black marks on the printed page, right? Ha—that's what the "delete" key is for! I've witnessed more than one author pause a public reading to decipher last-minute changes scribbled in the margins.

So all you tinkerers, listen up. We're going to hear from artists across multiple genres about when to let a project go.

DEADLINES AND OTHER USEFUL DELIMITERS

This article was pulled from a larger collection of wisdom than I could use, but I was limited by: 1) how much I could cram into a reasonable word limit, and 2) my deadline. But is reaching imposed limits reason enough to consider a piece "finished"?

In some cases, preset parameters can both inform a project's conception and provide a sense of its completion, says writer and painter Joe Skrapits (Allentown, PA). This is particularly true in one of his specialties, plein-air landscape painting.

"The light is at a certain angle, or of a certain quality, or the shadows are in a certain place, and so you give yourself an hour or two to state what that is," says Joe. "When the light changes, you've reached the limit on your participation that day. Sometimes, that's good."

Plein-air painting is a useful metaphor for aspiring book-a-year authors. Creating limits around your work is one way to practice walking away from it. If publication isn't in the offing, entering a contest can give you a deadline. NaNoWriMo gives you a one-month, 50K word-count goal.

PERFECTING VS. FINISHING

So how can you be sure you've come up with the perfect combination of the 85,000 words in your manuscript?

Of course, you can't.



I'm not the only writer who has typed "The End," snapped a screen shot, and then posted it on social media along with tearful thanks to everyone who helped me reach the finish line...only to realize I'd be facing several more finish lines in the life of my novel. Developmental edits. Beta reader edits. Concision edits. Agent edits. Publisher edits. Copy edits. Beyond the mechanics of typing "The End," from whence comes your first sense of completion?

"A piece is finished when it satisfies the artist's intention," Skrapits says, adding that his definition presupposes that the artist has a fairly clear vision of what he or she wants to achieve. His comment leads us into the first of several definitions of "finished."

■ PHILOSOPHICAL

What were you trying to say, and have you said it? Such a simple question, and yet we can forget to ask it. Writing a new synopsis after each draft will help determine if your accumulation of words has indeed fulfilled your intention.

■ EDITORIAL

Is it as tight as it can possibly be? Readers won't want to wade through excess verbiage to find your story and publishers won't want to cut down one more tree than necessary to print your book. Make every word count.

■ CRITICAL

Ask your beta readers what they perceive the story question to be, and if, in their opinion, you addressed it. Ask about character arc, relevant obstacles, pace. While caught up in your novel's minutiae, you may have lost sight of the big picture.

■ PROMOTIONAL

"This is a great book. It starts slow but hang in there because it has a great finish." We hear recommendations like this all the time. What we never hear is, "This book is amazing! It starts with a bang but then fizzles out." Make your ending strong enough to generate word-of-mouth

WHILE "FINISHING" IS OPEN TO DEBATE, "STOPPING" IS OFTEN A PRACTICAL DECISION. MAYBE YOUR PERSEVERANCE IS USED UP, OR YOUR EMOTIONAL CONNECTION TO THE WORK HAS SNAPPED. A NEW PROJECT MAY BE CALLING YOUR NAME. AND THERE WOULDN'T BE SUCH A THING AS A "DRAWER NOVEL" IF MOST OF US HADN'T EXPERIENCED THE NEED TO WALK AWAY BECAUSE WE'D REACHED A DEAD END.

sales. If that necessitates going back to the beginning to deepen your character's desire or raise the stakes, it will be worth it.

FINISHED—OR ABANDONED?

While "finishing" is open to debate, "stopping" is often a practical decision. Maybe your perseverance is used up, or your emotional connection to the work has snapped. A new project may be calling your name. And there wouldn't be such a thing as a "drawer novel" if most of us hadn't experienced the need to walk away because we'd reached a dead end.

"There are times when I complete a draft and feel oddly sated and at ease with the work," says poet Ann E. Michael (Emmaus, PA). "This can be a good sign. It can also be an indicator of self-delusion. I have heard poets speak of the 'click' at the close of a poem, like a perfectly fitting lid. That's nice to achieve, but it doesn't mean the poem is done. It just means the ending's okay. There may still be work to do."

Ellen Bryant Voigt (Cabot, VT) has confessed to having over 35 drafts of some of her poems and she's been rewarded well for her efforts, as her collections have won her accolades that include a MacArthur "Genius" Fellowship and a Pushcart Prize. If obsessive work is still reaping rewards for you, as well—and if youth and robust health are on your side—no one is stopping you.

But those with publication goals be forewarned: writing is a voracious beast that will eat whatever hours we feed it. Truth is, once the story unfolds the way you want it to, fiddling with each sentence yet one more time may not make enough of a difference to warrant additional time.

LETTING GO

Remember, a novel is a snapshot in time. The concern that led you into the story was indicative of where you were in your life. Hopefully, you will grow as a person and your concerns will change. If you start wanting to add these new concerns into your old novel, it's probably time to stop.

Most likely, the only creative piece requiring a lifetime of effort is you. At some point, you must screw up the courage to submit or else face rewriting the same piece your whole life long. If you're not sure it's finished, keep submitting it for critique—others will gladly reinforce your uncertainty by continuing to find things for you to change.

Skrapits used the image of a visual arts retrospective to explain why the notion of "finished" shouldn't cause an artist undue stress. Writers can do the same by imagining all of their novels on a shelf—even those that were abandoned or failed to sell. "You see the whole arc and how everything relates," Skrapits says. "You can tap into the dialogue going on among the work. 'Finished' matters less, and you just consider where it fits."

So, in the end, where is "The End"? Without a publisher, the decision is yours alone to make. But if your reluctance to move on is based in love for your characters and your commitment to seeing their story well-told, I say this: may it be so with your next project, as well.



Kathryn Craft, the WFWA 2020 Guiding Scribe and a member of the award-winning marketing collective of women authors, Tall Poppy Writers, is the author of novels *The Art of Falling* and *The Far End of Happy*, and chapters in *Author in Progress* and *The Complete Handbook of Novel Writing* from Writers Digest Books. Her 14 years as a freelance developmental editor inform monthly posts at Writer UnBoxed. www.kathryncraft.com



SERIES ENDINGS

THE END ~ BUT WAIT, THERE'S MORE!

By Laura Drake

Endings can be tricky, and they're never harder than when you're finishing a book and you've already planned/contracted another. Denouement is the MFA word for an ending.

de·noue·ment / dānōō' māN/ noun

The final part of a play, movie, or narrative in which the strands of the plot are drawn together and matters are explained or resolved.

How do you write a satisfying denouement in a series? It depends on what type of series you're writing, but the ultimate goal of every ending is:

PROMISE THE READER MORE OF WHAT THEY CAME TO YOUR BOOK FOR!

[Ignited Ink](#) details three different types of series. Let's look at how to write a satisfying denouement for each one.

DYNAMIC SERIES

These stories follow the same character or group of characters through the series as they try to accomplish a large goal. The story arc is too big for one book and is fleshed out over multiple books. Think *The Hobbit* or *Harry Potter*.

The overarching plot spans the entire series, so the ending of each book is one of the big steps along the way. One impossible-to-achieve step is won, but the reader knows there's more—the protagonists have won a battle, but the war isn't over.

Hunger Games is a good example. In the first book, the protagonist, Katniss, only wants to survive the games. In the end, she does (good thing, or it wouldn't be a satisfying ending or a series!). Satisfying ending, right? But that clever Susan Collins throws in a hook at the end that readers can't resist: she shows Peta and Katniss holding hands, heading to the Victor's Village after having thwarted the Capital. We now know that Peta loves Katniss, and that Katniss did what she had to in order to survive. No declarations of true love or riding off into the sunset here, leaving the reader to ask (and in my case, yell), "What happens next?!" Perfect ending if you're the author, and a buying opportunity for the reader. Win-Win!

STATIC SERIES

Each book is an individual event or installment in the characters' lives rather than a series of related events. Think *Sherlock Holmes*, *Murder She Wrote*, or *Babysitters Club*. You know, cozy mysteries.

In the first book, the readers fall in love with the characters, so they read the next book to find out more of what happens to them. Mysteries fit this scenario well. The mystery is solved. That makes the book's ending satisfying. You can hint at, or even open another mystery to pull them into the next book, but they'll read on for the characters either way.

IN THE FIRST BOOK, THE READERS FALL IN LOVE WITH THE CHARACTERS, SO THEY READ THE NEXT BOOK TO FIND OUT MORE OF WHAT HAPPENS TO THEM. MYSTERIES FIT THIS SCENARIO WELL. THE MYSTERY IS SOLVED. THAT MAKES THE BOOK'S ENDING SATISFYING.

FEATURE

The TV series *House* is a static series. In each episode, the quirky, emotionally unstable, but brilliant doctor solves a mysterious ailment that no one else can, and the patient lives. But you watch the next episode to find out if House will finally come off the rails completely. The writer was brilliant, because you both love and hate this arresting character at the same time, even as you queue up the next episode.

ANTHOLOGY SERIES

These stories are tied together by a world, a setting, or character relationships. The series can be made up of smaller dynamic and/or static series. Think the Marvel Universe, Hogwarts, or (cue shameless plug) my own series.

Readers come to these books for the world you create, so you promise more of that with your ending. My latest series is set in the fictional town of Unforgiven, New Mexico. Central to all the stories is a diner that serves as the social hub of the failing town. The series is full of quirky characters, and each book is a romance of someone involved with the diner. Each protagonist gets their happily-ever-after with their guy, so the ending of each book is satisfying.

How do you decide which characters should have their own book? The best protagonists are the ones with the most to lose. I hear you saying that doesn't help much, and you're right. But I'm a pantser, so I'm as surprised by the books and the characters that show up in them as anyone!

Seeing the characters in the first book show up in the second and third is fun, and by the end of the third book, you *know* this town, and the people in it. My series may share characters, but each book focuses on the romance of two people set in the same small town. It's the story world—the town, or, in one case, a sport—that links them. By the end of the series, I have a hard time leaving it—and I hope my readers do, too.

Regardless of what type of series you write, the normal rules of satisfying endings still apply:

- Resolve the conflict – tie up all those loose ends
- Evoke emotion – the best stories change us (looking at you, Alison Hammer)
- Add suspense – can you say 'cliffhanger'?
- Surprise your readers – the twist you never saw coming

Go forth bravely, and write those amazing endings!

THE SERIES CAN BE MADE UP OF SMALLER DYNAMIC AND/OR STATIC SERIES. THINK THE MARVEL UNIVERSE, HOGWARTS, OR (CUE SHAMELESS PLUG) MY OWN SERIES. READERS COME TO THESE BOOKS FOR THE WORLD YOU CREATE, SO YOU PROMISE MORE OF THAT WITH YOUR ENDING.



Laura Drake is a New York and self-published author of women's fiction and romance. Her romance series, *Sweet on a Cowboy*, is set in the world of professional bull riding. Her debut, *The Sweet Spot*, was a double-finalist, then won the 2014 Romance Writers of America® RITA® award. She's since published 12 more books. She is a founding member of Women's Fiction Writers Association, as well as a member of Western Writers of America and Women Writing the West. Laura is a city girl who never grew out of her tomboy ways, or a serious cowboy crush. She gave up the corporate CFO gig to write full time. She realized a lifelong dream of becoming a Texan and is currently working on her accent. She's a wife, grandmother, and motorcycle chick in the remaining waking hours. Follow her at lauradrakebooks.com as well as on Facebook and Twitter.

IN THEIR WORDS

By Kay Arthur

I had the distinct pleasure of interviewing WFWA member Jacki Kelly, this issue's highlighted successful author. She is the VP of Programs at WFWA and author of 15 books, both women's fiction and romance. She's currently working on a screenplay and co-authoring a book with five other authors. We talked frankly about writing, including the joys and challenges that we all face. The following are precious gifts of information, reassuring us that our author lives are separate journeys that follow different paths but share the same goal—to write.

■ **You've written 15 books, where do you get your creativity?**

I get inspiration everywhere. I can look at television and say, what if it didn't happen that way but like this instead? Or I can hear a song lyric and wonder, what if? Sometimes while I'm writing a story, another idea will pop into my head that doesn't fit this particular story but will go great with another. I keep a book of ideas where I jot down notes, so when I'm ready to start a new manuscript, I'll flip through it to see if those notes still resonate with me.

■ **Tell me about your writing process.**

I walk every morning and spend that time thinking about my goals for that day's writing. It's my time to sort through my thoughts and prioritize my work. Walking gives me time to think, to undergo the curative process, sometimes recording thoughts into my phone. I usually write in my office, but once a story gets moving, I can write anywhere, even with the TV on.

I have found, for myself, that the more time and attention I give to the plot, the faster and better I can write, so I spend a lot of time in the beginning with detailed plotting, the more detail the better. Then I'll write the rough draft. But I give myself permission to let the characters still surprise me.

■ **What is the hardest part about writing?**

The writing itself is the easy part. The hard part is making sure all the elements and techniques of the story are in place, weaving them in without the reader seeing them. These unseen, built-in elements are the essence of storytelling. I've learned a lot over the years about the craft of writing, and I am continually trying to improve my work. It's one thing to want to write about the anecdotal experiences in life that we all have, but to create and mold a story around them and put them on paper is the challenge.



■ **How do you engage with the writing community?**

I joined WFWA two years ago, and the community as well as the webinars have been educational and helpful with my writing goals. I always walk away with one or two tidbits of information that I can apply to my skills. I also belong to a critique group. We share 10,000 words a month and then receive feedback, plus I have three or four beta readers. I have been published by small and Indie presses. This year, my goal was to become agented. I'm still waiting for that, but I'm in the process of querying.

■ **Do you have any advice for our readers?**

Write. Write. Write. The more you write and study the craft, the better you'll become. Just like in sports, you have to practice to improve. Writing is a muscle that needs to be used daily. Also, take advantage of conferences, organizations, and webinars. I feel with each book, I get better. And yes, I read every review, even the bad ones. There's always something to be learned.

I wish I had started this journey earlier and taken my writing more seriously. Even though I have always written, I never believed I could write and sell books. I wish I'd had more faith in myself. Just keep at it. Keep writing. The biggest thrill as a writer is to hold your book in your hands, and I hope that everyone has the chance to do that.

ENDINGS

For this edition of our grammar column, let's talk about the ending of sentences. It is not something we always think about, but, nonetheless, sentence endings are very important and communicate a lot of a writer's intention.

Shall we start with punctuation?

PUNCTUATION

■ Of course, the most common punctuation mark for sentence ending is a period. A period follows a statement.

e.g. I ate an apple.

e.g. John lives in Michigan.

In fiction and other "creative" forms of writing, where sentence fragments are accepted if they have a rhetorical purpose, periods can also follow such fragments.

e.g. Silence. Janet wondered why it was all so quiet.

e.g. Thunder. Lightening. The sounds of the wind as it sieved through the windows. The mansion was not an inviting place.

When a person adds a comma or no punctuation where a period should be, the result is often a run-on sentence.

e.g. I looked at the sky, it displayed a multitude of colors, from yellow to pink.

Since we have two independent clauses here, we should either separate them with a period or introduce a conjunction (e.g. and) so as to be able to use the comma. Therefore,

e.g1. I looked at the sky. It displayed a multitude of colors, from yellow to pink.

e.g2. I looked at the sky, and it displayed a multitude of colors, from yellow to pink.

Notice that a semi-colon would also be adequate and would hint at the connection between the two clauses.

■ The exclamation point is another way to communicate expressions and rhetorical purpose at the end of the sentence. It is, however, the case that many writing experts and editors do not recommend its frequent use in fiction. The argument is that given the descriptions, characterizations, and other aspects of the story, the exclamation point is rendered unnecessary and in certain cases can shake the reader out of the story in which they are otherwise immersed. The exclamation point is used to signal surprise, outrage, loudness, and other actions and emotions that can otherwise be conveyed by the writing itself. Many editors will recommend that exclamation points not be used in narration and be used only occasionally in dialogue to signal, for example, physical distance between the characters (i.e. that the character is shouting).

e.g. "Don't cross the bridge!"

e.g. "Come back!"

■ The question mark seems to be quite a self-explanatory piece of punctuation. It is used to signal a question. When it comes to fiction, it appears most often in dialogue, although it sometimes appears in the narrative portion of the text. As with other punctuation marks, the trick is to ask yourself what rhetorical purpose it will play and to use it only occasionally when not in the dialogue.

e.g. "What time will you be back?" she asked.



■ Finally, the ellipsis needs our attention. Used to indicate trailing off or a break in continuity, the ellipsis can be a useful form of punctuation to indicate what is happening to a character. Maybe they are forming their thoughts while speaking, or they are confused. Maybe they hesitate. All of that can be conveyed through the use of the ellipsis.

e.g. "I thought...I mean...Wasn't that the purpose after all?"

Once more, it is often the case that the ellipsis will be found more often in dialogue than in narration.

PREPOSITIONS

To close this column, I would like to write briefly about ending sentences with prepositions. If you ask a prescriptive grammarian, chances are they will tell you not to end a sentence with a preposition. Here is an example of the prescriptive approach from a sentence I used above:

e.g. [...] the exclamation point is rendered unnecessary and in certain cases can shake the reader out of the story in which they are otherwise immersed.

As opposed to ending the sentence with a preposition:

e.g. [...] the exclamation point is rendered unnecessary and in certain cases can shake the reader out of the story they are otherwise immersed in.

Users of English commonly end sentences in prepositions. Therefore, when it comes to fiction, a question to ask, especially if the sentence will appear in dialogue, is whether it will seem artificial to try and avoid the preposition at the end. Ultimately, like with everything else in writing, your rhetorical purpose should inform your grammatical decisions.

HAPPY WRITING!

WHERE IN THE WORLD ARE WFWA VOLUNTEERS? EVERYWHERE!



LAINIE CAMERON

She writes contemporary women's fiction from San Miguel de Allende in central Mexico.

Her first novel, *The Exit Strategy* released in July. She says, "The value of connecting to writers outside your border means...I can be part of the community, celebrate with and help other writers, even though I move around a lot."



THERESA HERZOG WRITING AS MARIE BALUSTRADE

She writes women's fiction suspense, thriller from Berlin, Germany.

She says, "The value of connecting to writers outside my borders is essential to my survival as an author writing in English and living in a country where English is not the national language or even the primary working language. Moreover, as a literary activist who interweaves fiction with relevant social issues, connecting with writers across the globe keeps me focused and motivated, especially during the pandemic and these turbulent times. A writers' community reminds me every day of our role in society, to bridge reality and fiction, and make this world a better place through the magic of words that find their way to the pages."



As an online, global community, WFWA serves the spirit of women's fiction writers across the globe. This issue, we applaud some of our worldly (volunteer) workers who stay up late and wake up early to work with our USA-based timelines.



MAGGIE GILES

She writes women's fiction with suspense, or thrilling women's fiction as she likes to call it from Ontario, Canada.

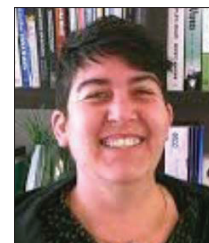
She says, "The value of connecting to writers outside your border means growing my network and helping those who need guidance and support all around the world. Working with WFWA has been an amazing opportunity to connect with those I may not have met otherwise and to help other members with their marketing and their social media growth. It's a rewarding opportunity to help others learn and watch their efforts grow!"



MAROLYN KRASNER

She writes her queer-focused stories from Palmerston North, New Zealand.

Her writing is strategically designed to make you laugh, or not. Her first novel is *The Radicals*. She lives in New Zealand with her wife, two children and a small dog. She created the 2020 Women's Fiction Day Logo.



Did you know WFWA is 100% run by volunteers? That means every WFWA program, newsletter, event, resource and benefit you enjoy is put together by your fellow members on their own time.

I think I did pretty
well, considering
I started out with
nothing but a bunch
of blank paper.

– STEVE MARTIN

