



Write ON!

QUARTERLY MAGAZINE OF THE
WOMEN'S FICTION WRITERS ASSOCIATION

Spring 2017

PLOTTING AND PANTSING

Plus

PACING

**KICKING THE CRAP
OUT OF REJECTION**

**NAVIGATING PSEUDONYMS
ACROSS GENRES**



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President's Note

It's spring in New York and that means big changes. The snow has stopped falling, the sun has grown warm. Some of last year's flowers haven't returned, but new raspberry bushes have sprouted in their place, and my firstborn is winding down his final year of high school while simultaneously gearing up for his first year at college. Milestones and deadlines, endings and beginnings. The beauty of opposites is that you can't have one without the other. The Greek philosopher Heraclitus said, "Change is the only constant in life."

I have a love/hate relationship with change. When it comes to writing, part of me thinks, *if it ain't broke, don't fix it*, while another part thinks if I don't mix things up, I'll get stuck in a rut and I won't improve. Where's the middle ground? I'm a plotter who tried pantsing once. Fifty-thousand funny, unsaleable NaNo words later, I decided once was enough. I continue to plot. My novels are historical, so I always start with an idea and then create a timeline. For one project, I decided to get to know my characters first. But every time I asked one of them a question, my research led me to what was happening in the world at that time in her life. Lesson learned? Create timelines first.

Dealing with publishing industry processes has prompted me to try different things here and there. When I finished a manuscript and sent out query letters, those early rejections were crushing. They'd paralyze me for at least a day. Then I decided a different approach might be better than moping, so I researched successful query letters in our [Aspiring Authors Toolbox](#). After that, for every rejection I got, I'd send out two more of the new letter. This also gave me the impetus to keep a running list of agents to target—a new process that made me feel more professional. Subsequent requests for chapters or the full manuscript made me think things were turning around. But those rejections, though personalized, felt even worse than a form rejection to a query letter. How did I change? I read more [craft books](#), took a [workshop](#), then dove back in and overhauled my manuscript to make it better, tighter, stronger.

If Heraclitus was right, we can't have success without failures. When we fall short in pursuit of our goals, we can either change the goals or change the way we approach them. For some, that change means self-publishing. For others, it means putting a project in a drawer and starting a new one. For me, it meant lovingly honing my craft and manuscript until they became the best they could be at this stage in my writing life.

No matter how you feel about change, do what you need to do to keep moving forward. Whether you take baby steps or giant leaps, be safe in the knowledge that WFWA is behind you with [support](#) and resources for every phase of your journey.



Christine Adler
WFWA PRESIDENT

Editors

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Erin Bartels writes copy for a living, but she writes novels for a life. She has worked in the publishing industry for fifteen years and has been a finalist in WFWA's Rising Star Contest and in the *Saturday Evening Post's* Great American Fiction Contest. You can find her in her home office in the middle of the Mitten State or at www.erinbartels.com.

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Write On! is published quarterly by the WFWA.

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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

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

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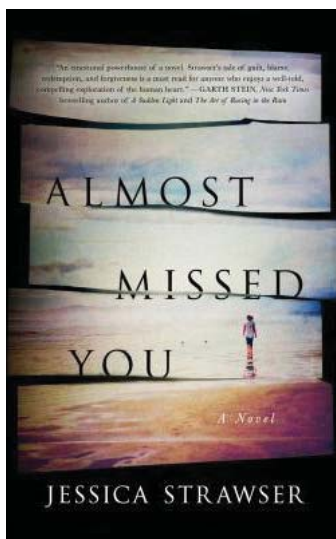
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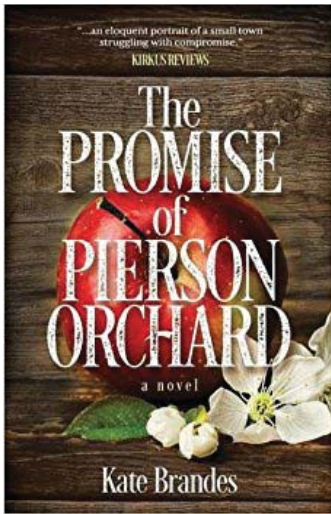
ALMOST MISSED YOU
JESSICA STRAWSER
MARCH 28, 2017

Violet and Finn were “meant to be,” said everyone, always. They ended up together by the hands of fate aligning things just so. Three years into their marriage, they have a wonderful little boy, and as the three of them embark on their first vacation as a family, Violet can’t help thinking that she can’t believe her luck. Life is good.

So no one is more surprised than she when Finn leaves her at the beach—just packs up the hotel room and disappears. And takes their son with him. Violet is suddenly in her own worst nightmare, and faced with the knowledge that the man she’s shared her life with, she never really knew at all.

Caitlin and Finn have been best friends since way back when, but when Finn shows up on Caitlin’s doorstep with the son he’s wanted for kidnapping, demands that she hide them from the authorities, and threatens to reveal a secret that could destroy her own family if she doesn’t, Caitlin faces an impossible choice.

Told through alternating viewpoints of Violet, Finn, and Caitlin, *Almost Missed You* is a powerful story of a mother’s love, a husband’s betrayal, connections that maybe should have been missed, secrets that perhaps shouldn’t have been kept, and the spaces between what’s meant to be and what might have been.

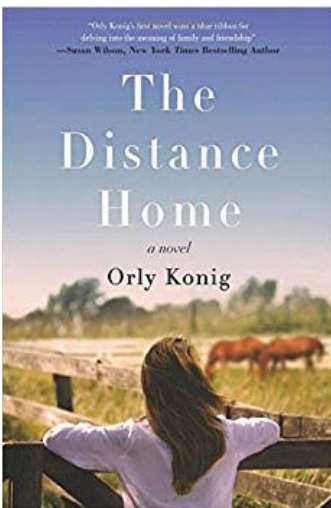


THE PROMISE OF PIERSON ORCHARD

KATE BRANDES

APRIL 22, 2017

Long before fracking ever came to Minden, Pennsylvania, the fissures in the Pierson family were developing into major fault lines. Green Energy arrives, offering a rural community the dream of making money from their land. But orchardist Jack Pierson fears his brother, Wade, has returned to town after a twenty-year absence desperate to be the hero. Jack also worries his brother will try to rekindle his relationship with LeeAnn, Jack's wife, who's recently left him. To protect his hometown and to fulfill a promise to himself, Jack seeks out his mother and environmental lawyer, Stella Brantley, who abandoned Minden—and Jack and Wade—many, many years ago.



THE DISTANCE HOME

ORLY KONIG

MAY 2, 2017

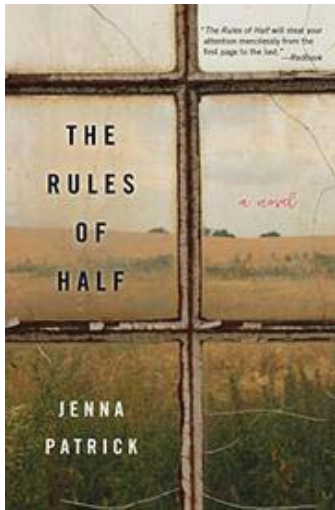
Sixteen years ago, a tragic accident cost Emma Metz her two best friends—one human, one equine. Now, following her father's death, Emma has reluctantly returned to the Maryland hometown she'd left under a cloud of guilt.

Sorting through her father's affairs, Emma uncovers a history of lies tying her broken family to the one place she thought she could never return—her girlhood sanctuary, Jumping Frog Farm.

Emma finds herself drawn back to the stable after all these years. It's easy to win forgiveness from a horse, but less so from her former friend Jillian, their once strong bond destroyed by secrets and betrayals. Despite Jillian's cold reception, for the first time in years, Emma feels at home.

To exorcise the past, Emma will have to release her guilt, embrace an uncertain future, and trust again in the healing power of horses.

The Distance Home is a powerful and sparkling women's fiction debut novel of second chances, friendship, and healing.



THE RULES OF HALF

JENNA PATRICK

JUNE 6, 2017

If Will Fletcher's severe bipolar disorder isn't proof he shouldn't be a parent, his infant daughter's grave is. Once a happily married, successful veterinarian, he now lives with his sister and thrives as the small-town crazy of Half Moon Hollow. But when a fifteen-year-old orphan claims she's his daughter, Will is forced back into the role he fears most: fatherhood.

Her biological dad isn't the hero Regan Whitmer hoped for, but he's better than her abusive stepfather back in Chicago. Still haunted by her mother's suicide and the rebellious past she fears led to it, Regan is desperate for a stable home and a normal family—things Will can't offer. Can she ride the highs and lows of his illness to find a new definition of family?

The Rules of Half explores what it is to be an atypical family in a small town and to be mentally ill in the wake of a tragedy—and who has the right to determine both.

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



Pantsing Your Way Through

by LAURA DRAKE

I don't think the hardest part of learning to write is the craft. It's learning how *you* write a book. I believe your brain already knows how, but it's not talking. So you dig, finding and discarding methods over your shoulder like a cheap clotheshorse at a Nordstrom's sale. Frustrating, isn't it? And it seems whichever method our brain has chosen, we're not happy with. We want *that* person's process—or *that* one (kind of like hair, no?). We keep looking, hoping something new will be THE thing that works better, faster—oh, might as well admit it—easier.

I was a career CFO (read: corporate bean-counter). I'm compulsively organized and I love outlines, so I *knew* I'd be a 40-page outline plotter. I studied the W-Diagram. I have all the Save the Cat books. I know the Snowflake Method. I've tried interviewing my characters, looking for photos of them on Pinterest, doing vision boards . . . I've used everything but Ouija Boards (oh, hey, maybe . . .).

Yet, when I sat down to write my first book, the creative side of my brain gave the organized side the finger. When I try to use these amazing, fun tools, the story goes dead. If you know what's going to happen, why write it? So, like it or not, I'm a pantsier. I'm learning to live with



the disappointment of all those bright shiny tools that I can't use.

If you're a pantsler, you know how it works: You start with a kernel of something—a situation, a character, a what if. Stephen King said in *On Writing*, “Stories are relics, part of an undiscovered, pre-existing world. The writer’s job is to . . . get as much as each one out of the ground as intact as possible.”

That’s what feels like for me. I begin usually with a character. I know her misunderstanding of the world (or flaw), and I usually know a beginning scene. I may even know a key scene or two along the way—something that stuck in my head and won’t let go. I know that in the end, she will have learned if not to overcome the flaw, at least understand it better. She’s in a better place than the mud, blood, and beer I’ve pulled her through.

That’s it.

As in any process, there are pros and cons. I’ll give you a few of mine. I’d love to hear others.

THE GOOD

- *No tears in the writer; no tears in the reader* (Robert Frost). Since I don’t know what’s going to happen next, I think it’s easier to live in deep POV. I’m as surprised as my main character by what happens. I think it helps make my writing more ‘real’ and immediate.
- I think of it as following a breadcrumb trail. I don’t know where I’m going, or how to get there, but it’s okay, because I only need to find the next crumb, to know the next scene. And the next, until eventually I can see the last scene. When I get there, it feels very familiar—like I’ve known where I was going all along.
- It’s exciting. I can’t wait to get up in the morning and find out what happens next.
- It feels like rebellion. I’m a trail blazer, a rabble-rouser and an outsider. I don’t need no stinking rules. I’m Truman Capote, mysterious and unknowable (without the weird parts).

- Some tools do work. Ones that, like Lisa Cron’s *Story Genius*, espouse thinking about the foundation blocks of your story rather than specifics of plotting.
- A new idea is shiny and perfect—at least until you dig into the details you can’t see in the beginning.
- Did you ever read something you wrote, and think, “Wow, I am not that smart?” Sometimes ideas come to me that are better than I believe I’m capable of.

THE BAD

- Sigh. All those pretty shiny tools wrapped under a tree, with someone else’s name on them.
- I get stuck. Often. My breadcrumb trail peters out in the middle of a thorny thicket and I don’t know how to get out!
- I don’t really know the themes or what the book is truly about until I finish it. If I want to portray a theme or a motif, I can’t make it happen. I just think about it and hope a miracle happens and it ends up in the book. Happily, so far, it has.
- Secondary characters can take over the story and you won’t even notice until a critter (critique partner) points it out.
- To every book, there is a middle (aka: The Pit of Despair). I know the end, but there’s no way to get there from where I am.
- I’ve heard other pantslers wander off on tangents and end up having to throw away huge chunks of what their story is *not*.

THE UGLY

And this is really the crux of my angst. I wonder if it’s the same for all the pantslers everywhere.

I don't know where this stuff comes from.

If you don't purposefully have a plan and follow it, you don't even have the illusion of control (to be fair, plotters probably don't believe they have total control, either). **That means you're relying on something you don't understand.** Don't get me wrong; epiphanies happen, and when they do glitter falls like snow from the sky. But what if they don't? What if I never get another idea? What if this story doesn't gel into something that makes any sense at all?

Okay, so far, the next idea has always come and I've managed to complete eight novels—and even won accolades. But past performance is no guarantee of future results, right?

I don't believe in things I can't see—like muses. I'm a pragmatist. I know the stories all come from my subconscious. But that doesn't make me feel better. I want *control*, dang it. It's like relying on a gift; it's wonderful and appreciated, but it's not good business practice to expect that it will always be there.

WHAT TO DO ABOUT IT

Aside from breathing into a paper bag. If you're stuck, here are some ideas to help pull you out of the mud.

- **Call a lifeline.** I have several friends who are used to me calling them and shouting gibberish through tears. They calm me down, we talk out the problem, and voila! The answer unfolds. Cherish those people (I'm looking at Orly).
- **Go take a shower.** Or go wherever it is you get your ideas. Doing the dishes, gardening, bathing the cat, whatever works for you. I get on my bicycle; for some reason keeping my conscious mind busy with balance, traffic, and directions frees up the subconscious and Gordian knots unravel.
- **Write a scene you DO know.** Doesn't matter if it's the last scene. Sometimes, it breaks the log jam, and you can work

backward from there, to where you're stuck.

- **Take up drinking.** Just kidding. Though it might make you feel better, it won't help you get unstuck.
- **Draw a map.** If you feel like you're getting off the path and wandering around in the weeds, draw a map. I use an Excel spreadsheet to keep track of scenes. Lisa Cron's scene cards work, too. Something that helps give you a bird's eye view of the forest instead of focusing on all those trees.
- **Adjust your perspective.** Many writers consider the first draft just sand shoveled in, to be able to make sand castles in the revision phase. Orly Konig calls this, 'pantsing with suspenders' and it takes the pressure off.
- **Pull out threads.** Odds are you'll have more than one character, theme, motif, and/or plot thread. Follow each of those . . . did you lose one?
- **Remember.** Why did you start this book (topic) to begin with? What was that spark, that human condition you wanted to explore? Write it in magic marker and tape in up at eye level. Then look at every scene you've written so far to see where you lost the path.

ONE OTHER SUGGESTION FOR WHEN YOU'RE STUCK

And this works whether you're a plotter, pantsner, or something in between. A friend of mine, Susan Squires, taught me this.

The cortex of your brain is hardwired to respond to questions. Its job is to accumulate data to answer any questions you ask, just like it's been doing for 50,000 years. What you do is ask yourself a question about your problem before you fall asleep. It needs to be a small question, and specific. *How do I fix this mess?* would not be a good question. A better one would be: *What*

would be a good bit of backstory to show why my character is overreacting? See? Small. Your brain will help you. It can't help itself! It sounds crazy, but try it for two weeks. I swear by it!

THE BOTTOM LINE:

I don't think we have much choice whether we're pantsing or plotting or any variation thereof. All we can do is make the most of the advantages we're given and negate the negatives as much as is possible.

And we pantsers just hope whatever it is that's feeding us this stuff doesn't stop! •



Laura Drake is the RITA Award-winning author of *The Sweet Spot* and *Days Made of Glass*. In 2014, Laura realized a lifelong dream of becoming a Texan and is currently working on her accent. She gave up the corporate CFO gig to write full time. She's a wife, grandmother, and motorcycle chick in the remaining waking hours.





4 Easy Plot Systems

by SIERRA GODFREY

There are a number of ways to approach the structure of your novel. Some of us are plotters, some of us are pantsers, and some of us are somewhere in between (including yours truly). But while I love the exhilaration of letting a story write itself, I almost always come back to plot to double check myself.

So I've made it a point to study plotting systems. Here are some of the most popular—and easiest:

1. SAVE THE CAT

This is one of my favorites because it's so simple! And it's a total game changer. *Save the Cat* was written by the late screenwriter Blake Snyder, who broke down a 112-minute movie into 15 distinctive beats. The beats, he said, can be found in every single well-written movie (if it's a bad movie, chances are it'll miss a beat). In terms of plot, the 15 beats can also be found in novels.

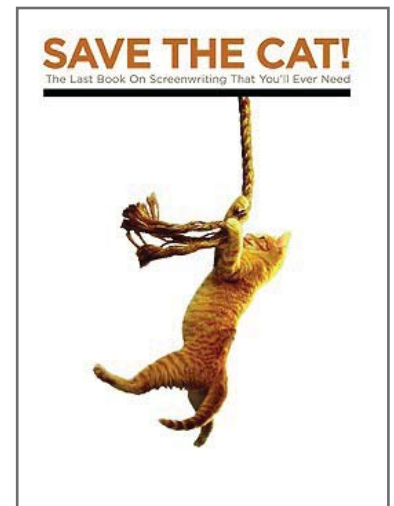
Obviously, novels can't be measured by 112 minutes, but you can still approximate the beats. For example, the first five beats match up to the first fourth of your story, or Act 1. These are: **Opening Image, Theme, Setup, Catalyst,** and **Debate.**

The middle of your story, or Act 2, consists of beats 6-12: **Break into Two, the B Story, Fun and Games, the Midpoint, Bad Guys Close In, All Is Lost,** and **Dark Night of the Soul.**

The remaining three beats, 13-15, comprise Act 3: **Break into Three, Finale,** and the **Final Image.**

Typically, the Midpoint beat happens right in the middle of your story. Beats can move around—it's okay!—but in general, all story types can (and usually do) follow this structure.

To read more about this plot structure and to see some easy examples, see Blake Snyder's *Save the Cat, Save the Cat Strikes Back,* and *Save the Cat Goes to the Movies.* Also see the robust blog run by Blake's STC team at savethecat.com.



2. MICHAEL HAGUE'S FIVE TURNING POINTS

Hague is another screenwriter whose advice speaks just as well to novelists. I've found that his emotional turning points take the *Save the Cat* beats a step further. Hague presents five key emotional markers in a story this way:

Turning Point #1: The Opportunity

Ten percent of the way into your screenplay, the heroine is presented with an opportunity. Hague describes it as creating "a new, visible desire, [that] will start the character on her journey."

Turning Point #2: The Change of Plans

Hague says, "Something must happen to your hero one-fourth of the way through your screenplay that will transform the original desire into a specific, visible goal with a clearly defined end point. This is the scene where your story concept is defined, and your hero's outer motivation is revealed."

Turning Point #3: The Point of No Return

This is the midpoint marker. Hague says that at this point, "your hero must fully commit to her goal. Up to this point, she had the option of turning back, giving up on her plan, and returning to the life she was living at the beginning of the film. But now your hero must burn her bridges behind her and put both feet in." I love the visual of putting "both feet in." Hague jokes he's using a "hackneyed metaphor" here, but I found that the image of my character with both feet helped me craft a stronger midpoint.

Turning Point #4: The Major Setback

Seventy-five percent of the way into the story, the heroine experiences a terrible setback in her journey. Hague says this event must "make it seem to the audience that all is lost . . . [In a romantic comedy] this is the point where your hero's

deception is revealed and the lovers break up."

Turning Point #5: The Climax

At the climactic point in your story, somewhere in the last ten percent, Hague says your heroine must "face the biggest obstacle of the entire story; she must determine her own fate; and the outer motivation must be resolved once and for all." This is the big moment where she "storms the castle" (to use a *Save the Cat* phrase).

The whole article is worth reading. You'll find it here:

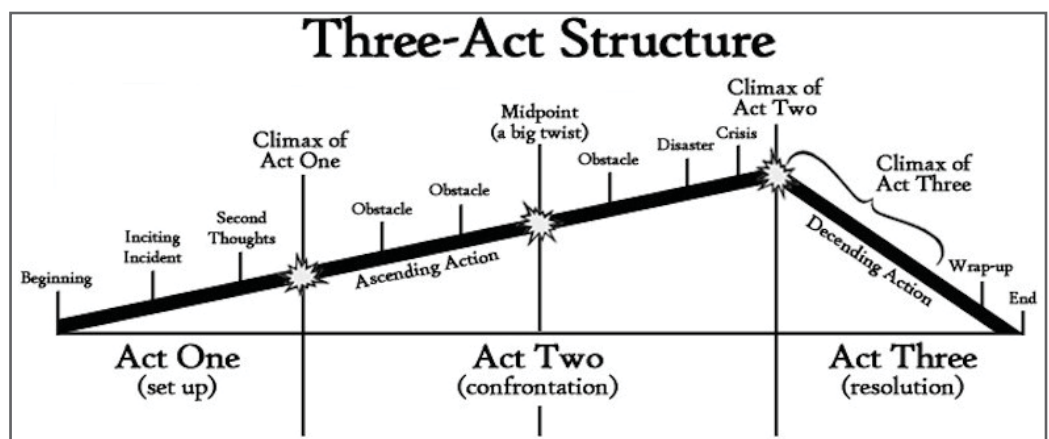
<http://www.storymastery.com/story/screenplay-structure-five-key-turning-points-successful-scripts/>

3. THE THREE ACT STRUCTURE

This isn't so much a plotting system as a visual, since most plotting systems are based on this. It's great for those of us who are particularly visual, and if you're really creative you can get this written out on a large sheet of paper and use sticky notes to move your ideas around.

The three act structure is just that: your structure in three acts, but it's presented on an ascending line with the major action marked along the way.

Act 1, or the Setup, contains the markers Beginning, Inciting Incident, and Call to Action with Second Thoughts. These end at the Climax of Act 1.



Act 2, or the Confrontation, contains five markers: two Obstacles, then the Midpoint, then another Obstacle, followed by Disaster and Crisis. Finally, you get to the Climax of Act 2.

Act 3, or the Resolution, contains the Final Push, a Regroup, and the Climax of Act 3, and then heads straight down into descending action.

Note that the three-act structure can work with any-length story, from a 100,000 word-novel to a picture book. For an example of how a nearly-wordless picture book used this structure, see my post here: <http://www.sierragodfrey.com/2013/11/07/picturebook-plot/>

4. THE HERO'S JOURNEY

For stories that follow a classic, mythological hero archetype, Joseph Campbell's Hero's Journey is a great structure.

Introduced by Campbell in his 1949 book *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, the Hero's Journey takes you through a visual plot circle, with several key events the hero undergoes along the way. Note that this plot device isn't as adaptable as the ones mentioned above, and works best for "quest" type stories, but there's enough overlap to make it a very worthwhile structure to study.

Let's take a look at this in terms of one of the greatest examples of the Hero's Journey: Star Wars Episode IV. (The original one, if you have trouble keeping track as I do!)

In the Call to Adventure moment, we see Luke heading to Mos Eisley on Tatooine to join the rebel alliance against the Empire. His Call was the moment when his aunt and uncle were murdered by Storm Troopers and he had nothing left. He says, "I want to learn the ways of the Force and become a Jedi like my father."

See that Supernatural Aid there? That's the force—or idol—that offers aid along the way.

At the Mentor and Helper moments, you see these clearly in Han Solo and Chewbacca, who offer help in the form of the Millennium Falcon,

flying him away from Tatooine.

Challenges and Temptations arise. It's certainly a challenge when the Millennium Falcon is captured by the Death Star's tractor beam and pulled in. ("That's no moon. It's a space station.") Even worse is when they get chased after rescuing Princess Leia and get caught in the trash compactor. After they get out of there, they're still on the run from Storm Troopers.

In the Revelation moment, where the character is in an Abyss of self-doubt and then experiences a moment of death and rebirth, we see Luke come across Darth Vader and Obi-Wan locked in lightsaber combat. Remember how Obi-Wan sees Luke watching, smiles, and pulls his lightsaber up? He allows Vader to strike him down. It's almost a test for Luke to have a revelation about how he'll go forward, which he does. After Obi-Wan falls, Luke fires at the Stormtroopers and then hears Obi-Wan's voice in his head telling him to run.

We know that when he wrote the original



Star Wars script George Lucas closely followed Joseph Campbell's Hero's Journey. Interestingly, his original script had Obi-Wan surviving and fleeing back to the Millennium Falcon. But because Obi-Wan's character didn't have much to do in the rest of the movie, he killed him off instead. Actor Alec Guinness reportedly threat-

ened to quit over this, but Lucas convinced him this was better for the story.

In other words, Lucas edited himself and his plot in real time. One imagines he brought out the Hero's Journey circle visual and pointed out to Guinness why Obi-Wan had to die. (Interestingly, in Blake Snyder's Save the Cat structure, the moment Obi-Wan died is Snyder's "whiff of death" moment, when the mentor dies in the All is Lost moment.)

Finally, at the Return moment in the Hero's Journey, we see Luke going back to the Death Star, this time as part of the attack squadron who has to get in and destroy the Death Star's main reactor. They attack, and you'll notice that little Gift of the Goddess at this point. In Star Wars, that's the Force. It's the moment when Obi-Wan says, "Use the Force, Luke." Luke shuts off his targeting computer and lets the Force guide him to fire at the exhaust port. It is, of course, a hit.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Intrigued at the possibilities of plotting? Want to discover even more great techniques? Try these great resources:

- *Story* by Robert McKee
- *Plot & Structure* by James Scott Bell
- *The Plot Whisperer* by Martha Alderson

It's interesting to see that all of these plot systems tend to rely on the same base, which is the three act structure. It's also interesting that three of the four I mentioned were devised by screenwriters. Movies are less forgiving than novels; there's a tighter space in which to tell the story. Mastering movie storytelling techniques can have a marvelous effect on our novel writing.

Now for an important caveat. While all of these structures are helpful, they can also be traps. You may feel yourself getting too tangled in making sure your story follows those beats no matter what rather than looking at your story as an organic whole. And, of course, there's far

more to novels than hitting those beats or the emotional turning points. You need to have character development, conflict, pacing, dialogue. Those things can't be found in these plot structures.

So instead, think of these plot structure systems as a skeleton with solid backbone. Then, you add your own nervous system and organs and blood and make it live. •



Sierra Godfrey writes fiction with international settings and usually a mention of soccer or two. She is also a graphic designer with a soft spot for magazine layout, and a staff sports writer covering La Liga for online sports sites. She lives in the foggy wastelands of the San Francisco Bay Area with her family and can be found at www.sierragodfrey.com or bloviating on Twitter at @sierragodfrey.



How to Kill Floating Head Doctor: *Eliminating the Pacing Pitfall That's Plaguing Your Story*

by ERIN BARTELS

In the 2000s, I watched a lot of *Scrubs*. No, I watched all of *Scrubs*. Every episode, most more than once. The musical episode? I've lost count.

You may find yourself judging me right now. I get it. Zach Braff is the Nicholas Cage of TV—either you love him or you hate him. At the Bartels house, we love him. (We love Nick Cage too. Hey, we've all got our problems.)

If you're not familiar with the show, Braff's character J.D. starts off as a naïve, inexperienced medical intern and throughout the nine-year run becomes a wise old doctor. Well, not old. Older. And while a lot of things change in his life and relationships, one thing remains consistent: he's often lost in his own thoughts. The action of a scene will cut away to J.D.'s weird interior world, showing the viewer a few seconds of the bizarre hilarity always bubbling below the surface.

Usually these interior scenes are really funny. They give the viewer insight into the protagonist's twisted mind and offer the show's creators a chance to film some jacked up stuff for a laugh.

They're also usually short. But on a few occasions, the interior scene might go on for more than just a moment. Almost invariably, these longer cutaways fall flat. They seem to follow the *SNL* Rule of Doubling Down Despite Diminish-

ing Returns (patent pending). By that I mean the school of comedy-writing where the longer you do something the funnier it becomes, even though often the opposite is the case.

Think of your kid the first time he does something that makes you laugh. He's pleased with the result, so he does it again. And again. And again. Until you want to destroy something beautiful, Blonde-Jared-Leto-in-*Fight-Club* style.

The worst offender in *Scrubs* is Floating Head Doctor. YouTube it if you need context, though it's not necessary to see it to catch my point (which I assure you is imminent). The first time Floating Head Doctor appears, the gag goes for 30 seconds. The second time it's 43 seconds. The third time, we're up to 50 seconds. Nearly a whole minute. And it feels like eternity.

Why? First of all, because Floating Head Doctor isn't funny. If Floating Head Doctor was all you've seen of Zach Braff, you *should* hate him. But more than that, the longer the gag, the more we are drawn out of the main narrative. And this is where my point comes in (told you.)

As an editor, one of the most common problems I see in long-form fiction manuscripts is **pacing**. Pacing problems can crop up anywhere. Beginnings drag on with info dumps, like a

rollercoaster that never manages to get to that first big drop. Endings are rushed or abrupt, like driving a friend's car that has much touchier brakes than yours. Middles sag like the seat of that pair of jeans that made your butt look great in the dressing room mirror then loses its shape after approximately 90 minutes of wear.



We're all aware of those dangers. What we may not be aware of are the dangers of Floating Head Doctor moments in our manuscripts. This is what I'm calling those moments when you break from the *now* of the story to give the reader some information—often bits of backstory—that they may or may not need, and you allow the break to go on too long.

But that's what I was told to do! you may protest. In fact, if I'm editing your manuscript, I may have been the one who told you to do it! Am I sociopath? No. It's just that weaving in backstory is more complicated than just taking chunks of that info dump and scattering them amongst the rest of your text.

Yes, backstory should appear when it is needed. That will necessarily be within scenes set in

the *now* of the story. But here's the secret: you probably need much less of it than you think. You often need only a sentence, though you'll be tempted to put in a paragraph or two. Or three. To the point where your reader is in danger of forgetting what is actually happening in the *now*. That's a Floating Head Doctor moment.

FHD moments are especially problematic when they interrupt action scenes, conversations, and moments of high tension in your story. I see this all the time. Consider the following scenarios:

- The kids are on the top floor of a burning building with no apparent means of escape. Perfect time for Sally to ruminate about the time her mother forgot to pick her up from ballet class.
- Rajesh has just lobbed a killer barb at Kyra. It reminds her of the last time she spoke to her ex-husband. What better time than now to tell the story of how their marriage disintegrated?
- Wanda has downed a shot of tequila and raised her pistol to the back of her former best friend Carolyn's head. Looks like an opportune time to flash back to that summer they lived together and Carolyn never did the dishes, tore Wanda's favorite shirt, lost her dog, and slept with her boyfriend.

What's wrong with these scenarios? Nothing. As long as those backstory asides take me only a second or two to read. If they take any longer, you've destroyed your momentum and you've thrown water on whatever fires of tension you had burning.

It's also just not all that realistic for Sally to be thinking of *anything* besides formulating an escape plan. And what is Rajesh doing the whole time Kyra's interior monologue is going on? Is he wondering why it's taking her so long to come up with a rejoinder? While Wanda's walking down memory lane, wouldn't Carolyn turn around and notice the gun pointed at her head?

We all do this, especially in our first drafts

when we're just trying to get all the information there so we can make it pretty later. The key is to notice when you're doing it and commit to fixing them as you revise.

Sometimes, these Floating Head Doctor moments are our darlings: **VITAL PIECES OF INFORMATION—THE READER NEEDS THIS!!!** Or they are some of our most beautiful and emotive writing. Or they are the only thing that is keeping the reader from thinking the protagonist is a complete bitch. So what's the harm in keeping them in?

The harm is that Floating Head Doctor moments take your reader out of the *now* of the story for too long. They break the spell. They whisper to the reader that none of this is real. They are glitches in the matrix. They are the coconut-clapping serf in *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* bursting everyone's bubble when they lay eyes on Camelot by saying, "It's only a model."

Everything that takes your reader out of the story is something that needs your attention when you're revising, and pacing is a doozy. Slow it too much, and people start getting bored and distracted. They start skimming. (The horror!) All those words you believed were *vital* for the them to read are simply skipped, just like when we rewatch those *Scrubs* episodes you can bet we fast forward through the Floating Head Doctor bits.

Do this enough, and the reader stops trusting you to tell them what they need to know and *only* what they need to know. They can no longer be sure that any part of what they are reading is something they actually need to pay attention to. If they finish your book, they may think twice about buying the next one.

Let's return to our three examples earlier and consider how we might get those bits of backstory in there without them turning into Floating Head Doctor moments.

First, there's Sally on the roof of the burning building, feeling abandoned and forsaken.

Sally rushed to the edge of the building.

There had to be a way out. There was always a way out. A fire escape. Didn't all tall buildings have one? She paced along the low brick wall, searching for the two black iron rails she knew had to be there, just as the day she'd strode through the parking lot looking for her mother's black Honda Civic after ballet class. Only she never did find the car. She'd been forgotten, just as God had forgotten her now.

Rather than tell the whole story of how she'd gone outside, waited for her mother, started searching for her, not found her, and what she had to do afterward to get home—not to mention her mental state at the time—all you need is to evoke that lonely feeling of looking for help and not getting it. Then you get right back to the moment at hand. The backstory bit is less than 30 words long.

What about Rajesh and Kyra?

"You're wearing that?" Rajesh said. "You look like you just crawled off a heroin addict in a motel with hourly rates."

For just a moment, Kyra couldn't speak. She hadn't felt so small since Arjun had told her he'd been having an affair. She'd promised herself she'd never let herself feel that way again. And yet here she was, shrinking under Rajesh's critical gaze.

"Get out," she said evenly. "Go find yourself a woman who'll take that kind of shit. Because it's not me."

It might be tempting in that moment to go into exactly how the relationship between Kyra and Arjun died, including lots of details and even the conversation that ensued after Arjun dropped the bomb. But you don't need it. All you need is to evoke that feeling of being belittled and feeling like dirt because of what someone else said. We've all felt that. When you keep the details light, we can access that feeling from our own experience. We don't need to see exactly how it played out in Kyra's life.

How about murderous Wanda and unsuspecting Carolyn? Surely at that point you need

to know about their backstory so you can understand why Wanda is about to kill someone! Yes, backstory is important in this instance. But unless this is the prologue and you're going to start chapter one earlier in the story in order to show how this relationship devolved into violence, this moment is not the time to go into it. It would be better if you'd already given the reader an idea of why Wanda is so angry. In that way, you can keep us right there inside this high-tension moment without a long break.

The empty glass hitting the bar sounded like a gunshot, but it was so loud in there that only Wanda and the bartender could have heard it. Carolyn was still writhing around the dance floor, a human tornado who hypnotized people with her sinewy movements—right before she destroyed everything you ever loved. Wanda reached her in three long strides, raised the slim pistol she'd smuggled in beneath her skirt, and took a deep breath. No going back now.

Did you catch it? This is the moment we have inside Wanda's head: "a human tornado who hypnotized people with her sinewy movements—right before she destroyed everything you ever loved." That's it. No specifics. The specifics could be given earlier in the narrative or later, but they don't belong right there at the moment Wanda raises the gun. They would slow the pace and steal the tension from the scene. That one phrase is enough to evoke the feeling in the reader that this dangerous woman must be stopped. Maybe not in the way Wanda intends to stop her, but somehow.

I imagine that the *Scrubs* writers never realized that something as tedious as Floating Head Doctor might one day become a useful tool in your writing toolbox. However, I hope it will help you identify the points at which you are tripping up the pacing of your story by breaking from the *now* for too long. The next time you're tempted to give the reader lots of details in those backstory asides, just remember that a little bit goes a long way. •



Erin Bartels is a full-time marketing copywriter at an independent publisher, a freelance editor and writer, and the author of *The Intentional Writer* and *This Elegant Ruin: and other stories*. She wields her red pen as Aragorn wields Andúril . . . or Mace Windu wields that purple lightsaber . . . or whatever geeky thing you're into. You can find her writing, painting, and taking pictures at www.erinbartels.com.



How to Kick the Crap Out of *Rejection*

by K. L. ROMO

Rejection hurts. It *really* hurts. I know writers need a thick hide, but sometimes I feel like body armor might be a good investment.

I've always wanted to be traditionally published, seeing my novels on the shelves in airport gift stores the epitome of my success. But 300 rejections (yes, you read that right) and two novels later, self-doubt seeps in like a poisonous gas. Maybe my writing just isn't good enough? And what about feeling invisible, when the words from my blog posts are shot into the webosphere and swallowed-up by the other trillion words swirling with them?

They say to enjoy the journey, but it seems my journey is out to get me. How do you enjoy a literary trek when you're constantly tripping, slipping, and falling down?

After many years of perilous wanderings, my flashlight beam is finally bright enough to reveal another path (or at least a more positive perspective). I think I've finally figured out how to make peace with my journey and enjoy my writing life, even when it sometimes seems I'm on a hike up the side of Mt. Everest.

Here are my tips to kick the crap out of rejection funk and focus on the joy of writing.



K – KNOW THE TRUTH ABOUT BEING A WRITER.

We were born to write; we need it like a lifeline. Without writing, we would shrivel up and die. We need to realize this up front and cherish the fact that when we write we're being true to ourselves and using our talents.

I relish the sense of self and accomplishment I feel when I pound out words on my laptop, regardless of whether anyone else reads them. The act of writing itself is its own reward. *It's who I am.*

I – INTERACT WITH THE WRITING COMMUNITY.

We writers need to be involved in our writing communities. We need to participate and cultivate relationships. We should get to know others like us and learn from them. And we need to use our knowledge and skills to “pay it forward.”

As an active member of the Women’s Fiction Writers’ Association, I participate in online conversations, craft workshops, and BETA read and critique projects, and I volunteer to assist in moderating virtual book launch parties. I belong to the Writers’ League of Texas, writing book reviews for their blog and providing brownies for meetings (yes, that counts). I’m active on Goodreads, reading and reviewing advance releases and connecting with readers and authors through online forums.

I help other authors in any way I can. I read and review as many books as possible, putting my reviews on multiple social media sites, and giving shout-outs to help advertise. I email authors to let them know I’ve enjoyed their books. Even well-read authors enjoy getting a compliment (and a review) from a fan. And it’s also a great feeling to receive a reply in acknowledgment.

I feel like I *belong* as a writer. I am part of the literary community. I’ve found my clan!

C – CONTINUALLY IMPROVE YOUR CRAFT.

As writers, we need to continually learn and improve our skills. We should try to take writing workshops and attend seminars and conferences. It doesn’t have to be expensive or even in person. Virtual works too. We should also read how-to books and magazines about writing.

I recently read a guide about freelancing, which prompted me to write essays and query magazines and websites. So far, I’ve had four articles published online and in print, with two more on the way. Having an article published is a wonderful *you-go-girl* for my author self-esteem: a positive, short-term accomplishment during the long and solitary novel writing process.

And we must read the kind of novels and articles we’re writing. As much as we can.

Continue to learn, learn, learn.

K - KEEP AT IT!

Never. Give. Up.

I still struggle to market my novel, and build my platform. But regardless of sales and downloads and reviews, I’m happy with the knowledge that I am, in fact, a writer, and I alone have control over that.

So the next time you receive a rejection letter (or 300) or no response at all, just remember that no one else can define you as a writer. Success is not measured by agents or editors or even readers. Success comes to writers when we write.

After kicking rejection where it hurts, we’ve called a truce. I am moving forward one word at a time. And you can too! •



K.L. Romo writes about life on the fringe—because 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. Find her at KLRomo.com or [@klromo](https://twitter.com/klromo).



Juggling Genres, Pseudonyms, Marketing, and Publicity

*How to keep them all in the air and
still have time to write your novel*

by SHELLEY NOBLE/FREYDONT

The following is my experience. I'm not an expert; this is just what has worked for me so far. Hopefully it will be helpful.

I'm traditionally published: twenty-four novels, as well as several novellas and short stories, written in three genres, under three pseudonyms. But I think my experience may be helpful across the board. We all want to sell our books.

Dealing with the various aspects of publishing can be a daunting prospect. Everyone has opinions about what you should do, should never do, what works best, but it only works if it works for you. The hardest thing for me to learn has been that you don't have to do it all.

So . . .

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Using separate names for different genres is often a publisher's decision, based on the needs of marketing and the convenience and ease of the reader. In my case, if you buy a Shelley Freydont novel, you can be assured it is either a contemporary amateur sleuth or a historical mystery. If you pick up a Shelley Noble novel, you can be certain it will deal with

a woman's—sometimes several women's—journey, and will probably take place on or near a beach, because that's the way I roll.

Do we owe it to our readers to make it easy to find us? Yes we do. Do we want to disappoint them when they expect to buy women's fiction and then get to the beach only to realize they've bought a mystery? No, we don't.

Another factor that dictates pseudonyms is the numbers game. If your numbers (sales) are low under one name, it doesn't mean it's the end of your career; you can pick another name and start again. This is a traditional publisher's tool, but I imagine it also works for indie authors who find themselves languishing in one genre and want to start fresh.

A ROSE BY ANY OTHER NAME . . .

Choosing a pseudonym. Choose something easy to spell and pronounce. You want to be distinctive but not so different that it takes several searches to be able to locate you on Amazon. Most people will give up before then.

To initial or not to initial. Nora Roberts and J. D. Robb are one and the same person. Two different voices, two different readerships (with some



TO MARKET, TO MARKET

I'm lucky enough to have a marketing and publicity department that really goes the extra mile. They set up blog tours, giveaways, price drops, interviews, and ad campaigns. I still have to write the blogs, do the interviews and announcements, etc. I sometimes set up my own specialty tours or interviews, but always in coordination with them.

These people are a life saver. I don't enjoy the organization part or contacting people, and I don't have the reach or the clout they do. If you don't have a team in place, you'll have to hire them or do all the above yourself.

Marketing and publicity for each genre for me is separate and not always equal, with the most current book getting the most time and effort.

The only place I consistently do dual publicity is in my newsletter and even then I focus on the most current book. It has a lovely layout of split screen graphics, one side for mystery the other for women's fiction. I keep it short, because no one has time to read long articles (like this one).

For example: *The Beach at Painter's Cove* will be available on June 13. The current newsletter will include the title, cover, a photo maybe, a bit about the characters, why this family was close to my heart, and how sometimes it's easier to be philanthropic to strangers than to those you love, plus an excerpt. (Just a paragraph or two—doesn't have to be the beginning. It's a tease, like a movie trailer.)

For *Ask Me No Questions*, a Gilded Age Manhattan mystery which won't be out until next summer, there will be a "Coming Soon," a short blurb (a sentence or two), and since there is no cover as yet, some little tidbit about real-life people of the period or the history, i.e., a photo of a period automobile with a caption about driving in 1907 New York.

I try not to clutter the page, I think cluttered pages trigger the scroll finger. You want the reader's eye to zero in and settle on your upcoming novel.

crossover readers).

A different name for each genre. Jayne Ann Kraentz (contemporary), Amanda Quick (historical), and Jayne Castle (futuristic romance) are also the same person.

Same first or last name. I use Shelley Freydont for mystery and when I had to choose an additional name for women's fiction, I went with Shelley Noble (which happens to be the name I was born with). I kept the Shelley for both thinking it might help with name recognition.

Combination of name and initial. Sylvia Day (erotica) and S. J. Day (Sci-Fi).

Writing as. Some famous authors are identified as "writing as" a pseudonym, which lets you know your favorite author is striking out in a new direction.

PRO TIP:

Your name should fit neatly on the cover of a book and be easy to read on a one-inch icon. Before your final decision, check out some actual shelves in bookstores and on line icons.

BRANDING

Think Target. You barely have to look to know that bull's-eye. Simple, strong branding. I'm not sure that books lend themselves easily to this kind of branding. How do you brand several different genres? I haven't figured out a way. And frankly I think we spend way too much time worrying about the incidentals: log lines, comparables, etc., when we should be writing.

Imagine how many log lines agents, editors, and readers see a day. I wonder how many they remember. I've had one for years; I never use it, though I think it still appears on the bottom of my website homepage. Instead, I try to find something conversational sounding so when someone asks about my novel it doesn't sound like a sound bite. This season I'm using part of a quote from a review of *Painter's Cove*: "beach read with substance." It isn't eye-catching or clever but it says what it is.

SOMETHING'S GOTTA GIVE—SOCIAL MEDIA

This is where we do most marketing and publicizing. It can be a huge time suck with only one name, and it becomes ridiculous when you deal in more than one genre. I have two websites, a Facebook profile, two Facebook pages, and two Twitter accounts. I also have the other stuff, but it's pretty much dormant. It was too much. I had to choose. My demographic (data shows) seems to hang out on Facebook. So that's where I put my energy. I tweet more around pub dates, but normally I don't hang out on Twitter.

I used to use Hootsuite to coordinate my posts, but I found that by posting less and gearing my posts more specifically to each page or profile and in real time it resulted in a better reach. That's just my observation, since Facebook reach seems to be a law unto itself.

I only change my social profile pictures when I have a new book or novella coming out. I know some people say that you should always keep things moving and fresh, but I'm sticking with easy recognition.



I decided from the start to let my pages and profile grow organically instead of pushing to get people to friend or like me. I've been comparing notes with colleagues and we haven't been seeing much difference in reach between those with 500, 2000, or 10,000 followers. Sometimes the smaller numbers get more engagement. It seems to depend more on the particular posts, which ones get the shares and comments, etc.

I use my personal Facebook profile for general interest things. I also try to find posts tangential to my two genres, but not always specifically writing-related. Of course I post for pub dates, news, and updates for books, but I try not to be overwhelmingly ad-oriented. I think we're so glutted with advertisement, that most people's eyes glaze over whenever they see a book cover in their feed.

I love carousels, so I post about carousels. A recurring theme in my work is people getting it together and doing good for their community, so I post things about people doing that IRL. But mainly I post things because I think they're cool, and when you find other people who think they're

cool, it's energizing.

Does it sell books? Who knows, but who can't use some extra energy?

I don't constantly update my websites. I've moved away from website as entertainment—pages, recipes, extras, photos, etc. (just too time consuming with two sites)—and use them more as informational pages for my bio, booklist, excerpts, reviews, and buy and link buttons. I hire someone to maintain my site and my newsletter.

I've pretty much let my blog flounder. I've tried sustaining two separate blogs and I've tried alternating subjects in one blog. It was way too work intensive. I find that I like the conversation and brevity of Facebook better, and that guest posting and blog tours let you reach people beyond your own readership.

Real life appearances—conferences, organizations, book signings, speaker engagements—are not totally a thing of the past. People who actually meet you in person, tend to remember you longer and talk about you to their friends. Hand selling is still a good tool. The hardest thing is remembering which writer you are for the day, and what name to sign. No kidding.

HOME AGAIN, HOME AGAIN

Publishing under several pseudonyms and genres can be extremely time consuming and not always effective. Focus is really the key. Here are my best tips:

- Choose your pseudonym(s) wisely.
- Know how you want to focus your time and energy. Go where your demographic is.
- If you don't have an assigned team, I strongly suggest hiring a team to help you.
- Be selective, know your limits.

Which brings me to the most important thing of all.

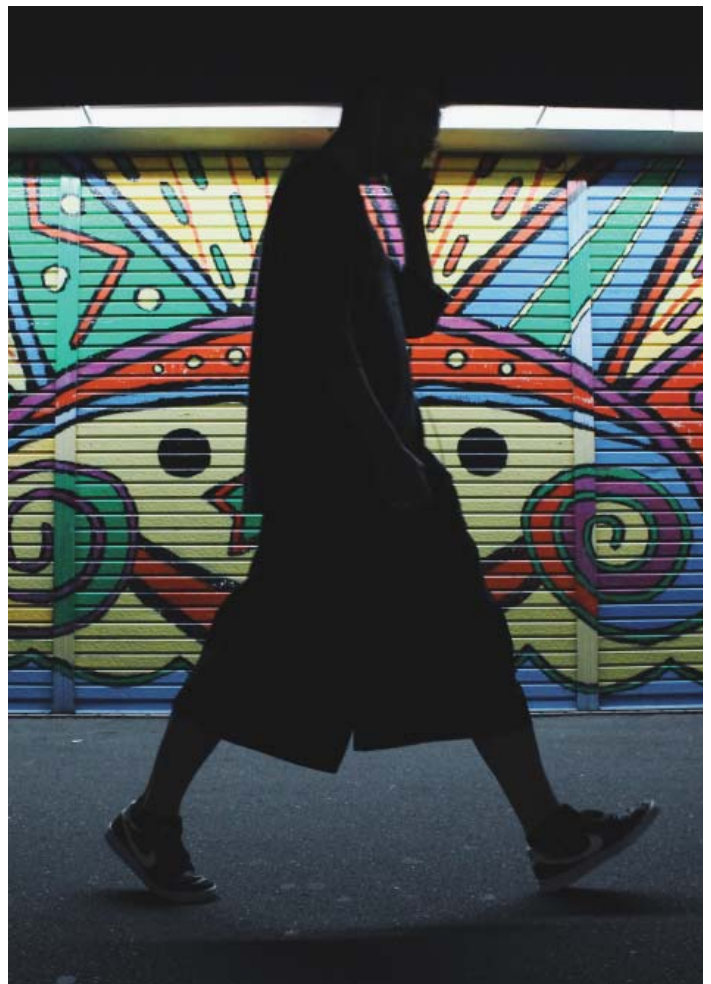
THE WRITING.

Get the craft down. Understand what makes one genre different from another in structure and in voice. Hone your voice. Tell the story as only you can tell it. Immerse yourself in the story.

Mystery and women's fiction have some of the same structures of course, but they're different and require a different mindset, a different voice—your voice, honed differently for each.

The story developments are different. The pace and the timeline are different. Mystery is dependent on set up of clues, alibis, and motives in a way that they make sense. In women's fiction, scenes aren't necessarily tied to clues, though they may be tied to emotional growth.

I like to work on one genre at a time when possible; to immerse myself in the genre, the characters, the locations, the plot, the period. To live there for the course of the story. This really helps with not slipping from one voice to another, which can be terribly jarring. Often when things are not going the way I want or I've lost



touch with what's happening, it's because I've slipped into another construct.

Sometimes just going back and reading a scene that did work, where the characters were acting like themselves, is enough to get you back on track. Often, especially in historical writing, it's difficult to close out my email and step into the 1900s, so I have newspapers.com and Time Machine bookmarked to 1906 on my Favorites bar. A couple of clicks and I can read primary sources, who was at the ball, what they were wearing, who was arrested, who won at the track, advertisements, theater reviews. All in the voices of that era. Period music or a few minutes of a BBC drama can all break the connection with the here and now.

These are just the things I've tried and might be helpful to others. The one thing I kind of know is true is that old saw: write the best book you can. When the dust clears, your voice, your craft, and your story will be what ultimately sells the book. •



Shelley Noble is a *New York Times* and *USA Today* bestselling author of women's fiction. Of her six novels, *Whisper Beach* and *Beach Colors* were Amazon and Nook bestsellers. *The Beach at Painter's Cove* releases June 2017.

Shelley Freydon has written more than sixteen amateur sleuth mystery novels and novellas. Her latest, *Ask Me No Questions*, a Manhattan Gilded Age mystery, will be available in 2018.

A former professional dancer and choreographer, Shelley lives at the Jersey shore where she indulges her passion for lighthouses and vintage carousels. For more visit www.shelley noble.com and www.shelleyfreydont.com.

Getting Personal: *Pronouns in Context*

by PATRICIA FRIEDRICH

No matter what point of view you employ in a story, you'll likely run into pronoun trouble. Is it "Between you and I?" or "Between you and me?" Is it all right to say "Contact myself, Peter, or John?"

The confusion often happens because in oral communication people are trying to compensate for colloquialisms such as "You and me need to talk," and they often overdo it by inserting a different pronoun, either "I" or "myself," where "me" would actually be correct.

In terms of grammatical categories, all of these are personal pronouns, but "I" is a subject pronoun, "me" is an object pronoun, and "myself" is a reflexive pronoun (the latter can also be used for emphasis).

Their standard use is as follows:

e.g. I rode my bicycle this morning.

e.g. Are you traveling with me?

e.g. I burned myself at the stove.

These are intuitive uses, and most people will not have trouble with them. The complication arises when compound subjects or objects appear in the sentence. Notice, however, that the pattern remains the same:



e.g. Johnny and I rode our bicycles this morning.

e.g. Are you traveling with me and my mom?

e.g. I burned myself and the pan at the stove.

Therefore, when a preposition appears before a compound object or complement, the rule still applies (the preposition indicates an object pronoun should follow):

e.g. This conversation should be between you and me.

e.g. They walked with you and me at the mall.

Though more often used as a reflexive, “myself” can be used for emphasis:

e.g. We were all confused, myself included.

However, avoid using “myself” where “I” or “me” would do:

e.g. Feel free to email myself or any of the team members. (Better if you write “email me or any . . .”)

As for myself, I hope this helps both you and me! •



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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