

RWR

ROMANCE WRITERS REPORT

February 2025 | Vol. 45 | No. 2

Hot? Sticky? Sweet?

**Love Is Love? As Writers, We Need to Know
There's More to the Story!**

**Tips for Love Scenes from Someone Who Skips
Over Them, Usually**

The Emotional Journey of the Romantic Arc

**Three or Four Observations about Writing
Heart-Racing Love Scenes: Sweet or Steamy?**

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Contributors

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Timothy Robare got his degree in writing arts from Plattsburgh State University. Timothy grew up on a small island in Vermont and now lives in Oregon. He has traveled to 60 countries and is a mountaineer. He mostly writes fantasy and poetry.

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Ann has 30+ years of full-time, award-winning writing and editing experience, and is hard at work on her first romantic suspense novel.

Robin Hillyer Miles

Robin is a native South Carolinian, born in the Upstate and raised (and residing) in the Lowcountry. She writes paranormal contemporary romance and contemporary romance.

Tina Radcliffe

Publishers Weekly bestselling author Tina Radcliffe is an RWA Honor Roll member. She has written twenty novels for Harlequin/Harper Collins. Additionally, Tina has co-written four Hope Street Church mystery novels with New York Times bestselling author Ellery Adams. She also has numerous independent publishing releases and has sold nearly four dozen short stories to Woman's World Magazine. A US Army veteran, a former registered nurse, and a library cataloger, Tina resides in Arizona, where she writes fun, heartwarming fiction. Visit her on the web at <https://www.tinaradcliffe.com>

Mike L. Downey

Mike L. Downey has an adult daughter who says to read more Emily Henry to help his fiction, something still to be determined. He's made a living as a freelance writer and newspaper reporter as well as having taught the occasional magazine and composition journalism course at Texas A&M University. Downey also worked as a ditch digger, construction worker, wrecking ball assistant, and bobtail truck driver. A past president of Brazos Writers, he is still thrilled with writing and with his wife and dog – perhaps not in that order.

Message from the President

BY JACKI RENÉE



I want to begin this month's Message from the President with this statement: RWA will continue to monitor what is happening with the Oklahoma Bill. Please know that we will advocate for our romance writing community through the channels we are legally allowed to use pursuant to our federal standing. We will continue to stay connected with organizations like the Authors Guild, as well as seek guidance from our attorney. We will pass along updates to members via eNotes as they become available to us.

I can't help but reflect on the momentum we're building as an organization. The Board and committees are bringing back some of the events that have been a part of our organization's legacy. The energy and enthusiasm we're seeing assure us that we are on the right path. RWA continues to welcome new members every week. And to those who are rejoining, welcome back. We're happy to have you here.

One of the highlights of my role has been the opportunity to engage one-on-one with chapter boards for the RWA portal trainings. Large group meetings are productive, but there's something uniquely valuable about smaller, deeper conversations. These individual meetings have

given me a clearer understanding of each chapter's operations and, more importantly, the dedicated members leading them. Thank you to every chapter leader who volunteers their time. I appreciate you! And I hope that you all consider one day leading our national organization.

Indie Author Weekend, the two-day virtual mini-conference, was held at the end of January. It continues to prove that it is a valuable resource for the romance writing community. Whether you're new to self-publishing or a seasoned indie author, I hope you walked away inspired and empowered.

We also continued our four-part Digital Author's Toolkit AI education series at the end of January with Part II. The webinar provided a deep dive into critical information on artificial intelligence and its impact on our world—past, present, and future. Protecting our work and making informed decisions about our careers is more important than ever, and I'm grateful we can provide these resources to our members. If you missed it, be sure to catch the replay when it becomes available!

Traditional Author Weekend, scheduled for the first weekend in April, is gearing up to be better than last year. It is a great opportunity for authors pursuing traditional publishing or currently working with traditional publishers and looking for ways to elevate their careers. If you have not already done so, I encourage you to register to attend.

The excitement around our Annual Conference in

Niagara Falls is contagious. The Conference Committee is working hard to give the essence of past larger conferences but in a more intimate setting. If you are still on the fence about joining us, heed my advice: don't procrastinate much longer. Spaces are limited, and they are filling up fast!

With so much to look forward to, I can't wait to see what our community accomplishes next month. Thank you for all the birthday wishes I received this month. I am proud of my 56 years of life, and I am humbled by the powerful support I get from the members of Romance Writers of America.

Jacki Renée
2024/2025 RWA President



FIND YOUR RWA
CHAPTER

News & Updates

BITE-SIZED INFO ON THE INDUSTRY

PUBLISHING

Oklahoma Anti-Pornography Bill: What It Means for Romance Writers

Authors Guild

The Authors Guild has heard your concerns about a recent bill introduced in the Oklahoma legislature that seeks to dramatically expand the definition of unlawful pornography and impose harsh criminal penalties for the distribution of what it deems pornography. A fear from authors is that the bill could include romance books or book covers.

The bill, SB593, was introduced in January by Rep. Dusty Deevers, seemingly as a publicity-seeking maneuver by a legislator with a history of pushing far-right legislation that does not pass, even in a red state. And in this case, even if the bill were to advance or pass, we, along with the motion picture industry, publishers, free speech advocates, and others, would immediately jump in and ensure that a court enjoins it as a violation of the First Amendment.

Among other things, the bill would provide criminal penalties of up to ten years in prison for the production, distribution, or possession of pornography.

[Read More.](#)

How Cover Art Influences Readers

Publishers Weekly

As I sat on a bench in the Musée Marmottan Monet in Paris this summer, I experienced a moment of clarity: white is not white. Now, before artists and designers roll their eyes in unison, believe me—I understand that this revelation is far from groundbreaking and that those in the creative fields have been shouting this for years. But allow me to elaborate on how this seemingly simple idea applies to creating effective book covers.

While wandering through the museum, I paused to admire a painting depicting a serene winter scene. Leaning in closer, I was struck by the realization that the snow was not the pure white I had always envisioned. Instead, I noticed a spectrum of colors—blues, grays, even subtle peaches. We've been conditioned to accept the notion that snow is white. The Brothers Grimm and Disney reinforced this concept with Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs. However, the truth is far more complex: reality is nuanced, just like our perception of color.

[Read More.](#)

Final PubWest Conference Focuses on Finance, Fostering Best Practices

Publishers Weekly

Last November, the Publishers Association of the West (PubWest) and Independent Book Publishers Association (IBPA) voted unanimously to combine into a single entity. That change goes into effect July 1, when members of PubWest will be welcomed to the IBPA—which caters both to established publishing houses and author-publishers—in a new membership tier requiring a book distributor, multiple published authors, and an established backlist.

[Read more.](#)



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Member Benefit

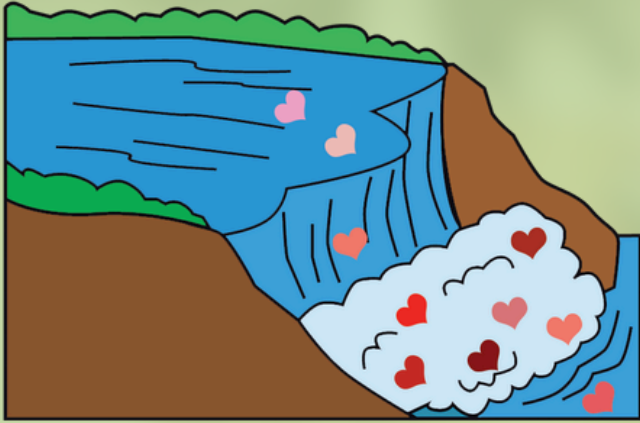
Publisher Alley is a web-based sales reporting tool that includes all of the sales and inventory data from Baker & Taylor. Baker & Taylor is the world's largest book distributor! We work with publishers to provide their book products to all markets. Publisher Alley allows authors to see what titles libraries are buying on a daily basis. Publisher Alley is the BEST tool available for analyzing sales on your titles and competitive titles by subject area, sales level, publication date, price point, reviews, author affiliations, interdisciplinary identifiers and sales channel. Full bibliographic data, including cover images and table of contents is available for all titles.

Book sales data serves several needs:

- Easily produce market research for book proposals, based on sales of comparable titles. Approach the right publishers for each project.
- Evaluate the potential of projects for self-publication: learn what sells in which markets, and at what price points.
- Locate expert authors as sources for newspaper or magazine stories, or identify trends related to world events.

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RWA 2025 Conference



RWA 2025

July 16 - 19 | Niagara Falls, Ontario

Mark your calendars for July 16–19, 2025, and join us at the stunning Niagara Falls, Ontario for an unforgettable experience! Whether you're new to romance writing, an established author, or anywhere in between, there's something for everyone—dynamic workshops, exciting community activities, and much more to elevate your career and connect with fellow writers.

At the [RWA Annual Conference](#), you'll experience three days filled with education, career enhancement, and networking with your peers and industry professionals.

Regular Registration February 15 - April 2

Register now and join us for an unforgettable experience! [Click here to learn more and register today.](#)

[Register Today!](#)

Hot? Sticky? Sweet?

BY TIMOTHY ROBARE

Most of us enjoy a good love scene, at least one would hope. Love scenes can be beautiful or they can be Game of Thrones level with Jamie and Cersei. Do you want a McDreamy type of love scene or a McSteamy? It is all about what you want your audience to gain and who they are. Sex scenes can be fun, a lot of fun, but they can also offer a lot about the characters involved. Love scenes are more than just sex of course. Steamy and Sweet are both different sides of love, not just sex to be clear.

Sweet love scenes are beautiful and can fade to black or can touch your heart and emotions. They can be compelling and can cause a deep connection between characters and also connect you to them more. You have to really show the scene and cause the reader to feel it. For instance, if you had a man who was a bad boy and then he softened and the first time he is gentle and sweet. That may have a larger impact on your readers. He has softened a little, but now with sex he is tender and sweet and shows his love in a soft and more romanticized way. You can incorporate sensory details like a light breeze, rain, a fire in a winter cabin, and more. Sensory details add to a sweet scene just as they do a steamy one. Use internal thought to convey the specific scene and the emotions that can help convey the scene, especially a sweet one.

You could also want the total opposite. The quiet, good man or woman, who then releases this powerful explosion of lust and steam. Tension is an interesting concept with love scenes. You can

use it to build and build and then when you release where do you go? Will it become this building of a sweet, beautiful, connection. Or will it be a powerhouse of sexual urges and release of the build up in an explosion of steam that causes a bathroom to be a massive cloud? Steamy scenes can be fun and well-done ones are obviously top notch. Dialogue is important in both, but dialogue in a steamy love scene can be a little more fun and exciting for the reader, but also play well with the characters.

Love scenes can be so difficult because there are different expectations based on the world that you have built. In real life both are great for their own reasons, but whose desires are you playing on? What perspective? There is a lot that goes into build up, but they also need to tantalize you and touch you in one way or another.



There is something to be said about slow and steady, but there is also something to be said about powerful and spicy. Hands against a steamy shower glass, hard thrusts, intense motions, that convey a powerful release between the characters. Personality of the character needs to be conveyed through the love scenes, this is an important difference between just a sex scene and a love scene. It isn't a one time pump and dump, it is an important moment. Each time should be an important moment, should convey parts of the characters, and should be intricate to the story you are weaving.

Rushed scenes are not great. Battle scenes with just hacking of weapons and blood are also not great. You might ask, where's the correlation? A love scene is just like a battle scene. Obviously they have different components, but they are

meant for more, not just shock value. Think of love scenes as a battle. A battle of the characters and what they've been through. You have to think of what emotions and feelings your audience will gain from them. Soft and steamy are self-explanatory and you have to decide which works best for the scene and work you are creating. Perhaps the most important part about either kind of scene is staying true to the characters. Sweet or steamy, they have to coincide with the character as they've been written. There has to be a lead up or some kind of indication that you play off of. Sweet and Steamy both have their places, just make sure they work for what you need them to, especially when it comes to your characters. A reader has to believe those moments.



RWA Writer Service List

It no longer matters if an author works with a publisher or not, they still have to have their book edited, promoted on social media, advertised, and so much more. Since every writer wants help, RWA's Writer Services List offers members a single location to find the support team they need for a great book with a long shelf life.

RWA's website annually garners more than 350,000 sessions and nearly one million page views, of which 79 percent are new users. As an established trade association with a growing membership, RWA's Writer Services List is the perfect place for focused advertising to those who need your services the most: authors.

[Click here to learn more.](#)

Upcoming Webinar: Digital Author Toolkit

Join RWA on April 2, 2025 for a virtual webinar “Digital Author Toolkit: Protecting Your Work and Information in an AI-Driven World Part IV of the Series: Intellectual Property” with USA Today Best Selling Author, Maggie Marr.

Learn more about this session’s presenter below, and [register here!](#)

RWA Members: Free
Non-Members: \$89

Maggie Marr



Maggie Marr is a USA Today Best Selling Author of over 20 books, including the beloved and best selling Hollywood Girls Club Series.

She is the founder of Happily Ever After, Inc. a media company specializing in books and mobile games and co-founder and managing partner of Tule Productions, a division of Tule Entertainment.

She is a former ICM motion picture literary agent; while at ICM she worked on such projects as *Meet The Parents*, *Meet The Fockers*, *Underworld*, *Last First Kiss*, *Bourne Identity*, *Bridget Jones's Diary*, *Game of Thrones*, and a host of books to film and TV projects.

She founded Maggie Marr Legal, a boutique intellectual property law practice dedicated to the sales, representation, and legal needs of creatives.

www.maggiemarrlegal.com

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MMLL

Love Is Love? As Writers, We Need to Know There's More to the Story!

BY ANN M KELLETT

Writing love scenes can be tricky, even for experienced romance authors. But by identifying the kind of love the scene requires—and learning about all the options—writing these scenes can become a simple matter of stacking emotions onto actions.

In the romance genre, readers have certain expectations: two people meet, face conflict that keeps them apart (even if at least one of them over time realizes they belong together), and overcome that conflict to finally enter Happily Ever After (or Happy For Now).

When we think of love scenes, we often think first of the steamy, intimate, titillating expression of deep, personal love (or sheer, animal lust) via sex—and with good reason! And there are many excellent online articles and other resources for drafting sexy scenes that are cohesive, realistic, and much deeper than the old bump and grind.

But many novels in the romance genre do not feature sex scenes in any great detail. The act is either hinted at or ignored entirely. In addition, love can be conveyed through numerous other physical behaviors and emotional reactions. In other words, our characters show love not just through making love—and they also show love to other characters than their main love interests.

Love Is a Noun: And There Are Many

If we tap into these other expressions of love (in addition to sex, if our work includes that), our

manuscripts can be richer and deeper—and have maximum impact on our readers.

Here's one way to do it: by using the frameworks created by ancient Greek philosophers. They came up with three broad categories for love:

- eros, the Greek god of love that represents sexual love, passion, and fertility,
- agape, or love for others—even total strangers—and love for nature and the world through expressions of kindness and charity, and
- philia, or love for others based on kinship or other shared interests or bonds to create an environment of safety and love among equals.



These are well known and universal, so they are excellent ways to approach the love our characters feel and express toward each other, based on the type of relationship they have and how new or well developed it is.

In addition, the ancient Greeks created four other, lesser known, categories of love that are equally useful for our purposes:

- ludus, or noncommittal flirtation and other playful behaviors that could lead to seduction and sex (but casual sex only),
- pragma, or healthy love that ripens and matures over time to include, but also transcend, physical love,
- philautia, or an unhealthy love of self—selfishness that could lead to full-blown narcissism—and
- mania, an unhealthy, obsessive love (or what someone believes is love) for another that could lead to excessive jealousy and possessiveness.

It's interesting to note that the last item—mania—might also describe the more modern trait of limerence, or “addiction” to the love interest through excessive longing for him or her, constant and intrusive thoughts about him or her, and an obsession for these intense feelings to be reciprocated.

Love Is Also a Verb

Human nature apparently has not changed one bit since the era when grown men wore togas and women hand-fed them peeled grapes.

And that is lucky for us, because it gives us plenty of personality traits, worldviews, and motivations to assign our various characters. It also helps us define the relationships between all of our characters, not just the male and female protagonists.

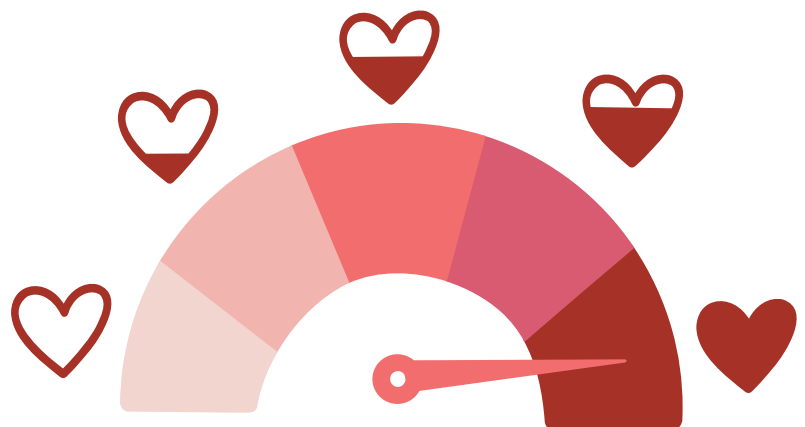
These relationships—with the internal and external flaws and fears all the parties involved bring with them—also provide a handy roadmap

for charting out our plotlines. We can see how each of these love categories could start small, a pang or feeling a character experiences internally, such as noticing how attractive that guy across the dance floor is.

From there, it's easy to consider how this feeling grows within both characters to become a healthy relationship based on equality, affection, respect, and physical desire. It's also easy to see how that spark of feeling could kindle actions that grow to become unhealthy and obsessive—and a real threat to our hero and heroine.

Here are a few ideas of how turning love—healthy and unhealthy—from a noun to a verb can make our characters and plots more realistic and our books un-put-downable:

- An ex-fiancée sees your heroine with your hero (perhaps even before they are attracted to each other) and what used to be mild obsession with the way she broke it off all those years ago now becomes full-blown mania that drives him to stalk the heroine, hero—or both—to do whatever it takes to deprive her of happiness.



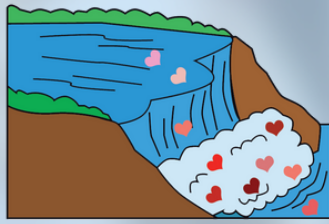
- Your hero is attending a three-day training session for his job and it's in a city that is new to him. To kill time—and to keep thoughts of his girlfriend (who is probably with someone else at the moment) at bay—he spends an evening in the bar of his swanky hotel, promising himself that he will flirt like never before with the next woman who makes eye contact with him.
- Your heroine, abandoned by her teenaged mother as a toddler, devotes all of her spare time to working with children in need, with the goal of preventing other vulnerable children from feeling unloved—and to also convince herself that has what it takes to be a loving mother someday. Now, she has found the guy who might be the one—except that he is adamant that he does not want kids, period.
- Widowed after decades of a truly awesome marriage, your heroine seeks one more grand romance and knows that while she can't replace dear old Charlie, she believes she can at least find happiness and mutual comfort with someone to be with through middle age and beyond. But this whole online dating game is entirely foreign to her, and she starts to wonder how it will be possible to avoid the heart-crushing pitfalls and find that one special someone.
- Your heroine knows she should love—or at least get along with—the hero's bossy, older sister, who practically raised him. But it's frustrating when the sister ignores her and gives only perfunctory answers to questions your heroine thinks will draw her out so they can get to know each other—and it's enraging when Big Sis dotes on the hero while systematically undermining the plans the two have made to be together at last.



Once you have determined the way the love between your hero and heroine will blossom, and how they will express (or try to develop) love when needed to other characters, all that remains is to structure the emotions and events into scenes that get your overall plot from point A to point Happily Ever After.

While drafting scenes sounds easy, we know that it is anything but. And while the topic is broader than the scope of our consideration of love scenes here, the good news is that there is a wealth of information online and elsewhere about scenes, what they do, and what they must include.

As romance writers, we know that the “love part” is often the fun part. Happy writing!



RWA 2025

July 16 - 19 | Niagara Falls, Ontario

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RWA2025 Sponsor Spotlight

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TULE
PUBLISHING

Tips for Love Scenes from Someone Who Skips Over Them, Usually

BY ROBIN HILLYER MILES

Anything You Can Do ...

You know how you'll read a love story, and the sex is kinda blah? Or the intimate details are too graphic for your tastes? And you think, of course you think, *gosh* I can write a better love scene than that?

But then you sit down to write it and all the sexy phrases you had in your head fall flat on the page? And you remember that this scene is supposed to be meaningful, and if you can just get them to stay still long enough for you to think, you might can toss in some deep point of view emotional connectiveness?

It ain't easy to do this justice. Here are some ideas to get those creative juices flowing.

(get it? ahem)

Gymnastics

Tab A does not necessarily have to go into Slot B. What else can they do besides missionary position? Is it realistic? Count the body parts, you can't have too many and you don't want to leave important ones out. Does he need to slide her down the bed, so his skull won't hit the headboard? Can't think of a good position? Just about all the yoga positions will work, so maybe practice some yoga which could help your brain space and your writing.

Know your Characters

Are they outgoing? Are they shy? Do they like their bodies? Do they have a hidden wild side? How will they respond if their partner gets kinky? What stimuli makes them horny? Are they neuro-divergent? What's icky to them?

The Occasion

First time? One more experienced than the other? Older couple? Just met? Friends for years? Are they under the bleachers? On the beach in a rickety lounge chair? Stopped at the roadside motel bearing the sign "Vibrating Beds. Water Beds. Hourly Rates?"

Senses

What other senses can you include besides touch?

Sight

The tiny hairs that stand on end when they whisper in the ear of their companion. Erect things. A scar. Clothes bunched around their ankles. Socks. Bright lights. Shuttered windows. Will they maintain eye contact or keep eyes closed?

Sound

The other person's breath. The rustle of bed clothes. The breaking of an ocean wave on the shore. A ticking clock. A television blaring in the distance. The thumping on the wall from the hotel room next door. Dirty talk. Stomach growling.

Scent

The salty sea. Fragrance. Shampoo. Skin. The burning supper left in the oven.

Taste

Toothpaste. Chewing Gum. Garlic. Blood. Sweetness. Saltiness.

Vestibular

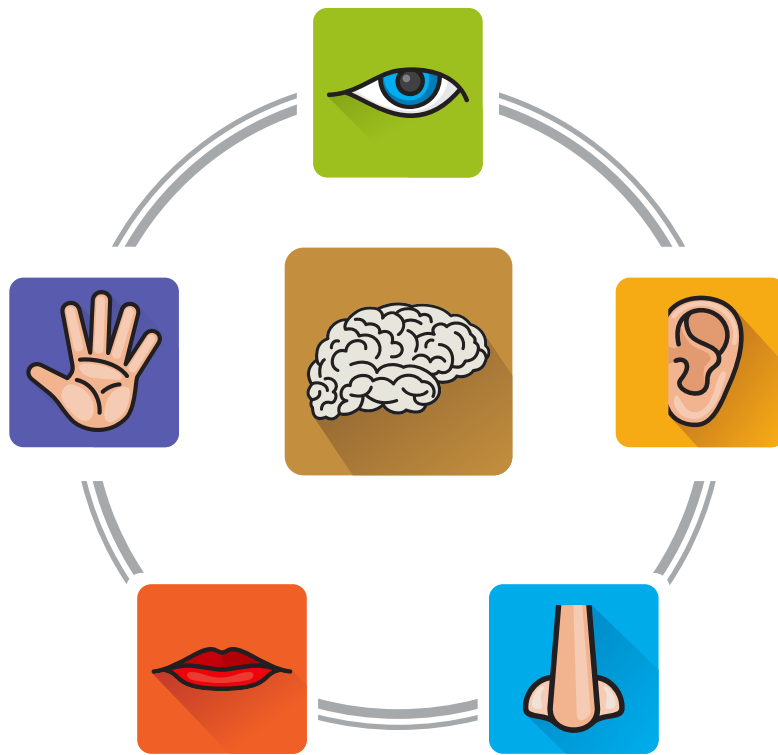
Do they feel safe. Balanced. Off balance. Movement. Stillness. Ready to be tossed about on the bed. Does this make them a wee dizzy? Do they like it?

Interoception

This is the awareness of internal body sensations. Sex takes place in an intimate, private area and other things happen down there too. But this also encompasses understanding emotions and the ability to emphasize. The racing heartbeat. The orgasm. The sensation of butterflies in the stomach.

And finally touch

The temperature of the room. Does one have literal cold feet and what happens if that iciness



Proprioception

Did one accidentally hit the other in the nose with their elbow? Why is that knee in the way?

This is the sense of knowing where your body is in space. Like how you know how to tie your shoes without looking. Or when thirteen-year-old boys suddenly start banging into doorframes and furniture because their limbs have grown faster than their brain can keep up with.

touches a warm spot on the other? Is there a fan blowing? Skin, lips, body parts, all feel different. Bed covers can be rough, smooth, silky. Things get wet and sticky. Fingers might be rough or soft. The squeeze of a hand, the rush of fingertips over the back. Find motions that feel good for both.

Emotions and Baggage

What will they gain from this experience? What could they lose? What are their past experiences and how would memories of those come into play? Will they say the L word?

Relatives Reading

Years ago, I attended an RWA conference session and a publisher or an editor, I forget which, said, "If your sex scene makes you squirm in your chair writing it, send it to me."

And I thought, I can do that. Easy. But then ... how do you juxtapose your readers' interest in a love scene and your embarrassment when your mother or grandmother, or oh-my-golly, your father, reads your story?

I've been published in short form twice and have a story in an upcoming anthology. I included a

sex scene in this last story. I still want to grab that final document and scrub out the titillating scene. My writing friends said no to that idea.

Here's what I know. Lose yourself in the moment. Push aside the censorship mind games and make that scene rock the core of the characters emotions and body parts.

Your mother can always flip through until the sex is over!



Want to write for the Romance Writers Report?

Submit your pitch and earn up to \$500 if your article is selected and published.

[Click here to submit your pitch!](#)

The Romance Writers Report Committee seeks articles for all levels and tracks of writing. We welcome submissions from beginner to expert authors, and aim to include a diverse array of subject matter expertise, including craft, industry, marketing, business, and more. While articles of all themes are welcome, here are some areas that will be given specific focus in upcoming issues:

- April 2025 - *Sagging Middles* (submit by February 28, 2025)
- May 2025 - *Writing difficult scenes using sensitivity* (submit by March 31, 2025)
- June 2025 - *Weddings—Getting to the Altar* (submit by April 30, 2025)
- July 2025 - *Writing authority figures* (submit by May 31, 2025)



Traditional Author WEEKEND

Romance Writers of America®

New to traditional romance publishing or making a comeback? Traditional Author Weekend, April 5-6, 2025, is your must-attend virtual event!

Gain vital insights and tools for navigating the traditional publishing landscape from agents, editors, and authors. This special virtual mini-conference welcomes newcomers and those re-entering the traditional publishing scene, ensuring they are equipped for success in publishing their romance novels through traditional avenues.

Ready to Land a Literary Agent or Publishing Deal? Join us for Traditional Author Weekend, April 5-6, 2025—a can't-miss virtual event for romance authors breaking into or returning to traditional publishing. Learn directly from agents, editors, and authors, and get the tools you need to succeed.

Traditional Author Weekend is your path to publishing success!

Bonus: Registrants get lifetime access to all recorded sessions.

REGISTER TODAY!

The Emotional Journey of the Romantic Arc

BY TINA RADCLIFFE

How do we move our love interests from awareness to forever love in a romance? By taking a trip on the romantic arc. The romantic arc is just that. It's an authentic journey of awareness, emotional bonding, and falling in love. It parallels the internal journey of your story.

After years of struggling to create an organic bonding path for my romance books, I created my own falling-in-love arc. Since I plot using Michael Hauge's Six Stage Plot Structure, my arc has roots in that process, although the framework is the basic three-act structure. It can be used whether you are a pantsner or a plotter. For more on Hauge's Six Stage Plot Structure, check out storymastery.com.

The goal of the romantic arc is two-fold: to bond the characters and to elicit emotion.

Over the last ten years, I have shared my process in dozens of in-person and online workshops. The steps have been fine-tuned as I grow as a writer. And, as with any writing process, there are many ways to arrive at the same destination. If this one doesn't speak to you, set it aside.

Tina Radcliffe's Romantic Arc

1. Awareness: The introduction of one or more of these senses: sight, smell, and hearing. It is the initial and most primal attraction. Initial

awareness occurs in Act 1, the first 10% of your story.

2. Heightened Awareness: This is a complete and more personal awareness with many levels. The process which begins mid-Act 1, repeats throughout your story, because this is a romance.

3. Emotional Discovery: Sharing baggage and history and awareness of the relationship progressing. This stage will parallel the internal journey of each love interest. The characters reveal themselves to each other through observation, interaction, and, ideally, story conflict. It occurs in Act II, from around the 25% point through to the 50% midpoint, also referred to as the point of no return.

4. *The Almost Kiss: This step builds romantic tension and can be used several times in a book. It generally occurs in Act II but can present at any point, although it usually precedes the first kiss and a sex scene if your book has a higher heat level.

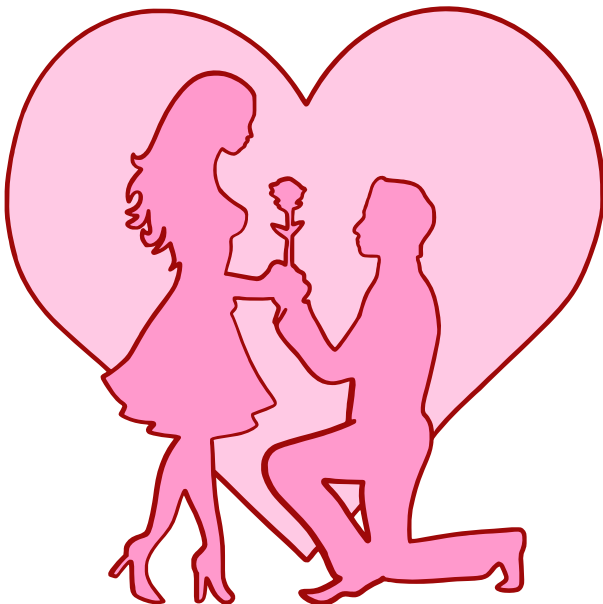


5. *The First Kiss: All senses collide...smell, sight, hearing, touch and taste. This is often at the 50% point. However, in a very chaste book, the first kiss can occur at the end of the book.

6. *Emotional Commitment: This is the point where the characters have a startling realization that they are emotionally committed to another person (whether they like it or not). Emotional commitment usually involves sharing secrets. It occurs in the second half of Act II up to the 75% point or up to the black moment.

7. Emotional Setback: Fearful, the characters retreat to their safe world. They fight or break up, or the external conflict separates them. This stage parallels the major setback or black moment in Act III. All is lost. This is our story climax.

8. Acceptance: The characters face their fear and go for the brass ring. This stage includes the admission of love. If the characters have been in denial to this point, self-admission and verbal admission will occur. Verbal admission may include "I love you" and a marriage proposal. This stage occurs in the 90-99% of Act III or denouement.



9. HEA (Happy Ever After): Occurs at the 99-100% point of our three-act structure. This is the aftermath. A peek at the new life occurs here. It may include an epilogue.

Remember, the romantic arc is a fluid journey. Your book may have two kisses, and mine may have one. Or none. Your characters may skip a step or two or combine a step or two. You can repeat the steps as well. The romantic arc depends upon the internal journey, so no two will be the same.

* Indicates that these stages are the most flexible (switch them around) and they often overlap other stages.

Do not get waylaid by percentages. Every book is different. It should be that way.

Popularized by author Linda Howard, The Stages of Intimacy is another tool for understanding and creating an organic romantic arc. The Stages of Intimacy was created by UK zoologist Desmond Morris and is from his book *Intimate Behaviour: A Zoologist's Classic Study of Human Intimacy*.

I have paraphrased nine of the twelve stages, but you can find more information and take a deeper dive into Morris's twelve steps with a simple internet search or by reading his book.

1. Eye-to-Body: A glance that may reveal an attraction
2. Eye-to-Eye: The second glance. That first spark of attraction.
3. Voice-to-Voice: The first awkward conversation. The start of emotional bonding.
4. Hand-to-Hand: That first "hand touch" that indicates the relationship is progressing.

5. Hand-to-Shoulder: Indicative of a close friendship but not necessarily romance.
6. Hand-to-Waist: Publicizes a romantic relationship.
7. Face-to-Face: Signals deep communication with very few words.
8. Hand-to-Head: Emotional closeness. We do not normally allow individuals to touch our heads unless they are family or have a romantic relationship.
9. Hand-to-Body: This stage requires consent and mutual trust.

As you write your book, you will create scenes that platform the stages of the romantic arc while weaving in the all-important internal and external journey.

Remember that your goal is to create a layered story that resonates with your reader on an emotional level. Take the reader along on the romantic arc ride—a ride they will refuse to leave until the story reaches its aftermath.

It's all about that emotional connection.

Here are a few questions to ask yourself as you evaluate the emotional connection in your scenes.

1. POV- In each scene, have you chosen the point of view character who can provide the most significant emotional payoff for the reader?
2. Best Words- Have you used the most evocative words? Words that elicit emotion?
3. In his book *Techniques of a Selling Writer*, Dwight V. Swain identified what he calls motivation reaction units or MRU. MRU is the process of stimulus and response.

Do all your actions show a response? Remember that response or reaction is always in chronological order. (FAS)

- Feeling (always occurs)
- Action (usually occurs)
- Speech (does not always occur.)

4. Sensory Response- Have you utilized a full range of senses and sensory responses?

The best way to understand emotional response and the romantic arc is to deconstruct authors who do it well. Deconstruct romantic movies as well. As you do so, observe each stage of the romantic arc. Ask yourself if the POV character is the character with the most emotional payoff. Notice the author's word choices, and zero in on motivation reaction and sensory response.

Finally, keep writing. The more words you put down on paper, the more skilled you become at your craft and at creating an authentic romantic arc for your characters.

Don't cheat the reader. Give them the journey. They'll love you for it.



Three or Four Observations about Writing Heart-Racing Love Scenes: Sweet or Steamy?

BY MIKE L. DOWNEY

We've all been there as a reader. The characters hungrily reach for each other and then . . . they're mostly silent in the sweaty afterglow. Or your book (or tablet) catches fire from the sex. Or it's somewhere in between.

As writers, we make countless decisions when telling stories, but deciding how much detail is right for love scenes in your romance is crucial. There is no "one size fits all" (no joke intended) in this field. Well, that's not exactly true. Romance tales feature a love story between two characters (at least) as the core narrative, along with an upbeat rewarding conclusion.

So, while crafting that romance, here are three or four items to consider, whether you're just starting or have some experience.

Listen to your characters. Now if you're a beginning writer working on your first novel or short story, this directive may not make a great deal of sense. However, the more you write, the more you will find this to be true. Seeing a character come to life on the page is one of the writing life's sublime gifts. You'll be surprised how quickly characters will become flesh and blood on the page – and blossom as personalities.

Assuming this is not your first rodeo, you know exactly what I'm talking about. Let's say you're

writing from a first-person POV for your central character, you know what's going through her head during that love scene. How specific would she be in that moment? If switching POVs back and forth between characters, the same rule holds true. How much would he or she or they reveal onto the page?

Be true to your characters – and to the kind of romance you want to write. Let's face it – if you're constructing a cozy romance, you don't want to shock your readers with graphic sex instead of a charming love scene.

In "The Last-Chance Library" by Freya Sampson, the central character June is forced out of her safe if staid life. When she becomes involved unexpectedly with someone, a rambunctious sex scene would have been not only out of character, but it would have taken the reader completely out of the story. In other words, steamy was not the right call. Sweet is where the love scenes had to go.

Also, Jennifer L. Armentrout wouldn't drop a steamy sex scene into her YA romances, but her adult series is often going to be just that – adult as expected. Keep in mind your readers as well as what you want to pursue as a writer.

Yes, you want to stretch boundaries on your

own as a writer and within this genre, but only so much, which leads to the next observation.

Sex scenes shouldn't be the point of your story . . . until they are. Let me explain - a trend among some contemporary romances is an uptick of frank sexual scenes rather than the more traditional "leave it up to the imagination" of the readers. Authors like Diana Gabaldon infuse their work with torrid, and often descriptive, love/sex scenes. And let's be honest - her success and others indicate that there is a readership for such writing.

Let's not forget the enormous hoorah - and popularity - after the publication of "Fifty Shades of Grey" by E.L. James. Although nearly 15 years ago, the impact of that book, and its subsequent others (and the billion-dollar movies box-office), is still reverberating through the romance publishing field.

So, the quandary as a writer is what kind of story are *you* writing? Is it a tale of characters who struggle with their relationship, dip in and out of scorching sex-not-quite-love-yet (ala "Fifty Shades") situations, and ultimately blend it all together into a true romance? Or is it a story of people who grapple with being together where a



love scene occurs, but it's not the focus of the story?

Don't get me wrong - there is certainly nothing amiss about including hot sex/love scenes in your writing as long as you are writing the story *you* want to write. And there is also nothing wrong with gearing your work for readers you want to reach.

This leads us to the next point about writing.

Write what you know . . . up to a certain point.

When it comes to writing, readers sometimes project the authors into the novels and stories as they peruse them. Naturally, some of our life experiences seeps into the work we produce. Are we just pouring ourselves onto the pages though without any filter or skill? Of course not. Yes, some of our lives makes it into our stories, but the gift of all writers is the ability to dream up a story.

Novels are fiction; they are not just gussied-up thinly-disguised memoirs. One of my favorite facts about an author known for his fiction is from W. P. Kinsella. If the name doesn't ring a bell, here is the beginning of one of his most famous lines in his best novel that I imagine all can finish: "If you build it, . . ."

Yes, Kinsella wrote "Shoeless Joe" which became the movie "Field of Dreams" that also included "If you build it, he will come" in the film.

Anyway, Kinsella said in a talk that it's the duty of the imagination of a fiction writer is to make the reader believe the world on the page is real. Kinsella nailed the allure of baseball like few other writers, but he never played the game himself. He didn't have to be a baseball player to be a great writer of baseball.

You don't have to experience everything that your characters in your romance go through. This includes their love scenes. Yes, you can write about your own experiences, but employ your skill as a writer to take those love scenes – and yes, those sex scenes – to the next level.

This brings us to the last observation about writing love scenes of any stripe, whether steamy or sweet or whatever.

Read outside of your field. Of course, in this case, it means read outside of the romance genre. Now, one must assume that you are already well-read in the romance field. You were a romance reader first (hopefully) because it's what you like to read. Some may enjoy mysteries more, others more literary works, others even science fiction/fantasy more (sorry, my favorite).

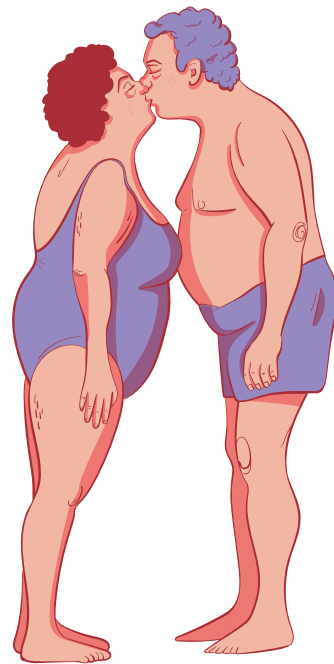
The point is if all you read is romance, as a writer, you're not going to have anything fresh on the subject of love scenes to bring to your fiction. There are thousands of talented writers who bring a fresh perspective to crafting love stories in every genre out there, especially the ones that bleed into each other. You know the ones I'm talking about – the fantasy romances, the romantic fantasies in otherworldly settings, and so forth.

I'm not saying to spend your precious reading time scarfing up every book outside of romance. However, make it a point to dip into other books – or better yet – other short stories that are outside of your usual comfort zone. There are plenty of reviews out there to give you guidance into the best choices.

And here's a tip about reading outside your usual boundaries. And it's one of the best things about

reading to become a better writer: if the book doesn't grab you in a way that you feel will help your work (my personal limit is 100 pages, but shorter is certainly acceptable), take it back to the library and start anew.

Finally, composing a romance (or any piece of writing) should be fun for crying out loud. Constructing a story where you're trying to juggle too many parameters is a surefire recipe for writer's block. And who wants that? If you are a writer who likes to outline, then include in that outline some guidelines for your characters to either engage in vivid sexual activity as part of their relationship growth – or not.



If you are more of a pantsner who likes to see where the characters will take the story (my style), then you still need to have a basic feel for what the people in your story will do during a love scene. But be open to surprises – that's one of the greatest gifts your writing can give you.

Sweet or steamy love scenes– sure, it's a challenge, but that's part of the beauty of writing. As long as love wins, you and your reader win.

Contests & Conferences

ONLINE WORKSHOPS

Easy Synopsis Writing

Date: Saturday, March 8, 2025

Price: Member \$15 | Non-Member: \$20

FMI: [Click Here](#)

How to Maintain Romantic Conflict

Date: Monday, March 3, 2025 - Friday, March 14, 2025

FMI: <https://ffprwa.com/product/how-to-maintain-romantic-conflict-mar-25/>

Price: Member \$10 | Non-Member: \$15

Cyberpunk It

Date: Monday, March 3, 2025 - Friday, March 28, 2025

FMI: <https://ffprwa.com/product/cyberpunk-it-mar-25/>

Price: Member \$20 | Non-Member: \$25

Those Who Forget the Past - Using Backstory to Enhance Your Novel

Date: Monday, March 3, 2025 - Friday, March 28, 2025

FMI: <https://ffprwa.com/product/those-who-forget-the-past-mar-25/>

Price: Member \$20 | Non-Member: \$25

Overcoming Write Overwhelm

Start Saturday, April 12, 2025., 11:00 AM Eastern

FMI: <https://ffprwa.com/product/overcoming-write-overwhelm-apr-25/>

Price for Chapter Member \$15.00

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Ensembles & Sidekicks

Start Date: Monday, April 7, 2025

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Writing to Market in Romance

Start: Saturday, May 3, 2025., 11:00 AM Eastern

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Fairy Tale Retelling

Start Date: Monday, May 5, 2025

End Date: Friday, May 16, 2025

FMI: <https://ffprwa.com/product/fairy-tale-retelling-may-25/>

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Price for RWA Member \$ 15.00

Making a Good First Impression: The First Five Chapters

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FMI: <https://ffprwa.com/product/the-first-five-chapters-may-25/>

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Digging Deep – Researching Your Novel

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FMI: <https://ffprwa.com/product/digging-deep-may-25/>

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When Your Hero Must Swear

Start: Saturday, June 7, 2025 11:00 AM Eastern

FMI: <https://ffprwa.com/product/when-your-hero-must-swear-jun-25/>

Price for Chapter Member \$15.00

Price for RWA Member \$ 20.00

Benefits and Pitfalls of Joining Writing Groups

Start Date: Monday, June 2, 2025

End Date: Friday, June 13, 2025

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To have your chapter's contest, conference, or online workshop included in the RWR and on this web page, please send the pertinent information (following the format above) to info@rwa.org.

Disclaimer: RWA includes contests, conferences, and online workshops from fully affiliated RWA chapters in good standing on RWA's Chapter Events page. RWA chapters are separate legal entities. The inclusion of an RWA chapter contest, conference, online workshop, and/or speaker on the RWA website does not constitute an endorsement or approval by RWA in any way.

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Celina Thompson
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Welcome to RWA!

Debut Authors

RWA congratulates the following authors on the publication of their first romance novel/novella

###

To submit your information for publication in the Debut Author column, complete the online form at <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/RWAdebutauthor>.

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The journal is published for the members of Romance Writers of America, Inc., a nonprofit organization.

The Romance Writers Report is a monthly publication of Romance Writers of America, Inc. The journal is published 12 times per year. Twenty-eight dollars and fifty-eight cents of each RWA member's \$99 dues payment funds the publication of the Romance Writers Report.

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RWA BYLAWS, ARTICLE 2, PURPOSES AND LIMITATIONS

The corporation is hereby organized for the following purposes:

- To advance the professional and common business interests of career-focused romance writers through networking and advocacy and by increasing public awareness of the romance genre; and
- To carry on such other activities as are permissible for Texas nonprofit corporations exempt from federal income tax under Section 501(c) (6) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986, as the same may be amended or supplemented ("IRC").

Notwithstanding any other provision of these Bylaws, RWA shall not carry on any activities not permitted to be carried on by a corporation exempt from federal income tax under IRC Section 501(c) (6) or by a nonprofit corporation formed under the Texas Business Organizations Code, as the same may be amended or supplemented (the "Act").

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The RWA Member Code of Ethics ("Code of Ethics") serves as a code of professional conduct for RWA members. Its purpose is to encourage RWA members to exhibit integrity, honesty, and other sound industry practices, thereby elevating the professionalism of the RWA's membership.

The principles of this Code of Ethics are expressed in broad statements to guide ethical decision-making. The RWA Code of Ethics is a framework and is not intended to dictate behavior in particular situations.

Any member found to be in violation of the RWA Code of Ethics may be subject to disciplinary action pursuant to the Code of Ethics.

- RWA members support the preservation of authorial and intellectual property rights.
- RWA members strive for excellence and integrity in the profession of romance writing.
- RWA members strive to treat fellow members, RWA staff, and others with respect through adherence to the RWA Antidiscrimination Policy and the RWA Antiharassment Policy.

View the full Code of Ethics at <https://www.rwa.org/code-of-ethics>

RWA'S OPERATING VALUES

External Values

- Romance writers have the right to reasonable remuneration and preservation of authorial and intellectual property rights.
- Literacy is individually and culturally vital.
- Storytelling is fundamental to human experience: romance fiction explores issues of universal and eternal human interest.
- United, romance writers are a powerful community.

Internal Values

- RWA belongs to its members.
- RWA fosters an environment of creative and professional growth.
- RWA thrives through the free exchange of ideas, knowledge, and diverse career experiences. [n](#)

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