

Secrets to Selling Your Novel

Key Writing, Skills that Matter from a Writer's and Agent's Perspective

Presented by:

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Coming in 2014

Harlequin Intrigue - **Secret Obsession** (August), **Secrets, Lies and Trouble** (December)

Amazon's Montlake Romance (Montgomery Justice Novels) - **Game of Fear** (August 26)

Key Writing Skills

- Key 1: Develop Great Characters
- Key 2: Create a Compelling Story
- Key 3: Focus on Story and Pacing
- Key 4: Revise and Polish



Key 1: Great Characters

- **Maximize Strong Character Goals**
 - Story is character.
 - How much a character cares about his/her goal is in direct proportion to how much the reader will care (Laura DeVries) - Long and Short-Range Goals
 - Goal often relates to backstory and this is where backstory can be effectively used to give emotion to the goal and make it compelling for both the character and the reader



Exploit Character vs. Characterization

- Characterization - Sum total of observable traits and qualities
- Character - Deep true nature of your character, revealed by making choices under pressure
 - Ask yourself what your character would NEVER do, then figure out a way to make them do it.
 - Each time you remove an obstacle, uncover one more.



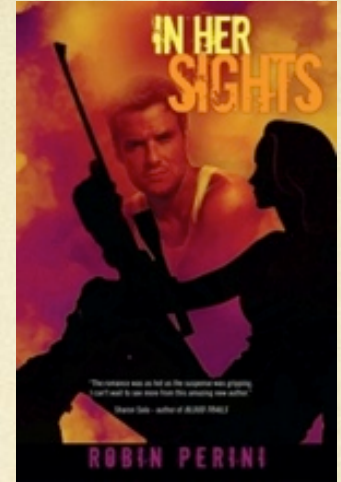
Duality of Character

Self-Image Worksheet

Strength	Character Flaw	Weakness
Strong-willed, deals w/people & ideas skillfully	Needs to Control	Manipulative
Lives in the Present	Fears the Unknown	Controlled by Circumstances
Self-Reliant	Needs Independence	Can't Rely on Others, Unreliable
Earnest, with conviction and purpose	Believes End Justifies Means	Ruthless
Strategist, careful, prepared, can be relentless	Fear of Failure	Tentative, Relentless
Power of Convictions	Needs Justice	Judgmental, Vengeful, Righteous
Intuitive understanding of others	Believes World there to be manipulated	Egotistical
Intuitive, Trusts inherent human judgment	Needs to Trust	Unrealistic
Faithful, Steadfast, Unflappable	Fears Chaos	Uncompromising, Resistant to change
Compassionate	Needs to Please	Failure to know oneself
Challenges Oneself	Need to Prove Worthiness	Self-Involved
Spontaneous	Needs Freedom	Undisciplined, Unpredictable
Perfectionist	Fears Misjudgment	Defensive
Fearless, Intrepid	Needs to Take Risks	Reckless
Independent	Fears Emotional Attachment	Distrusting
Cautious	Needs to be Safe	Fearful
Honest	Needs the Truth	Unemotional
Analytical	Needs Logic	Distrusts intuition, calculating, shrewd, cunning
Self-sacrificing	Needs Love	Submissive
Ability to be someone else (wears masks)	Believes Flawed	Covers Flaw with Mask
Adaptable	Needs Balance	Indecisive, Obedient
Flexible, Diplomatic	Fears does not know best	Pliant, Deferential
Optimistic	Needs to hope for the best	Naïve
Resourceful	Believes own needs surpass everyone	Predatory
Fearless, no fear of consequences	Fears Unredeemable	Pessimistic, Fatalistic
Faithful, Steadfast	Believes the best	Follows others blindly
Places no expectations	Believes love conditional	Fears Emotions
Free from bias, open-minded	Needs Fairness	Gullible
Patience	Believes to endure is to conquer	Compulsive, can't let go

Show Us Character, Don't Tell

- It's the character who tells the story, not the author.
- Imagery based in character
- Watch out for 's/he felt,' 's/he thought,' 's/he saw,' 's/he wondered,' 's/he realized...



Luke Montgomery kept to the shadows, studying the surroundings for potential threats and quick exits. He preferred covert operations, but stealth wasn't an option here. Even he couldn't blend his six-foot-four-inch frame in this cracker box. Though he hadn't set foot in the joint in a couple of years, too many people would recognize him.

A sharp rap of the cue ball hitting its target echoed like a gunshot over the raucous laughter. Nope, Sammy's Bar hadn't changed. Neither had the clientele.

Cops. And some of them were on the take.

Examples of 'Telling'

"You think that matters to Tower? He wants to bring you down."

Sarge tossed down her folder on a desk so pristine the dust didn't dare settle there. "Be careful, Jazz. This file doesn't go into a lot of detail, but he claims he can prove you're not fit to be a cop."

~~A frisson of disquiet quivered through her.~~ She clutched the candy in her pocket and squeezed the ~~feelings~~ frisson of disquiet into submission. Emotions were weak, and she would never reveal even the smallest crack in her armor. She forced her voice steady. "He's bluffing."

Sarge leaned forward in his chair. "A smart cop doesn't make a move like this without an ace in his hand. Do you have any idea what he's latched onto? What he can use against you?"

Her mind flashed to the angry runaway she'd been, a child forced to do anything to survive. Twelve years had passed since then. Her juvenile records had been expunged, erased as if they never existed. She pushed away the thoughts. No. It was impossible. Tower couldn't know.

She met Sarge's look, and forced her face into a calm, ~~her gaze fixed~~ mask. "He's grasping at straws. I've done nothing to dishonor my badge."

Sarge nodded as if reassured, but she could detect the underlying concern.

"He'll fight dirty. He's got a lot to lose."

"I can stand up for myself." ~~Her mouth tightened and she set her jaw.~~ She was good at her job. She protected her team. She never failed. She was Jazz Parker, one of the boys in blue who could thread a needle with a bullet.

Examples of Showing....

The trigger felt right.

The sight was zeroed in, the balance perfect. The Remington 700/40 fit her body and her mind like an old friend she could trust, and Jasmine "Jazz" Parker didn't trust easily. **But she and this rifle were connected in a way a lover, friend or family could never be. The Remington would never let her down.**

The only hitch--she didn't have an ideal shot at the kidnapper. Not yet, anyway.

Sweat beaded her brow in the Colorado midmorning sun. **Without taking her gaze from her target, she wiped away the perspiration. Every second counted and she had to stay ready.** Negotiations had fallen apart hours ago and the ending seemed inevitable. To save the Governor's daughter, Jazz would excise the five-year-old girl's captor.

Jazz shifted, relieving the pressure against her knees, the stiffness in her hips, but the rifle remained steady. She centered her sight on the small break in the window.

Braid Plot and Character

- Why is this character the ONLY character for this story?
 - Choose plot to exploit character.
- Actions don't drive the story. Actions drive emotions, emotions drive the story. (Laura Baker)
- Is the drama motivated?
- It's a cycle
- Internal vs. External Conflicts



Key 2: Create a Compelling Story

- **Character vs. Character.** In romance, romantic tension comes from the heroine's goals conflicting with what the hero represents (and vice versa)
- **Goals.** Need to ask, "What is your Heroine's Goal?". This is their most secret wish—they don't even know they are wishing this sometimes.

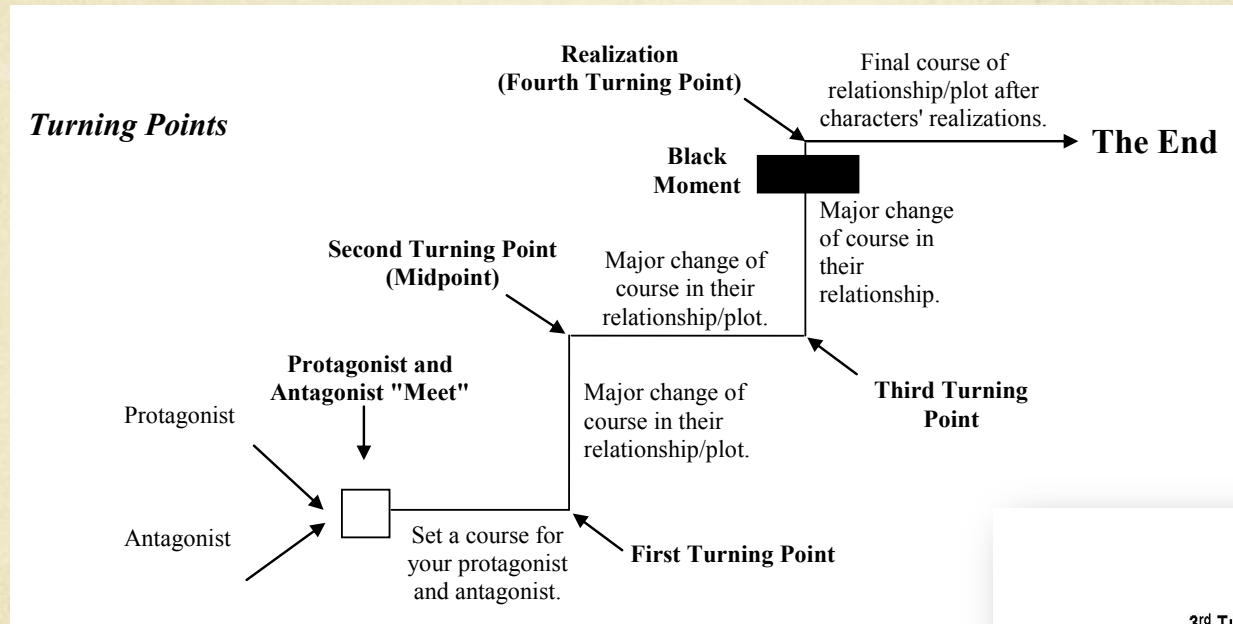
**Strong, positive goals can help
prevent sagging middles**

Motivation/Conflict

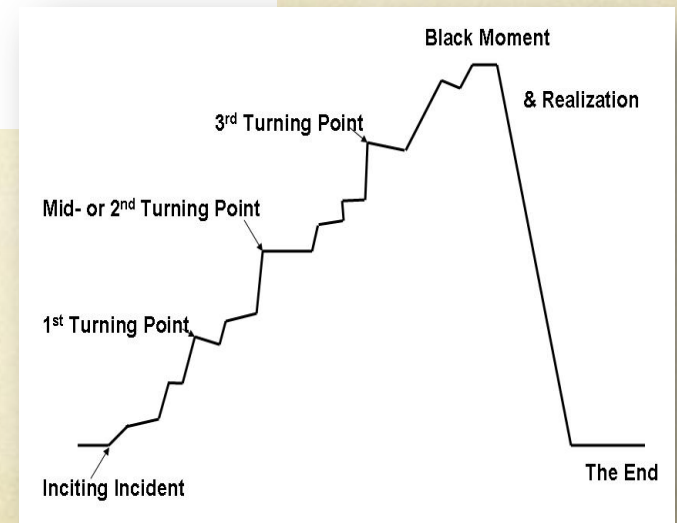
- **Motivation.** This is often the result of what happened to them growing up or in the past. Often comes out of backstory. “Because of her painful past, she wants to stay out of relationships.”
- **Conflict.** How does this put her in conflict with the hero?
 - If he loves, he opens himself up to emotional pain. *She is challenging his core beliefs of keeping himself closed off from love.*
 - The A-Ha moment, “In the end, what does she realize she really wants?”

WHY???

Key 3: Focus on Story and Pacing



- Turning Points
- Escalate
- Rule of thumb 1 per 25,000 words



Scene and Arcs

- Scene and Sequel – Must move the story forward
- Arcs – Character, Scene, Chapter

Story Board				
For a 20-Chapter Book with Four Turning Points				
1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20

Scene & Sequel

The A-Ha Moment:
 “In the end what does the protagonist realize he or she really wants?”

Key 4: Revise and Polish

- Common Mistakes to watch out for
 - Overwriting
 - Backstory
 - Telling
 - Too many adjectives
 - Devices that are not properly set up
 - Filler
 - Body parts doing things
 - Gazes and breathing

Revision

- Big Stuff (Character, Conflict, Plot, Theme, etc.)
- Small Stuff
 - “*In simplicity lies power.*”—Sandra Canfield
 - General Rules
 - Keep it Concise and Specific
 - Keep it Logical
 - Look at words
 - Look at overall rhythm and flow
 - Get rid of filler and cobwebs
 - Must advance character, setting, plot, or conflict – otherwise delete
 - Don’t tell us what you’ve just shown us – ex: woman hit by a Porsche, next scene call telling her employer she was hit
- Final revision for pacing and compelling storytelling

VERSION 1

(The Thinking it Through On Paper Draft)

"Remind me again why you thought spending Thanksgiving with them would be a good idea?" Josh Wentworth grumbled, as he flipped on the windshield wipers to batten away the snowflakes that were coming down faster. The SUV curved through the Denver traffic and he took the Quincy exit. "It'll be a disaster. It always is. I don't want Joshua's first Thanksgiving to be more like a root canal than a celebration."

Emily Wentworth shot her husband a frustrated glance. "Our one-month old won't be warped. Besides, your parents deserve to get to know their new grandson." An overwhelming sense of rightness filled her as she glanced at the baby in the backseat, his cheeks rosy with warmth as he slept. "With Ryan deployed overseas, your family's all he's got."

VERSION 2

(Honing in on More Important Details)

Eric Wentworth was dying. He didn't have to see the stop sign's shaft penetrating his chest or the blood pulsing from the wound. Strange, though. He felt no pain, but he could feel his life slipping away as surely as the ravaging winter wind whistled through his crumpled car.

He wasn't ready to die. Not yet. He had a wife who loved him and a new baby boy he'd just met. He couldn't leave them alone and unprotected.

"Eric?"

He struggled to turn his head toward his wife's weak cry.

VERSION 3 – Final Version

(Active Writing Utilizing Deep Point of View)

This is the prologue that won the Golden Heart in 2011 and sold to Harlequin Intrigue.



Icy wind howled through the SUV's shattered windshield, spraying glass and freezing sleet across Eric Wentworth's face. He struggled in and out of consciousness. Flashes of memory struck. Oncoming headlights on the wrong side of the road. Skidding tires on black ice. The baby's cries. Emily's screams.

Oh, God.

Why couldn't he focus? Above the wind, he heard only silence, then an ominous gurgling sound from his lungs. He shifted his head slightly to check on his wife, and a knifelike pain seared his neck. He stopped, staring in horror at the shaft of metal guardrail penetrating his chest. Blood pulsed from the wound, but he couldn't feel it. He couldn't feel anything.

Eric was dying. And it was no accident. He hadn't taken the threats seriously, hadn't told Emily what he'd done. Why they were all in danger.

VERSION 1

(The Thinking it Through On Paper Draft)

Four-foot long icicles and Texas didn't go together.

Blake Reynolds paced the wooden floor, nerves wound tighter than an over-cinched saddle. Sleet pounded the roof, hammering the century-old ranch house with what the Weather Channel had termed the worst ice storm in decades. He'd issued an order hours ago for folks in the county to hunker down until further notice. Below freezing temperatures and unrelenting ice made travel hazardous. Blake tilted the brim of his hat back as he glanced at the silent police radio sitting silent on the oak sideboard. "Guess we're lucky it's quiet, huh Leo."

A whine escaped the Lab-mix, curled on the rug next to the fire.

"Or not."

Being alone with his thoughts didn't suit Blake well. The sparse room gave him no distraction, but at least he hadn't unpacked enough in the eighteen months he'd been back to make running from memories any tougher than normal.

VERSION 2

(Starting Earlier)

"Mommy, please don't die."

Banging sleet echoed like a drum off the car's roof. Amanda Hawthorne struggled in and out of consciousness as a small, icy-cold hand patted her face.

"The bad men might come back."

Oh, God. Had they been found again?

"Ethan?" Her heart thudded, and she twisted toward his voice. She had to get her son to safety. Knifelike pain sliced across her flank. "Oh. She crumpled in her seat, pressing hard against the gunshot wound on her right side. Wet and sticky. It had started bleeding again.

Biting her lip against the throbbing, she pasted a confident smile on her face and looked toward her five-year-old. "You okay, little man?"

VERSION 3 – Final Version

(Active Writing Utilizing Deep Point of View)

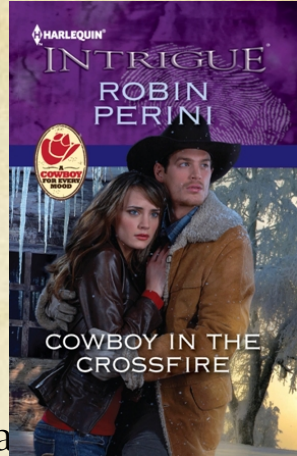
A wicked gust of winter wind buffeted Amanda Hawthorne toward the front entrance of her brother's home. She wrapped her flimsy coat tighter around her body and lowered her head. Another cold blast nearly knocked her down. Even the weather fought to keep her out of Vince's house. Well, this freak wouldn't win, and neither would her brother. He'd be furious, but she was staying. Just until she found another job.

She breathed in, hoping to kill the perpetual french-fry smell that permeated her clothes from her final shift at Jimmy's Chicken Shack. She could've lived with the odor and her aching feet, but she couldn't take his octopus hands, his foul breath or his large body trapping her against the wall in his storage room. She shuddered at the memory. She wouldn't go back. But first, she had to face Vince.

With a deep breath, she unlocked the door. "Big brother, I've got bad news. You may have houseguests for a while—"

Her voice trailed off. The photos that had lined the entryway hall lay shattered on the tile floor. The small table near the doorway teetered on its side, crushed.

"Vince?" Her heart thumped like a panicked rabbit. She ran into the living room. The place was in shambles. "Ethan?" Oh, God. Where was her son?



The Secret

- From the Writer's Perspective
- From the Agent's Perspective

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