

# Secrets to Selling and Staying Sold: Writing Techniques for Making a Good Book Great

*Presented by Robin L. Perini*

*A story recounts events that must be translated into feelings. It concerns . . . someone's reactions to what happens; his feelings; emotions; his impulses; his dreams, his ambitions; his clashing drives and inner conflicts. Plunge the character into a pre-planned situation that challenges the part of him that cares, that threatens the thing he feels is important. — Dwight V. Swain, Techniques of the Selling Writer.*

## Introduction

### i. Take what you want and leave the rest.

*What a writer ... "wants is a set of rules on what to do and what not to do in writing fiction...."when one begins to be persuaded that certain things must never be done in fiction and certain other things must always be done, one has entered the first stage of aesthetic arthritis, the disease that ends in pedantic rigidity and the atrophy of intuition." — John Gardner, The Art of Fiction*

### ii. Non-craft

- a. Life-long learning (you, your critique group) – challenge yourself.
- b. Discover **your** process
  - i. Be willing to change/expand/adjusts...but know your strengths and weaknesses
  - ii. Planner, Plotter, Pantster
- c. Creative Goal Setting
  - i. Do your strengths fit your genre?
  - ii. What is your kind of book?
  - iii. Set goals and write them down, then evaluate and re-evaluate.
- d. Make writing a priority...decide what's important.
- e. Write regularly...discover how fast you can write a book, and what it takes.
- f. After you complete one book, take a short break then start another

### iii. Elements that I already knew: Deep Character, Turning Points, Romantic Conflict

## Lesson 1. Discover YOUR Story

### i. Uncover Your Emotional Cues (Laura Baker – Purposeful Writer)

- List your three most powerful childhood memories. Define the key emotions.
- What do you look for in a read? Name two authors whose work you love. What are the key emotions these authors explore?
- Identify the book that was easiest for you to finish.
  1. List five most prominent characteristics of this book
- Identify the most compelling character.
  1. List five most prominent characteristics of this character
- Look at all of these lists of emotions. Is there a common thread?

### ii. Consider the book you were unable to finish.

**Lesson 2. The One Sentence Blurb – A Hidden Test of the Strength of Your Story**

**i. Internal and External Conflict in One Sentence**

- **The more clear, the easier the book will be to write and the stronger the book will be**

**ii. Examples**

- Finding Her Son, Harlequin Intrigue, March 2012. Determined to find her kidnapped son, a woman suspected in her husband's death reluctantly teams with the embattled SWAT cop assigned to prove her guilt.
- In Her Sights (A Montgomery Justice Novel), Amazon Montlake Romance, December 2011. A female SWAT sniper finds herself in the crosshairs when her past is exposed and an old enemy returns with a vengeance to seek to destroy her—and everyone she loves.

**iii. Story Question Will Guide Your Writing.**

\_\_\_\_\_ **must** \_\_\_\_\_ **by** \_\_\_\_\_  
 Your Critical Plot Goal Conflict with the  
 Protagonist Antagonist

**Only to Realize**

\_\_\_\_\_ What the Character Learns about life that helps him/her change his goal during the journey of the book.

- iv. Example: Jacob Marshall must avenge his father's honor by implicating Serena Jones' father, only to realize revenge often hurts the innocent.**

**Lesson 3. Know and Use Your Theme**

**i. Identify the protagonist's character flaw/internal conflict (based on emotion)**

- \_\_\_\_\_ (protagonist) will [now or eventually] have to face and get past that he/she NEEDS/BELIEVES/FEARS \_\_\_\_\_.
- The villain is the personification of your protagonist's flaw and takes advantage of the protagonist's flaw. (i.e. the real danger to your protagonist is their flaw)

**ii. Theme = Truth (It's simple, and in its simplicity lies its power.)**

- What do you want your reader to understand about the world after he/she finishes your book. (The Heart of your Book)
- The Quick and Dirty Way to Figure Out Your Theme: The epiphany of your protagonist is the theme of your book. (How does the protagonist overcome their flaw?)
- Layer Your Novel using Theme

**Lesson 4. Deep Point of View**

**i. It's the character who tells the story, not the author.**

**ii. Imagery based in character**

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.

- iii. Watch out for 's/he felt,' 's/he thought,' 's/he saw,' 's/he wondered,' 's/he realized...

**Lesson 5. Show, Don't Tell Emotions**

- i. Identify a key word from Step 1
- ii. Write a paragraph showing this emotion without using the word (or a form of the word)

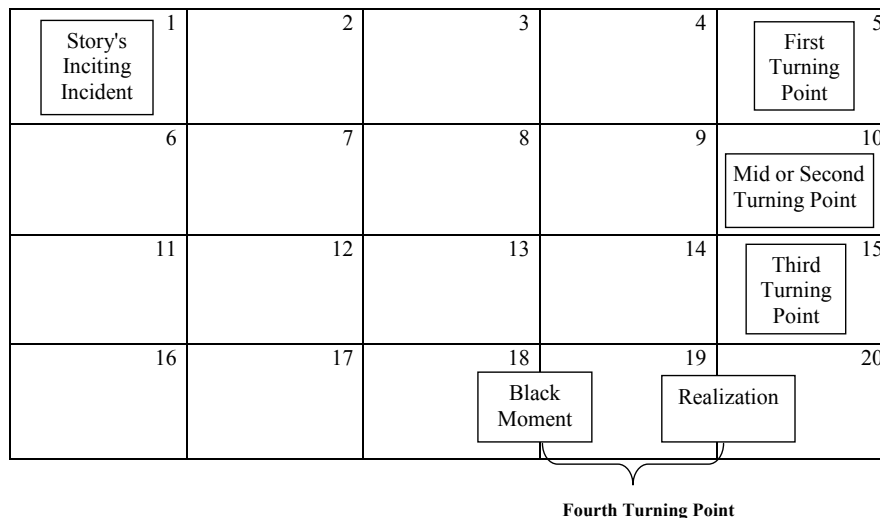
**Lesson 6. Make Narrative and Description Count**

- i. Significant Detail based on emotion, not research
- ii. Choose a setting. Choose two opposite emotions. Write a paragraph illustrating the emotions through significant details, without using the specific words (or a form of the word).

**Lesson 7. Take Advantage of Arcs**

- i. Character, Scene, Chapter, Turning Points, Book

**Story Board**  
For a 20-Chapter Book with Four Turning Points



**Lesson 8. Avoid Repetition**  
**i. Analyze your writing during revision**

Chap. & Start Pg	Time	Plot Points by Scene	Conflict (with focus on Romantic Conflict)	Jazz Knows (Plot-Tower, Ray, Past)	Luke Knows (Plot-Tower, Ray, Past)	Lisa Knows (Plot-Past, Tower, Ray,)
Prol.	Day 1--AM (midmornin g)-Friday	Jazz saves Gov's daughter.	He leveled her defenses 2 years ago, and he's the last person she should ever be involved with.	Nothing	Nothing	Nothing
1-p.4	Day 2--AM-Saturday	Sarge calls Jazz in. Tells her about Tower investigation.	We know she had feelings for Luke and for some reason believes he has something she can never have.	No promotion. Tower is investigating her. Worried about past coming up.	Nothing	Has Seen Article, Furious, Plans Revenge (List done). Heard Tower's rant re: Jazz, Article. Use him.
	Day 2--AM	She comes out. Tower is in there sitting at her desk with Luke's article. Lisa has been there, too. Shows her Luke's article. Use some of interaction from workout room. What are you trying to do, be the only star?	Luke wrote the article and it's compromised her promotion and hiding her identity.	Tower is trying to instigate something. Some forced laughter by team.	Nothing	Lisa Sabotages Gun (goes with Tower)
	Day 2--PM (Almost end of work day.)	Start with him and how important the truth is. Jazz confronts Luke about the article. (Does she lie to him about the reason--white lie)	Unwanted attraction. Confrontation about 'You're the last person I wanted to see. You're the last person I wanted to write an article about. You made it clear you didn't want me. She sees Joy's picture. (dagger to the heart)	Doesn't want attention focused on her for 2 reasons: team and past. (she must be cautious).	Luke knows something about article, and questions has spooked her.	

**Lesson 9. Activate Your Writing**  
**i. Read for pacing and compelling storytelling**

- Dialogue is the best way to show character and emotion. Get rid of introspection if possible.
- Is there a "zinger" on every page?
- Is the POV character the right one?
- Can you tell whose POV character it is on every page?
- Symptoms of Lack of Conflict
  1. Is there repetitious dialogue? (no conflict development)
  2. Tack on other issues
- Have I braided internal and external conflict (do they lead to each other?)

**ii. Three Versions (Activate the story (from telling to showing))**

**FINDING HER SON**

**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. FINDING HER SON, March 2012 Harlequin Intrigue®. 2011 Golden Heart® Winner (Stolen Lullaby)**

*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.*

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### **VERSION 1 (The Thinking it Through On Paper Draft) DARK GUARDIAN, Kent County, England, 1816**

Damn Richard St. James to hell. He'd slaughtered them--he'd slaughtered them all.

Jaw clenched with fury, Jonathan Price urged the horse he'd commandeered at the last posting stop forward. His hands and cloak were soaked with blood. He had to get home. He could only pray he wasn't too late.

The sky billowed with black clouds, and little light illuminated the old Roman road he raced down. His heart pounded, and agony ripped through his chest.

He'd witnessed carnage during the war. Waterloo had been a bloodbath, but Anne should never have

witnessed the massacre she'd seen tonight. Until a few hours ago, his fiancée had known nothing of the brutality of man.

St. James had changed her--forever. The bastard.

Anne's family--murdered in cold blood. All of them, down to her young sister barely out of the crib.

Jonathan's stomach wretched at the memory of the Cavanaugh's laid out in front of their home like some gruesome message, their throats torn open as if an animal had feasted. But even that hadn't shredded his heart like Anne's mewling cries as he'd cradled her in his arms. He just prayed her family

in York would be able to heal her mind, even if her heart were forever broken.

**VERSION 2 (Honing in on More Important Details)**  
**DARK GUARDIAN, Kent County, England, 1816**

Damn Richard St. James to hell.  
 He'd slaughtered them. He'd slaughtered them all save one.

A mist of night smoldered the burning remains of the Price family home, and Jonathan blinked through the soot streaking the land that had once been the family's pride and joy. He breathed in, willing the nausea churning his stomach to not desecrate this place. They deserved better.

Jaw clenched, he forced himself to stare into their sightless eyes one by one. His father, his mother, his young sister. Lined up in a row, their bodies were darkened with ash, the only color, the red seeping from their shredded throats.

But that wasn't the worst of it. St. James hadn't just killed them--he'd tortured and humiliated them. Jonathan couldn't bear the thought of what the bastard had done. His young brother, Edward, by happenstance still at Eton, would never know, Jonathan vowed.

With care, he covered his young sister's bare body, and concealed his mother's naked torso with her decimated gown. As for Jonathan's father, St. James had emasculated him, the blood soaking his pants.

Deep fury, like Jonathan had never imagined, even on the bloodiest Waterloo battlefield, skewered his gut like a thousand splinters of glass.

**VERSION 3 (Active Writing Utilizing Deep Point of View)**  
**DARK GUARDIAN, Kent County, England, 1816**

Jonathan Price surged through the fiery hallway, clutching his sister's limp body close to his heart. "Don't give up, Elizabeth." His desperate plea was swallowed by the hellish roar of the fire crackling around him. Blistering heat seared his hands and face, and black roiling smoke scorched his lungs.

Maddened with grief, he kicked the flaming debris from the doorway and burst into the rainy night. Coughing and hacking, he staggered across the muddy yard and fell to his knees before laying his sister on the sodden grass.

The fire illuminated her sightless eyes, the vicious wound on her neck. Horror overcame him.

What manner of beast had done this? Torn the very skin from her throat, killed her with no mercy?

He whirled toward Price Manor. The blaze shot from every window and door, scarlet serpents of flame devouring all in their path, engulfing everything.

Where was the rest of his family? The servants, the butler, hell, even the scullery maid? Had they escaped or had the beast killed them, too?

"No!" He raced back toward the house, only to be grabbed and flung to the cobblestones with powerful force.

"You cannot save anyone, you fool. They're all dead. Your family and Lady Anne's as well."

**Lesson 10. Don't Edit out the Passion**

- i. Let your Voice Shine Through.**
- ii. It's YOUR story.**
- iii. Ray Bradbury says, "There is only one type of story in the world--YOUR story."**

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## BIOGRAPHY

*A 2013 RITA finalist, award-winning and national bestselling author, Robin Perini invites readers to 'step into the crossfire' with her fast-paced, high stakes adventures laced with a love story sure to melt your hearts. Robin's strong characters and tightly woven plots garnered her seven prestigious Romance Writers of America Golden Heart® finals. She won the Golden Heart® in 2011, and that title became her first Harlequin Intrigue, Finding Her Son (March 2012). Her other 2011 Golden Heart® Finalist, In Her Sights, was published by Amazon's Montlake Romance (November 29, 2011). Robin went on to sell fourteen novels in approximately two years.*

*She was on the committee that produced the first edition of the LERA Writer's Guide, an instructional book for writers that has been recommended by Writer's Digest books. Her standing-room-only workshops at RWA National have landed her on the 24 Most Popular Sessions CD five consecutive years. You can find out more information at her website [www.robinperini.com](http://www.robinperini.com) or visit her on Twitter @RobinPerini, Facebook (Robin PeriniAuthor), Goodreads or Pinterest. Her agent is Jill Marsal of Marsal Lyon Literary Agency.*

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## Book List

**Montgomery Justice Novels**  
**Amazon Montlake Romance**  
In Her Sights (2011)  
Behind the Lies (2013)  
Game of Fear (2014)  
Edge of Deceit (2015)

**Harlequin Intrigues**  
Finding Her Son (3/12)  
Cowboy in the Crossfire (7/12)  
Christmas Conspiracy (10/12)  
Undercover Texas (6/13)  
The Cradle Conspiracy (12/13)  
Secret Obsession (8/14)  
Christmas Justice (12/14)

**The LERA Writer's Guide, ISBN 0-9660063-0-5**