

# HEART TO HEART

## Stalking the Wild Editor

*How to get published, maybe.*

*Best-selling author **Jennifer Crusie** gives practical advice on ways to sight, target, and bag this elusive beast.*



The editor looms large in publishing lore. She's the celestial gatekeeper, the goddess who bestows fame and riches, the fairy godmother with the magic red pencil, the person who would be your new best friend if only she read your manuscript...

Okay, reality check.

Editors are mere humans like the rest of us, as varied in their tastes as we are, as prone to hopes and fears as we are, and as focused on their own careers as we are. They are not the Grail, attaching to one will not automatically bring you salvation or even fame and fortune, and failing to please one is not the end of your career. This is important to know because that hunted look editors get at conferences is almost always a product of authors flinging themselves at their feet with manuscripts and proposals, determined that this editor right now will read and love the work when all this editor wants right now is a bathroom followed by a large drink with some kick to it.

So let's regroup and look at the species again.

Editors are among the most overworked human beings on the planet. Coal miners don't have to take their coal home with them on the weekends, loggers don't get unsolicited trees in the mail, and no commercial fisherman was ever handed an extra net under the door of a restroom stall. They work impossible hours, often for impossible people, trying to achieve impossible outcomes,

most of them for impossibly inadequate wages. Nobody in her right mind ever became an editor.

Which I think explains a lot.

Good editors are crazy, crazy in love with books. They love writing, they love publishing, they love talking to (some) writers, they love arguing about covers, they love scheming to make the lists, they go into stores just to rearrange the titles and into libraries just to snort the book dust. And their favorite (professional) fantasy is discovering new writers with talent and skill that they can transform into bestselling superstars.

But here's the catch. Editors work for publishing houses and publishing houses are businesses and businesses have to make money or they fold. Which means editors have to choose books that will make money or they'll get fired. Overall, this is a good thing. The more successful a publishing house is, the more money they'll have to give writers. But it does mean that if an editor looks at your book and loves it but knows she can't sell it, you're out of luck. And that if she looks at a book she doesn't like as well but knows she can sell a zillion copies of, she'll buy it.

Before you cry, "Unfair," let me ask you, why is it you want to be published? To get your work of art into as many hands as possible and make a lot of money, right? Well, that's what the editor wants, too, and if she can't see a way to do that with your story, it's good for both of you that she rejects it. That gives you the chance to keep showing it to editors until you find the one who says, "I know how to market this sucker," and takes you to the top. Or until tastes change and suddenly your

unpopular topic is hot. You wait long enough, anything can happen.

So your job in submitting your novel is to find the editor who not only loves it but knows how to sell it. How do you do that? By searching out the editors who have sold books that are in some way like yours, especially books with a similar voice, mood, story, characters, or theme. So you go through your bookcase and you pull out every book published in the past two years that you loved. Not that you liked, that you loved. You loved them because they struck a chord in you, the same chord (you hope) that they struck in their editors. Then find out who those editors are. Lots of authors thank their editors in the acknowledgments or dedicate books to them. More of them mention their editors on their websites. And if all else fails, call the publisher and ask. It's not a secret, they'll tell you.

Then look at the list of editors you've compiled and rank them. Is there somebody on there that appears more than once? She's a pretty good bet to share your tastes, so put her at the top of your list. If there are no repeat editors, are there repeat houses? That is, are several of your faves from the same publisher? That's going to be a good place for you to query first. Another way is to arrange your list in the order of the books you liked best. Then, if you can, go to conferences where the editors on your list will be talking and listen to them to see if any of them seem especially great, or if any of them strike you as not right for you. Ask around about them at chapter meetings or on internet lists. Do the same kind of digging you did in your

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## Editors' Desk

In *Heart To Heart* this month our theme is Editing and Critiquing, both of which are as essential to the writing process as the writing itself.

Learning how to edit your own work properly is worth every homicidal—or suicidal—moment. Learning how to critique someone else's work can be both educational and wonderfully therapeutic because it shows you you're not alone—neither in your mistakes nor in your desire to rip someone's head off for pointing them out. Bless their hearts.

The best thing I ever did for my writing career and growth was to become part of a critique group. If it wasn't for my critique partners—Jem, Bron, Rach, and Karen—I'd have sent out some absolute crap over the last few years. They keep me from settling for an easy fix to a problem, ask annoying questions about stuff I haven't thought through properly, tell me what they like and don't like, drive large tanks through my plot holes, and offer me hope, cuddles, shoulders, and cyber chocolate when all looks dark and completely depressing. I try to do the same for them.

Here are five things to keep in mind when you're considering critique partners.

1. Beginning a critique partner relationship is like getting a new puppy. It's fun. It's cute. But sooner or later someone is going to get upset and howl at the neighbours, chew slippers, or pee on the carpet. Try and make sure it isn't you. If it is, apologise, clean up, and provide chocolate. If it's someone else, explain the rules of the house, and forgive. Either way, hugs and pats and some bonding time together is always appropriate.
2. Have at least one critique partner who is familiar with the conventions of the romance genre and, if possible, with the subgenre you write.
3. This is a two-way or (clears throat) multiple relationship. Don't just take from it. Make time to give your best to each other. Remember, the more people in your group the more time you need to put aside. When all of us are working on something with the same deadline it can get hairy.
4. With reference to number 3. above. "That's great!" is not a critique. It's a cop out. Be nice, but it's your job to help each other, so spend time looking at the work with a critical eye and with a view to its improvement.
5. Grow a thick skin. In the words of the late William Safire, "Nobody stands taller than those willing to stand corrected." It's so easy to get upset and offended when people find things "wrong" in work you've slaved over. Suck it up. It'll happen in the real publishing world too, so get over it now while you're working with those who love you.

**Bonus tip:** Don't ask your mother to critique your work. Really. Don't. I'm sure she'd be both nice and truthful, but the poor woman has already raised you—and is probably *still* hoping you'll outgrow this phase of your life and get a real job making pots of money—so give her a break. It means Christmas and other family get-togethers are a lot less stressful.

And that's probably enough from me.

Now, grab that cup of coffee and settle down for a fabulous read.

*Gracie, Rachel, Bron, & Karen*



### WELCOME TO OUR NEWEST MEMBERS:

Sonia Rose Moore in Auckland

Paula Phillips in Tauranga

Karen Jackson in Australia

Jane Madison-Jones in Christchurch

Sandra Toornstra in Waihi

### RWNZ CONTEST SCHEDULE 2011

#### STRICTLY SINGLE CONTEST Judging In Progress

Good luck, everyone!

If you have any questions, contact Viv Constable, Contests Coordinator:  
[vconstable@xtra.co.nz](mailto:vconstable@xtra.co.nz)

# From The Pres.

## What's happening in RWNZ?

*President Iona Jones brings us up-to-date with the news.*



This month I'm coming to you from the lovely Marlborough Sounds. Well, truth be told, I was cruising through the Sounds when I wrote this but will be well home by the time you read it. It's school holidays and the family and I are heading off to Auckland for a week, which so far has meant a 4 am start this morning to make our sailing on the *Arahura*, and then a nice long drive to look forward to. It's no wonder that sometimes the school holidays can seem more like an endurance exercise than anything else!

Of course, having the kids at home during the school holidays can also play havoc with your writing time. If your children are anything like mine, they will have an unerring ability to pick the exact moment when you've finally managed to get in front of your computer to announce they've flooded the laundry, spilt raspberry cordial on the lounge carpet or "accidentally" slammed the door on their sibling's fingers! I hope those of you with children survived any such school holiday experience and are back into your regular routine of writing every day. Routines are so much easier to break than they are to institute in the first place but, if there's one thing I've learned on my writing journey, it's that you need to make writing part of your regular routine. Write every day. (And, yes, once again those who know me well will be shaking their heads and saying I need to practise what I preach. In response, I can only say, "I'm trying!!")

Moving quickly on from my deficiencies, on the success side of the ledger I can report that the venue for next year's conference has now been confirmed. RWNZ's 2012 conference will be held at the Crowne Plaza Hotel in Auckland on the weekend of Friday 24—Sunday 26 August 2012. I'm sure those of you who attended this year's conference will agree the Crowne Plaza is a great venue, with wonderful service. I'm certainly looking forward to returning there again next year. I will keep you updated on further developments for next year's conference as things are confirmed.

I'm also very pleased to report that we have found a replacement judge for the **Short Story Contest**. Some of you may not be aware that Woman's Day is no longer publishing short stories and Julie Redlich, our judge for several years now, is no longer with the magazine. However, thanks to the efforts of our wonderful Contest Coordinator, Viv Constable, I can now announce that **Gaynor Davies**, Fiction Editor for the English Woman's Weekly, has agreed to be our final judge. Once details of the short story contest are finalized, information will be put up on the website and included in a future issue of *Heart To Heart*.

One thing that hasn't been quite so successful this year is membership renewals, as there are still a number of members who have not yet renewed. I would put a strongly worded message to late renewing members here, but the sad truth is they won't get to see it. All members who have not renewed will not be receiving a copy of *Heart To Heart* this month. Unfortunately we cannot incur the significant cost of printing and postage of *Heart To Heart* for members

who haven't paid their fees, so if you know someone who hasn't renewed yet be sure to encourage them to pay their \$64 as soon as possible! And be sure to tell them that if they are paying by credit card or Paypal, they must pay the increased amount of \$66.50 to cover the bank fees. Our beleaguered Membership Officer, Kris, and Treasurer, Miriam, tell me that people have not been paying these fees and this means the funds we should be using for other things are being eaten up by fees! OK, I'm putting away my growly voice now.

Speaking of the significant cost of printing and posting *Heart To Heart*, if you are one of the many members still receiving *Heart To Heart* in printed form, I would like to encourage you to think about swapping to the electronic form. I admit I have always been addicted to my hard copy edition of *Heart To Heart*, but I've finally made the change to electronic. Not only does this mean I get to see *Heart To Heart* the way it should be seen—in all its multi-coloured splendour—it also means I've always got my copies of *Heart To Heart* with me wherever my laptop and I travel. The unfortunate reality is that a very significant portion of RWNZ's funds is used to pay for the printing and posting of *Heart To Heart*, leaving less to be used for other initiatives. If RWNZ is to grow and develop, providing more services for its members, either we need to decrease our costs or increase our membership fee. Ideally, of course, the Exec would like to avoid the latter!

The issue of the costs of *Heart To Heart* may be an academic question soon, of course, if no one steps up to take on the editorial role. As discussed in last issue's editorial column, the current editorial team is stepping down after the December issue. I think we'd all agree they have done a marvellous job and, yes, they will be a hard act to follow. However, they are offering to pass on their knowledge, so now's the time to leap up and take advantage of their offer. Please email me at [iona.jones@xtra.co.nz](mailto:iona.jones@xtra.co.nz) if you are interested.

Many of you will have seen discussion on the loop about the Memorial Trust that has been set up in honour of Sandra Hyde. For those who haven't heard about this very worthwhile endeavour, Karina Bliss has provided a description of the Trust and its purposes and how you can make a donation to the Trust in this issue of *Heart To Heart*. RWNZ will be forwarding Jillian Britnell's kind donation of her Out-of-towners Raffle prize (noted in this column last month) to the Trust. Thank you, Jillian.

OK, that is more than enough from me this month. Happy writing everyone and may the words flow! ♥♥♥

People are like stained glass windows.  
They sparkle and shine  
when the sun is out,  
but when the darkness sets in,  
their true beauty is revealed  
only if there is a light  
from within.

Elizabeth Kubler-Ross







# Woos, Hoos, and News

*Celebrating our members' achievements.*

Send your successes to Tyree Connor at [rocker.t@xtra.co.nz](mailto:rocker.t@xtra.co.nz)

## COMPETITION SUCCESSSES

**Anna Campbell** **won** the historical section of the **First Coast Romance Writers Beacon Contest** with *My Reckless Surrender*.

**Maree Anderson** w/a as Maree West has **finalled** in the **From The Heart Romance Writers' 2011 Golden Gateway Contest** with her Y/A paranormal *Liminal*.

**Faye Robertson** has **won** first place in the Harlequin Blaze Aviator Challenge and received a request for her full manuscript from the editor.

**Tyree Connor** has made it into the **Top 21** round of the **Mills & Boon New Voices** competition on:  
[romanceisnotdead.com](http://romanceisnotdead.com)

**Love is, above all, the gift of oneself.**

Jean Anouth

What is success?  
To laugh often and much;  
To win the respect  
of intelligent people  
and the affection of children;  
To earn the appreciation of  
honest critics  
and endure the betrayal  
of false friends;  
To appreciate the beauty;  
To find the best in others;  
To leave the world a bit better,  
whether by a healthy child,  
a garden patch  
or a redeemed social condition;  
To know even one life  
has breathed easier  
because you have lived;  
This is to have succeeded.

Ralph Waldo Emerson  
*American essayist, poet and philosopher*

**SOLD!**

**Faye Robertson** w/a Serenity Woods has had her **second book accepted** by **Samhain Publishing**. *An Uncommon Sense* is the first in the Sensual Healing series and will be published in the first half of next year.

**SOLD!**

**Laverne Clarke** has **sold** her second manuscript, *Affinity*, to **The Wild Rose Press**.

**The greatest use of life is to spend it  
for something that will outlast it.**

William James

## Sandra Hyde Memorial Romance Writers Trust



**Romance author Sandra Hyde (writing as Sandra Hyatt)** died suddenly on August 21, 2011. Because so many have been touched by Sandra's life, either personally or through reading her wonderful books, her family has set up a trust to continue her legacy of generosity and kindness by furthering the career of an emerging writer.

Money raised by the Trust will form an annual education grant, awarded to an aspiring NZ-based romance writer to enable them to attend a national or international writers conference, to improve their craft and progress their writing goals.

Sandra wrote for Silhouette Desire, an imprint of Harlequin Enterprises, under the pseudonym Sandra Hyatt. A gifted writer, her books regularly hit the USA Today bestseller list and Waldens/Border's Bestseller list.

Her fourth book, a novella called *Mistletoe Magic*, was nominated for a 2011 Rita, the romance world's equivalent of the Oscars. Her eighth book will be published in December 2011.

An active member of Romance Writers of New Zealand, Sandra served on the executive for three terms and was always willing to reach out to new writers with advice and encouragement. She was also a much loved member of Romance Writers of America.

Sandra wrote romance because it reflected who she was as a person. Someone who had the courage to be an idealist in a cynical world. Someone who believed in the power of love to overcome any tragedy or obstacle. Someone who believed in heroes and had one at home to prove it.

If you wish to be part of Sandra's legacy to future writers, you can make a contribution to the trust by:

- Direct credit to the Bank of New Zealand, Sandra Hyde Memorial Romance Writers Trust—Account Number 0400-0092668-00
- (For International Transfers—Sort Code 02-04-00 Swift Code BKNZLN22)
- Through Paypal using [SandraHydeTrust@gmail.com](mailto:SandraHydeTrust@gmail.com) as the recipient.
- Cheque (within NZ) made out to the Sandra Hyde Memorial Romance Writers Trust and posted to: 191 McNicol Rd, RD5 Papakura, Auckland.

For any further information please email [SandraHydeTrust@gmail.com](mailto:SandraHydeTrust@gmail.com)

# A Successful Synopsis



## The top ten questions to ask.

Contemporary romance author and writing workshop host **Gina Ardito** walks us through the key elements to synopsis success.

**I**t arrived like a bolt of lightning from the heavens, on the gossamer wings of angels singing "Alleluia." Okay, not quite. It actually came to me the day my daughter said, "My teacher thinks my book reports are too light, and I don't put enough information in them. What am I doing wrong?"

Well, I took a look at her book report and instantly realized what she was doing wrong. Isn't that always the case? It's so much easier to notice someone else's mistakes, even when that same glaring error escapes you in your own work. To assist her, I drafted a list of ten questions that every book report should cover. And that's when the idea came to me.

A synopsis is nothing more than a book report for adults. No wonder we all hate writing one! It brings back memories of cringing at our desks when a teacher would say, "And over the vacation I expect you to read these eighteen tomes and write a detailed report on each."

When an agent or an editor requests a synopsis, our minds revert to those days and we freeze. Well, I believe you can satisfy the teacher and the editor by answering ten basic questions. Trust me. Once you've answered them for your own work, the Ghost of Book Reports Past will no longer darken your door. You'll find writing a synopsis isn't so bad after all.

And so, without further ado, I present to you the top ten questions you need to answer in a successful synopsis. To help you, I'll refer to a familiar work, Walt Disney's version of "Beauty and the Beast", and give example answers for each question.

### 1. Who is the heroine and what does she want?

**Example:** The heroine is Belle, the beautiful young daughter of an eccentric inventor who is bored with her life in her village in France and longs for a life of adventure similar to that in the characters of the books she loves to read.

### 2. Who is the hero and what does he want?

**Example:** The hero is a prince who has been turned into a beast by an

enchantress because he has lived his life as a spoiled brat, never caring for anyone else's feelings. He wishes to regain his human appearance, but in order to do so, he must be loved, despite his hideousness, and learn to love in return.

### 3. What brings the hero and heroine together?

**Example:** Belle's father is captured and imprisoned by the Beast. Belle offers to take his place and remain in the castle.

### 4. What problem do they encounter at their first meeting or shortly thereafter?

**Example:** Belle disobeys his order to stay away from the room where all his secrets are kept, his temper erupts when he finds her there, and she runs away.

### 5. How do they overcome their initial problems and achieve some measure of success?

**Example:** The Beast rescues her from a pack of wolves and is injured in the process. She takes him back to the castle and tends his wounds. Through these actions, she learns to conquer her fear of him, and he learns to control his temper. Affection blossoms between them.

### 6. What happens to spoil the initial success?

**Example:** After a romantic dinner, Belle sees her father in the Beast's magic mirror; he's lost in the woods and deathly ill. The Beast allows her to leave the castle to find her father and bring him home.

### 7. Where does this new problem lead?

**Example:** Belle proves to the villagers that the Beast is real by showing them his image in the magic mirror. The Beast is alone and miserable in his castle, knowing Belle's departure has sealed his fate to remain a beast forever. Seeing his misery, the villagers decide the Beast is a monster and must be destroyed.

### 8. What risk do the hero and heroine take to deal with this new challenge?

**Example:** The villagers attack the castle, planning to kill the Beast. But he does not prepare to fight their

onslaught. Without Belle, his life has no meaning. Meanwhile, Belle and her father follow the marauders, and return to the castle, hoping to rescue the Beast.

### 9. What is their 'dark moment'?

**Example:** The Beast is stabbed during the attack, and Belle arrives to see him crumple to the ground. As he lies dying, the two profess their love for one another.

### 10. How do they overcome this last obstacle to achieve their 'Happily Ever After'?

**Example:** The moment Belle tells the Beast she loves him, the spell is broken. Instantly the Beast is transformed back into his true form as a handsome prince, with one exception. Now he has learned to love, becoming a better man in the process. The two marry and dance happily into their future together.

So now that we've answered the ten questions, let's put them together in some semblance of a synopsis, bearing in mind our synopsis must be written in present tense.

"In a castle in France, an enchantress casts a spell on a spoiled, selfish prince, dooming him to live life as an ugly BEAST until he learns the meaning of true love. In a nearby village, BELLE despairs of ever experiencing the excitement and adventure she reads in her favorite stories. Their two worlds collide when her father, lost during a storm, enters the Beast's castle and is taken prisoner. After tracking him down, Belle offers to exchange places with her father.

On their first evening together, the Beast's temper flares, and a terrified Belle runs away, only to be caught in the woods by a pack of ravenous wolves. Just when all seems lost, the Beast rescues her, but is injured in the ensuing melee. Belle transports him back to his castle and tends his wounds. She apologizes for running away, and he apologizes for losing his temper. Peace reigns between them for a long time, and one night, they celebrate their friendship and blossoming romance with a candlelit dinner. After the dinner, Belle sees a

(Continued on page 18)



# Contests and Markets

*P.D.R. Lindsay-Salmon shares some potential markets and Rachel Collins suggests a few contests.*

## Potential Markets

### Entangled Publishing

**Deadline:** N/a

**Eligibility:** Agents first priority, then non-agent subs

**Seeking:** Paranormal, urban, contemporary, romantic thrillers, YA novellas, 20,000-40,000 words, novels, 70,000-120,000 words, YA to 50,000.

**Payment:** Royalties that begin at 40% of digital cover price and increase with sales.

**Guidelines:** <http://www.entangledpublishing.com/submission-information/>

**Email:** [submissions@entangledpublishing.com](mailto:submissions@entangledpublishing.com)

**Website:** [www.entangledpublishing.com](http://www.entangledpublishing.com)

### SoulMate Publishing

A new publisher, novels in both electronic and paperback.

**Deadline:** N/a

**Eligibility:** Anyone

**Seeking:** Action/Adventure, Chick Lit, Contemporary, Erotica, Fantasy, Historical, Inspirational, Novellas, Paranormal, Sci-Fi/Futuristic, Suspense/Thriller, Time Travel, Urban Fantasy, Women's Fiction. Blending of genres is allowed and encouraged. Varying levels of sensuality are welcome, however all stories should have an upbeat ending. (No depraved or illegal acts, bestiality, or pedophilia.)

**Payment:** 35% royalties

**Guidelines:** <http://www.soulmatepublishing.com/pages/Submission-Guidelines.htm>

**Email:** [submissions@SoulMatePublishing.com](mailto:submissions@SoulMatePublishing.com)

**Website:** [www.soulmatepublishing.com](http://www.soulmatepublishing.com)

### Lyrical Press

An electronic publisher with some print issues.

**Deadline:** N/a

**Eligibility:** Anyone

**Seeking:** All genres of erotica and romance.

**Payment:** Details provided to contracting authors only.

**Guidelines:** <http://www.lyricalpress.com/submissions.php>

**Email:** [submissions@lyricalpress.com](mailto:submissions@lyricalpress.com)

**Website:** [www.lyricalpress.com](http://www.lyricalpress.com)

### The Wild Rose Press

A well-established, highly recommended electronic press.

**Deadline:** N/a

**Eligibility:** Anyone

**Seeking:** All types of Romance, short stories and novels, but read guidelines carefully.

**Payment:** Details provided to contracting authors only.

**Guidelines:** [http://wildrosepress.us/publisher/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=33&Itemid=44](http://wildrosepress.us/publisher/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=33&Itemid=44)

**Email:** [queryus@thewildrosepress.com](mailto:queryus@thewildrosepress.com)

**Website:** <http://thewildrosepress.com>

## Potential Markets (continued)

### Eternal Press

An electronic press with some print issues.

**Deadline:** N/a

**Eligibility:** Anyone

**Seeking:** Erotica, Paranormal (vampire/shapeshifter/witch), GBLT, Romance, BDSM, Young Adult, Longer length novellas and novels.

**Payment:** Details provided to contracting authors only.

**Guidelines:** <http://www.eternalpress.biz/submissions.php>

**Email:** [submissionseternalpress@gmail.com](mailto:submissionseternalpress@gmail.com)

**Website:** <http://www.eternalpress.biz>

### Cliffhanger Books: anthology publishers

**Deadline:** October 31, 2011

**Eligibility:** Anyone

**Seeking:** Original, unusual paranormal romance for anthology *Paramortal Two*.

**Payment:** Royalties

**Guidelines:** <http://www.cliffhangerbooks.com/submit.html>

**Email:** [submit@cliffhangerbooks.com](mailto:submit@cliffhangerbooks.com)

**Website:** [www.cliffhangerbooks.com](http://www.cliffhangerbooks.com)

## International Contests

### RWA Golden Heart

**Deadline for forms and fees:** November 15, 2011

**Fee:** \$50/100

**Deadline for manuscripts:** December 2, 2011

**Eligibility:** Unpublished

**Enter:** 6 printed copies of partial and synopsis totalling no more than 55 pages.

**Full entry details:** [http://www.rwa.org/cs/contests\\_and\\_awards/golden\\_heart\\_awards/contest\\_rules](http://www.rwa.org/cs/contests_and_awards/golden_heart_awards/contest_rules)

### Great Expectations

**Deadline:** December 30, 2011

**Eligibility:** Open to entrants who (1) are unpublished or uncontracted in book-length romantic fiction; (2) are unpublished or uncontracted in the category entered; OR (3) have not been published, sold, or contracted in the category entered for the past three years.

**Enter:** First 25 pages + micro-synopsis (300 words max).

**Fee:** \$30 for RWA members, \$35 for non-RWA members (\$5 "early bird" discount for entries received by December 10).

**Website:** [www.ntrwa.org](http://www.ntrwa.org)

**Email:** Wendy Watson at [gecoordinator@ntrwa.org](mailto:gecoordinator@ntrwa.org)

### The Write Stuff 2011/2012

**Deadline:** December 5, 2011

**Eligibility:** Non-PAN Recognized Authors

**Enter:** First 20 pages, no synopsis.

**Fee:** \$20/30

**Website:** <http://ctrwa.org/writestuff/>



# Beginning with Chapter One



## How does one create a compelling first chapter?

**Melissa Jeglinski**, agent with *The Knight Agency*, shares with Bronwen Evans how to make a memorable first impression.

*Let me introduce my agent, Melissa Jeglinski. I signed with Melissa at the beginning of 2010 after meeting and pitching to her at the RWNZ conference in 2009. (See! It does happen!). I submitted my first three chapters, got a request for the full, and the rest is history.*

*I can't sing the praises of Melissa and The Knight Agency enough. Several RWNZ members are agented through TKA—Nalini Singh, Gracie O'Neil, Abby Gaines, Kylie Griffin, Frances Housden, me... Sorry if I have forgotten anyone.*

*I asked Melissa to tell me what she looks for in a submission from Chapter One.*

**F**irst chapters... I know them well. After twenty years in the publishing business, I've done my fair share of critiquing them for contests, evaluating them to see if I want to ask for more from a new writer, editing them for a client before we shop a project, and enjoying them from my favorite authors. And although every writer has a different style, and each genre lends itself to different tones, that first chapter is always the essential element that is going to draw me in and make me want to read on.

So just how does one create a compelling first chapter? In no particular order, here are some of my suggestions for putting together a memorable opening that will entice your reader and, perhaps, help you avoid some of the pitfalls that can lead to rejection.

**Show, Don't Tell:** Many writers make the mistake of treating the opening like a synopsis. They want to tell the reader everything right from the start. And so their opening consists of multiple paragraphs, even pages, of details about where we are, what we're seeing and why we should care. Instead, show the reader where they are by setting the scene through a character's eyes. Let the reader know what's at stake by having something happen to your character right at that moment. Tell us why we should care by giving us the character's thoughts on the current situation. The first chapter needs to open the reader up to the world by enticing them into your world.

**Know When to Start:** I can't tell you how many first chapters I've read that start with a character going

somewhere. They are driving to a destination, walking up to a front door, about to board a plane. Instead of wasting time writing about how that character is getting to that destination, start with them having already arrived and quite possibly already in the middle of the situation. It's not difficult to add in the details about how they got there later on with just a few sentences of background information. If a reader comes in during the middle of the action they are immediately engaged by the situation and the why's and how's can come later.

**Don't Forget the Dialogue:** Some of the best opening lines I've ever read have been lines of dialogue. A sentence from the main protagonist or a minor secondary character can immediately set the stage for the type of journey one is about to take. Dialogue creates interaction between characters. The words used by these characters can illicit feelings of nervousness, exultation or fear. And the reader is immediately engaged. Think about it like coming into the room during the middle of a conversation. Don't you love trying to figure out what's going on and how the people talking have gotten to that point?

**Avoid Dumping:** Please don't be afraid to leave unanswered questions in your first chapter. You don't need to use it as a dumping ground for every fact about your main character and their conflict. You want to keep your story evenly paced so giving away everything in chapter one will not do you any favors. I've often found that first chapters can be tossed away and that the second, even third or fourth chapters, make for a better opening because they start at the right place and leave enough questions for me to want to read on.

**Leave them Wanting More:** The first chapter is an enticement into the book but of course you want the reader to continue on to chapter two. So that first chapter needs to end with a great hook. Avoid having the protagonist go to sleep at the end of chapter one—the reader will too. Rather, end with a moment of suspense or a great realization that leads to more questions. Think about how your favorite television show cuts to a

commercial... they leave you wanting to fast forward and get back to the story ASAP. So go out on a high note or a dismal note or a fearful note... but a note that will bring them back for more.

Remember, your first chapter sets the stage for all that is to come. Present it with the right tone, give away just enough information and start with a compelling scene. And you will let the reader know they are in for a memorable read. ♥♥♥

Melissa Jeglinski joined The Knight Agency in September of 2008 as Agent/Submissions Coordinator. A graduate of Clarion University of Pennsylvania, where she majored in English with a concentration in writing, Melissa began her career as an editorial assistant at Harlequin Enterprises.

During her seventeen-year tenure, she discovered more than a dozen authors who have become National bestsellers, and ascended to senior editor of the Silhouette Desire line, one of the company's most prestigious and successful series. An undeniable asset to the TKA team, she utilizes her extensive editorial experience, combined with distinctive tastes and a top-notch romantic pedigree, to foster TKA's client roster to national prominence. Melissa is a member of RWA and AAR.

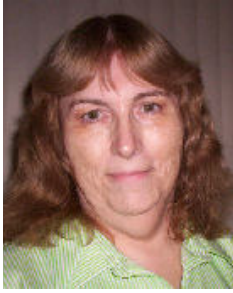
Article was originally published in The Knight Agency June newsletter. Sign up here: <http://www.knightagency.net/newsletter/> Submission guidelines: [http://www.knightagency.net/manuscript\\_submissions/](http://www.knightagency.net/manuscript_submissions/)

All men dream,  
but not equally.

Those who dream by night  
in the dusty recesses  
of their minds  
wake in the day  
to find that it was vanity:

but those dreamers of the day  
are dangerous men,  
for they may act their dream  
with open eyes,  
to make it possible.

T.E. Lawrence



# How to Critique Fiction

**What are you looking for, and why?**

*Independent Editor and Writing Coach Victory Crayne offers questions and a checklist to help evaluate your work.*

**Y**ou pour your energy and nine-tenths of your soul into a story. Night and day you wrestle with yourself over every page, every word at your keyboard, typewriter, or notepad. You are writing every day, aren't you? At last, you're finished! With nervous anxiety you take the next daring step—letting someone else, maybe another writer, editor, friend, or even enemy open to the first page and start reading.

You wonder—is this your masterpiece? Have you learned at last how to write a bestseller? You really tried hard to do so much better on this one. You wait, as if standing in front of the judge at your murder trial. Will the verdict be 'Not Guilty'? Will the jury yell and wave their arms in praise?

Or, will you hear those awful words—'Guilty of Bad Writing'?

A professional learns to systematically organize their knowledge of how to write well. One area of knowledge is how to do a professional critique—a really detailed, rip it up and tear it apart critique, hitting it from all angles, until every weakness stands raw and exposed.

Here is a checklist of points and questions on many aspects of fiction writing that may be useful to you—or your favorite critic—in evaluating works of fiction.

There are many different styles of critiquing, of course. The checklist and questions presented here are offered as food for thought, not as a strict set of rules. Very few people will try to answer every one of these points/questions.

After you finish your next piece, or part of it, set it aside for a few days. Then haul out this article, put on your Critic Hat, and go through these questions for your work.

See you on the Bestseller's List!

## THE CRITIQUE PROCESS

### A. Don't read other critiques of this story yet.

Doing so would likely bias your review. The author would much prefer your unbiased and fresh impression.

### B. Write down your impressions as a reader.

Was the story captivating from the very

first few paragraphs? Did you enjoy reading it? What type of person would this book appeal to? Do you think that the story or book has sales potential?

### C. Try to give feedback on what could be changed.

Remember, the purpose of writing a critique is twofold: (1) identify the weaknesses in the piece and (2) offer some constructive advice to the author that might lead to improvement in the story. To just bash the story without providing something useful to the author is not really being professional.

### D. Give examples of improvements, if possible.

When you give an example of a better way to do what you pointed out, you make your point much clearer to the author. As they say, 'an example is worth a thousand words'.

**As [critics], don't we have a responsibility to not only point out what needs changing, as we see it, but also what worked and why, so the writer won't change it and will be encouraged to produce more of the same?"**

J. R. Lankford (Jilla).

### E. Praise where praise is due.

Did you remember to add some positive comments on the piece, where the author did something you thought was very good?

*"I feel I have a decent critical eye. But when I think I see a touchdown, I cheer. That's feedback, too. Why should all the mistakes find their targets, but the successes meet with only silence—leaving the poor writer, who has poured out her/his heart, with nothing but: no, no, no, ... As [critics], don't we have a responsibility to not only point out what needs changing, as we see it, but also what worked and why, so the writer won't change it and will be encouraged to produce more of the same?"—J. R. Lankford (Jilla).*

*"We all need to be told where we are very good as well as where we are very, very bad. We cannot grow, otherwise."—Pete Murphy*

*"I think there's a sometimes overlooked purpose in critiquing and that is to identify the strengths in a story as well, to offer encouragement and positive reinforcement in regard to those*

*strengths, thereby preventing the possibility that the author will change, for the worse, those things that make the story good."—Debra Littlejohn Shinder*

### F. Never criticize the author personally.

Focus your attention on the story as written.

### G. Critique as you would want to be critiqued.

Ask yourself before you post or mail a critique: Is this an example of the way I would like to be treated?

## THE CHECKLIST (THINGS TO LOOK FOR)

### A. OPENING

Do the first few sentences or paragraphs of the story grab your attention? Do they present the protagonist's main problem? Remember how you judge a book or story when you first see it in a bookstore. Don't we often base our decision to buy or not buy upon those first few sentences? Did this author grab your attention fast enough?

### B. CONFLICT

**1. By conflict, I do not mean lots of slam-bam action.** Conflict is *"The mental or moral struggle caused by incompatible desires and aims. That is the kind of conflict that makes stories vitally alive."*—Ben Bova in *"The Craft of Writing Science Fiction That Sells"*.

**2. Is there emotional conflict within the main character?** Between the main characters? Emotional conflict is part of what gets readers interested. For example: love vs. loyalty; greed vs. duty; fear vs. desire; revenge vs. self-doubt.

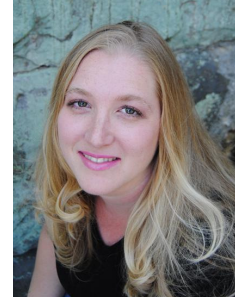
### 3. Are there too many or not enough conflicts?

*"The writer's job is to be a troublemaker! Stir up as many levels of conflict and problems for your protagonist (hero) as you can. Let one set of problems grow out of another. And never, never, never solve a problem until you've raised at least two more. It is the unsolved problems that form the chain of promises that keeps the reader interested."*—Ben Bova.

(Continued on page 9)



# Finished the Damn Book?



**Oh no! Time to edit...**

*Historical romance author **Eliza Knight** gives some editing pointers to help us beat the competition.*

**C**ongratulations! You've written "The End." I assure you this is no easy feat. Many people set out on a quest to write a tale and, for one reason or another, do not complete it. The question is: now what? You must edit!

Why should you edit your work? Your work should be edited because competition is fierce in the publishing world—the number of submissions accepted is quite small. The average number of books accepted by publishers for publication is around 2–4%. That is not very high. For every one-hundred manuscripts they receive, only two, maybe four on a good day, will be offered a contract.

With odds like 2-4%, you will want your book to be in the best shape it can possibly be. Here's an example of why:

Jane Editor at Big Six Publishing House has two manuscripts in front of her. They are both phenomenal! The plots are compelling, the characters intriguing. Both books are sure to sell well, but she's been told by the editorial board she can only accept one book—that's all they have room for, as her own list of authors and books on the table is vast. Jane Editor goes back and forth between manuscripts. The decision is hard to make. She wants both. How will she possibly decide?

Well, as it's been mentioned, Jane Editor has a very busy schedule. She already works 60+ hours a week, and

during her free time at home she reads over her authors' work. Another quick look at the two manuscripts shows that Manuscript#1 has a lot more editing issues in it than Manuscript#2... Decision made, Jane is going to go with the manuscript that will require the least amount of work.

And if all goes well, that's yours!

A few pointers to keep on hand when editing your manuscript...

**Tightening up those sentences**—By paring down on filler words, weak words and strengthening verbs, you can tighten up your sentences. Writers tend to put a lot of extraneous words in our sentences we do not need. Remember, Evil = that/had. You can't delete all the "that" and "had" words, but do a search and find, read the sentence thoroughly. Do you need the word? Often times we write in something like: "She had gone to the market earlier that day." This is a sentence that can be easily tightened: "She went to the market in the morning." Another example of what we can do to tighten up sentences is delete redundancy. Instead of saying she sat down, say sat. Stand up, becomes stood. Turned around becomes turned. Don't let too much backstory bog down your pages. Sprinkle it in through dialogue, action, reaction. If it doesn't move the story along, delete it.

**Inconsistencies**—Beware of those inconsistencies! Eye color, location,

years, setting, season. A character with a broken leg won't be miraculously healed the next day. If it's the dead of winter, your heroine won't be picking roses unless she's in a greenhouse.

**Format**—Always check the submission guidelines for format. If none are stated, use the standard 12pt regular font, double-spaced, 1" margins, 1st line indent.

**Using the 5 senses**—Readers want to experience the story. Show them what is happening with the characters. Let the reader, touch, see, hear, taste and smell what the character does. This works great during every scene and should be especially potent in love scenes and highly intense scenes.

**Hooks beginning and end**—Draw your reader in and keep them there. Examples of hooks are: danger, strong emotion, shocking situation, evocative narrative, witty dialogue.

**Point-of-view**—Pick the character who has the most at stake in a scene and use their POV. Use transitions to switch "heads". Don't hop back and forth. If you feel that in a scene you need more than one POV, do it smoothly so you don't confuse the reader, and don't do it for only one line. If you only have one line, best to save it for a separate scene when the character is reacting to the previous scene. For one scene with two POV's, authors will often have the

*(Continued on page 17)*

*(How to Critique Fiction...cont from page 8)*

Until the end, of course, when all the conflicts should be resolved.

**4. Is there enough conflict between the characters?** Is it expressed through action, dialogue, attitudes, or values? Were the characters sufficiently contrasted? Or did they seem to be totally satisfied with their roles? Did they have the potential to transform each other?

## C. PLOT

**1. Was the main plot clear and believable?**

**2. Did the main character have a clearly defined problem to solve?** Did you feel by the end of the piece that this problem was solved, or did the

character become resolved to live with it?

**3. Were you able to determine the time and place of the story quickly enough?**

**4. Did the story start at the right place? Did it end at the right place in the plot?**

**5. Are there scenes which do not seem to further the plot?**

**6. Were there too many flashbacks, which broke your attention?**

**7. If the piece was a short story, were there too many subplots?** If the piece was a novel, could it be improved by more attention to the subplots or by having more subplots? Conversely, does it have too many subplots and you

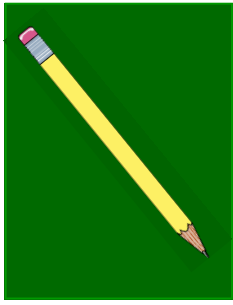
got confused about what was happening?

**8. Was every subplot useful?** Did it add to the overall story or did the author seem to stick it in just for complexity?

**9. Pacing:** Did the plot/subplots move fast enough to keep the reader's attention?

**10. Resolution of conflict:** Did the conflict and tension in the plots and subplots come to some reasonable ending? Or did the author leave us hanging, wondering what happened? When you finished, were there things that you still felt needed to be explained?

*(Continued on page 13)*



# Hiring an Assessor

## *What do you get for your money?*

*Editor Lesley Marshall explains assessment, editing, and proofreading and what a professional evaluation can bring to your manuscript.*

**M**embers of the New Zealand Association of Manuscript Assessors advertise themselves as assessors, though most of them also do editing, and sometimes proofreading. When a writer hires an assessor/editor for their book, they need to know what exactly they're buying so that they can get the best value for money.

### **Firstly, why would you get anyone else to pick holes in your baby?**

Before you send anything away, someone else should have read it with an analytical eye. Anything you've written yourself you will then probably not be able to edit thoroughly because you'll be too close to it. You won't see the heroine walking across the barbecue coals instead of around them, because you'll only see what you intended to write—not what's actually there on paper. And you may not see the plot holes or motivation problems as easily as someone coming to it fresh—and that may partly be because you don't actually want to see them! We're all the same—for instance, I'm hoping Bronwen will have edited this article, because I'm too close to it to do it well myself, even though editing is what I do for a living.

Fiction writers are passionate about every word, and are harder to edit for; non-fiction writers tend to only be interested in the message. So when you get someone else to edit or assess your work, try to think like a non-fiction writer. That way you may not feel you need to defend your baby from unwarranted attacks, but rather may see that a haircut here and a different coloured outfit there might actually make her look prettier.

### **What's the difference between assessing and editing?**

#### **Assessing**

Also called critiquing, this involves reading through the manuscript and then writing a report on it (generally 5-8 pages). The assessment will cover the bigger issues—plot, pacing, characterisation, motivation, structure, scenes, tone, some common errors, manuscript layout, internal logic, point of view, etc. Some assessors will not write any notes on the ms at all; some (like me) will write quite a few, and also

make some text changes to illustrate a recurring problem. My reports tend to be shorter because of this, usually only 3-6 pages long.

#### **Editing**

This is very time-consuming. All the things covered in an assessment will be addressed, but there is also detailed analysis of the text. Every sentence will be looked at for structure, rhythm, grammar, punctuation, word choice, purpose, syntax and general flow (readability), as well as the way it fits with the other sentences and paragraphs around it (in terms of rhythm, structure, repetition of structure/words/phrasing, etc).

Anything that might concern the reader is grist for the editor's mill. Does the dialogue work? Do the characters have distinctive and appropriate voices? Is there a good narrative/dialogue balance? Are the names of the characters right? (For instance, one book I worked on had a character called Carol. The name didn't work for me, and eventually I realised it was because she was the wrong age for a Carol—most Carols are my age, and she was supposed to be in her early twenties at a time when I was in my thirties).

Do the flowers come out at that time of the year in that place? Is the time travelled right for the distance? Is there variety and internal logic in the foods the characters eat, the clothes they wear? Would he drive that sort of car? Would she use that word? Are their professions right for them? Are their families right? Should you add another child/sibling/aunt, or kill off someone? Are the characters' actions and beliefs consistent with their time? Would they have known about this event at that time? Do the characters change and develop over the course of the book? Yet, despite this, are they also consistent and believable?

What words or sentence structures are overused? Is this a brand name, and is it spelled right? In a book set in a different time, which words are anachronistic? (For this I use a dictionary on historical principles.) What information is being repeated in narrative and dialogue, or in two different places? Which sentences or

paragraphs (occasionally even whole scenes) need cutting because they're dragging the novel to a standstill, and aren't telling the reader anything new or useful? Which scenes should perhaps be written from a different character's point of view?

What kind of point of view is being used, and should it be a different one? How many point-of-view characters are there, and should this be reduced or expanded? Do all the chapters start in the same place or time? Are there too many scenes in one setting? Are the flashbacks in the right place? Are they the right length, giving the appropriate amount of information? The list of possible things to consider is literally endless.

Sometimes I draw house plans or maps to ensure things work, and these get sent back to the writer to see if they match her vision. I wouldn't want to see her version, because the reader's not going to. But she needs to see mine to check that what she's written is what the reader is going to "see".

I also draw up a stylesheet for novels, which involves a chapter by chapter breakdown, lists of names and descriptions, clothing, vehicles, food, building descriptions, place names etc—anything that I may need to refer back to in order to be sure everything works out. Times, seasons and events all have to match up. This is particularly vital in novels with pregnancies, or ones that have a back story.

I try things out—such as getting a friend to float a shirt on her swimming pool to see how long it took to sink, or dropping matches onto a pile of newspapers to time how long it was before they caught fire. Some writers are meticulous and check things, but I know many don't, so I always do it just in case. Some writers actually hire me to do research, or track down experts they can later pump.

Basically, anything a reader might stop at, I try and deal with. The object of the exercise—and the reason we have grammar, syntax and punctuation rules—is to ensure that when a reader picks up your book she will stay inside that book and those characters' heads until she gets to "The End". Anything that jerks her out of that suspended state of disbelief and makes her say

"What?" or "Hang on, I'll have to read that again" is something that should have been fixed in the editing process.

This sometimes means I have to admit to possible stupidity, but then if I'm too dumb to get something, a lot of the book's future readers might be too. Occasionally this is useful for a writer if they're dealing with a subject they know very well. In the past my not being a Catholic, and not being Canadian or Australian has been useful to my writers, since if I don't understand something they know their readers also may not. Being part of the younger generation used to be useful; now I have to consult my kids and their friends, which they're all accustomed to. Maybe I'll eventually find being older useful!

### **Why not just get your best friend/mother/local English teacher to edit it for free?**

This can actually work—plenty of writers do have someone they know who has a good eye and will do that process for them. I teach online writing classes through NorthTec, and one woman doing the grammar and editing papers is being paid to do it by her sister, on the understanding that afterwards she's available as a free editor—and she'll be a good one. However, you need to choose your reader carefully, particularly if you're a romance writer.

You don't want a reader who'll dine out on your story later, or who'll get so wedded to their own ideas of where the story should go that they get upset when you ignore their well-meant advice. They may think all adverbs are a black sin, they may not notice subtle slips out of deep POV, and above all if they don't love and read romances they may fail to understand the almost coded language. Often they'll miss the whole point of the book.

I remember asking a friend's new fiancé for help with a boat scene I wasn't sure was working—I knew he was a boating nut because I'd heard about him teaching her to sail. I outlined the story to the new fiancé: villain has married heroine, is taking her out in the boat, and tosses her overboard at sea to get her insurance, but she'll survive and be rescued on deserted island by hero. Then I described the tossing bit. No, he agreed, it wasn't working. We started to work through ways to make it work.

"Actually," he said, "the best way is to wait till she's asleep in her bunk, hit her over the head to make her unconscious, and then throw her over."

"Yes, but she'll probably die," I pointed out. "This is a romance, and she's the

heroine, and this is the prologue, and there's a hero out on a deserted island who's going to find her."

"Yes, yes," he said, dismissing that as a mere triviality while my friend looked increasingly anxious, "but if you really want to kill her that's what you'd do."

So how do you choose your potential reader if you can't afford an editor? Talk to them about the books you've both read, analyse the plots and characters, and discuss the sentence and paragraph structures and rhythms. Find out if she has that good eye before you let her loose on your precious story—or you risk damaging both the manuscript and the friendship.

### **You've decided to bite the bullet and pay someone. How do you choose whether you want an assessment or an edit?**

In both an assessment and an edit what you're mostly getting is your first reader's critical eye. The assessor/editor should be asking the hard "Why?" questions. Why have you got your character doing/saying/thinking that? Why didn't he do something else? Often it can be infuriating for a writer to have someone ask those questions, because really the answer is "I needed them to do/not do that because otherwise my plot falls over." But dealing with the why questions and finding a way around them so they're answered in a satisfying way will usually make your book richer, deeper and more effective.

I can edit 2500-3000 words an hour, so you can see a manuscript of 100,000 words would involve a lot of work—and a lot of money. Assessing is cheaper, and may be more appropriate for an earlier draft. I can read for assessment purposes about 10,000 words an hour, and then there are a couple of hours on top of that to do the annotations and write the report.

If you expect to do a lot of rewriting, then editing may be a waste of money. On the other hand, some writers just get me to edit since they do their rewriting based on those edits. One organic writer who sends me a sometimes quite messy first draft says that hiring me saves her a month of time.

Sometimes I get combinations to do—e.g. to critique most of the book, which I might have seen before, but edit any scenes that are new. Once I was given the first three chapters of something new that was just not working, to see if I came to the same conclusion as the writer about why. (I did.)

Some beginning writers have used me as a writing teacher, where I explain all my changes in the margins so they can

learn the techniques/rules. This is particularly useful if the writer dropped out of school early and hasn't really got a grasp of punctuation and grammar. In one case the writer really didn't understand what a sentence was, so my first edit of her book was aimed as much at teaching her this sort of thing as "fixing" the manuscript. Normally I don't rewrite, but occasionally with a beginning or struggling writer I will, in places, to help advance their skills. However, I will try to ensure this writing is done within the writer's style.

Think carefully about what's most useful to you, and discuss it with the assessor. Ask as many questions as you like. And bear in mind that what's the right decision for this book at this time might not be the right decision for another book, or even for the same book further down the track.

The publishing market is increasingly competitive; a polished and well-presented manuscript is more likely to succeed. Lesley Marshall has been critiquing and editing fiction and non-fiction for more than twenty-five years. Lesley works for writers, helping to improve their manuscripts before they are sent to a publisher. References from published writers can be supplied.

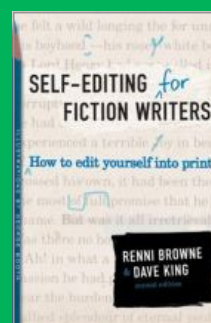
[www.editline.co.nz](http://www.editline.co.nz)

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## **ON EDITING AND EDITORS**

**There is a difference between a book of two hundred pages from the very beginning, and a book of two hundred pages which is the result of an original eight hundred pages. The six hundred are there. Only you don't see them.**

Elie Wiesel



Available from Barbara's Books  
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(*Stalking the Wild Editor...cont from page 1*)

agent search. You're not looking for any editor, you're looking for your editor. Once you've got your ranked list, you're ready to send in your manuscript starting with the name at the top.

Except not yet.

If you send an unrequested book to a publisher, it goes into the slush pile, the stack of unsolicited manuscripts that arrive at an editor's office every day. I've been in offices where these envelopes are stacked along the walls, reaching the ceiling and toppling over. When you consider that an editor has to meet with senior editors, junior editors, the marketing department, and a thousand other people, has to oversee ad campaigns and PR plans, has to placate agents and talk authors off ledges, has to negotiate contracts and sell books to the sales force at conferences and read submissions from authors under contract and then edit books she's already bought, that slush pile is not going to be high on her To Do list. Some houses just pitch everything when the stacks reach critical mass, others buy pizza for the editorial assistants and tell them to go through the envelopes as fast as possible, but nobody reads the slush pile with any real hope. I remember hearing that one house figured out they bought one manuscript for every thousand in their slush. It wasn't cost effective, so they stopped accepting unsolicited manuscripts. Yes, that's depressing—but not for you because you are going to skip right over the slush with your brilliant query letter.

A query letter is a selling tool: You're trying to show the editor that your book is new, different, exciting, and very, very commercial. You also want her to know that you picked her especially because you like her taste in fiction, because you loved the books she edited, because you want to work with her. You're selling not only your book, but also your enthusiasm for her in particular. And you're going to do it all in three short paragraphs, trying to keep the letter to one page, two at the most, because she's a busy woman and you don't want to waste her time. You have to grab her attention, make your point, and get out.

**Paragraph 1:** Establish a relationship with the editor by telling her how much you liked the book she edited (always tell the truth). Stress the things you liked that are similar to your story. Then tell her that you've written a novel and you'd like to send her the proposal. (Do not say you write

just like the author of the book—she's already got one of those—or that your book is better.)

**Paragraph 2:** Imagine that the editor is putting together a book ad or a pitch to the sales force and she's asked you for the copy. You want to sell the things that make your book stand out from the crowd, so show her the fascinating protagonist, the powerful antagonist, the riveting conflict, the irresistible setting, all in your captivating and unique voice. Write a blurb or a tagline that grabs her and that she can use to grab readers. Show her your expertise on the subject: If you've written a medical thriller and you're a doctor, mention it; if it's a book about a cooking school murder and you've been to cooking school, tell her that. Support it with other people's quotes; if you've got a friend who's a published writer or an expert in a field your book addresses and who will give you a blurb, put that in. Remember, the editor would love to publish a good book, but she needs to publish a book that will sell, so show

**A query letter is a selling tool:**  
You're trying to show the editor that your book is new, different, exciting, and very, very commercial. You also want her to know that you picked her especially because you like her taste in fiction, because you loved the books she edited, because you want to work with her.

her how commercial it will be.

**Paragraph 3:** Give her every way possible to contact you: SASE (self-addressed stamped envelope), e-mail, phone number, fax number, pony express, whatever. And thank her for giving you hours of pleasure with the book she edited (always tell the truth) and for considering your book.

If she likes the writing in your letter (it's your first writing sample, after all) and thinks the idea is marketable, it's easy for her to write "Sure, send the proposal" on the letter, and shove it in the SASE back to you, and you'll have hurdled the first barrier: You're out of the slush pile.

Now you have to write a proposal that will knock her socks off. A proposal has one big drawback: It's long. She may end up reading it on the train or on her lunch break or over the weekend, so it has to be excellent because she doesn't have time to waste on it. Therefore your proposal will have three brief parts: a cover letter, the first pages of your story, and a synopsis.

The cover letter is to remind her that she requested your ms and to refresh her memory on everything you put in your query letter. It's really a revamp of your query, this time thanking her for asking to see your work. Don't expect

her to remember your query—you would not believe how much stuff this woman reads—but make it different enough that she's not reading the same letter.

The second part of your proposal is the first thirty to fifty pages of your book (stop at the end of a scene). An editor can usually tell by the end of the first page if she's got a winner, so you have to have a great first page followed by a lot of other great pages. This is where you show her you can write a can't-put-it-down story. Do not say, "The beginning's a little slow, but it gets really good later." If the beginning is slow, there is no later.

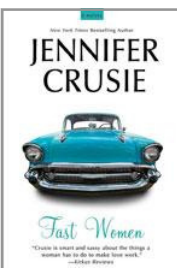
In particular, this writing sample tells the editor that you can:

- open a book with a strong hook that puts the protagonist on the page in trouble evoking the sympathy of the reader
- structure a scene (that is, there's a clear protagonist, the action rises in escalating tension, and the scene ends with a clear climax and transition)
- handle dialogue so that each character has a distinct voice and sounds real to the reader's ear
- pace action so that the tension rises from scene to scene, propelling the reader through the story
- establish and maintain your own unique voice throughout, the voice that will make you a bestseller
- make her want to read on so that she's sorry she doesn't have the rest of the book.

Thirty to fifty pages is a lot of pages, so make sure they're great pages that keep her reading.

The third part of your proposal is your synopsis, a summary of the story's events that shows the editor you can plot. Writing a synopsis is one of the hardest things to do in publishing, although it's a little easier to do after the story is done because that's when you can see it as a whole. The biggest mistake in synopsis writing is doing a ten page synopsis, nine pages of which tells back story and the first chapter, and the last of page of which says, "And then trouble ensues," so concentrate on telling the entire story giving equal emphasis to all parts. One way to do that is to write a paragraph for each chapter, assuming you don't have more than twenty or so chapters in your book. Another is to divide your book into acts, and write a page for each act (Establish, Build Stakes, Build Higher Stakes, Resolution). Another way is to write an outline using turning

(Continued on page 14)



(How to Critique Fiction...cont from page 9)

If the author did leave some conflict unresolved, did they indicate somewhere that future stories are pending?

#### D. SETTING

1. **Is there enough description of the background in the story to paint a picture that seems real enough for the reader?** Did you feel that you were transported to 'that time or place'?

2. **Was there too much description so modern readers might tend to become bored?** Was the description written with clichés?

3. **Did the author use good enough names for people, places, and things?** Names help set the tone for a story. Were some names of people hard to keep track of? Did some names seem inconsistent with the character? Were the names too stereotypical?

*"The reader would have a tough time imagining a two-fisted hero named Elmer Small, but James Retief comes across just fine as a hero in Keith Laumer's stories. Similarly, Bubbles La Toure is hardly the name of a saintly nun, whereas Modesty Blaise is a sexy and intriguing name for a female counterpart of James Bond."*—Ben Bova.

4. **Did the author convince you that people in that time or place would behave that way?**

5. **Is the timing and order of events in the story consistent?** For example, did John drive his new car on his vacation in chapter six but it wasn't until chapter ten that he bought it?

#### E. CHARACTERIZATION

1. **Did the people seem real?** Or were the main characters stereotypes or one-dimensional cardboard characters?

2. **Were the facts about the characters accurate and consistent?**

*"It's very important in building characters to make sure your 'facts' are accurate and consistent. If you mention in chapter two that your sister's birth sign is Leo, and then in chapter twelve, you have her celebrating her birthday during a snowfall (unless she lives at the north pole [or in the southern hemisphere]), credibility will be lost. Even if the reader doesn't key in on exactly 'what' is wrong with the picture, he/she will have a disquieting sense that 'something' is."*—Debra Littlejohn Shinder

3. **People do not exist in a vacuum.** They have family, friends, a job, worries, ambitions, etc. Did you get a sense of enough of these, but not too much, for the main characters?

4. **Did you get a good picture of the culture, historical period, location, and occupation of the main character?**

5. **Did you get enough of a sense of paradoxes within the character?** Enough of their emotions, attitudes, values?

6. **Backstory:** Were you distracted by too much background information of a character at one time? Did the author seem to dump a lot of information on the background of a character in one or two long speeches, or did we learn about that character here and there in smaller pieces?

7. **Did the protagonist undergo some change in the story?**

8. **Could the story have been improved by adding more details of the protagonist's or another character's reputation; stereotyped beliefs; their network of relations to other people; habits and patterns; talents and abilities; tastes and preferences; or physical description of their body?**

The key point is to get the reader to engage in a contract in which the writer offers:

*"I'm not going to show you everything in the character's head because that would spoil the story for you. Instead, I will reveal things as we go along but I promise that I won't cheat."*

Trevor Lawrence

9. **Does each chapter/page have enough sensory description?** Can the reader easily sense what is happening physically to the main character? Were there enough words of sight, sound, touch, smell, or taste?

10. **If the story used a person as the antagonist (villain), did they seem real too?** Or did they seem so evil or one-sided that they were more like ideal villains? Did they have some redeeming qualities too? Did the villain seem to be a hero in their own mind?

11. **Every reader has their own taste in how much characterization they like.** Did this story have too little or too much characterization for you?

#### F. DIALOGUE

1. **Did the words from the mouths of the people in the story seem consistent with their personalities?**

2. **Was there too much or not enough dialogue, in your opinion?** Usually writers err on the side of not enough dialogue.

3. **Did any character tend to talk in long monologues?**

4. **Were you able to sense the conflict, attitudes, and intentions of each character in their dialogue without the author telling you these directly?**

5. **Were you able to detect any**

Asking a writer what he thinks about criticism is like asking a lamppost what it feels about dogs.

John Osborne

**exchange of power that is sexual, physical, political, or social?**

6. **Did the dialogue seem easy to speak?** Can you 'hear' it? If it sounds unusual, you might suggest that the writer try reading it aloud.

7. **Does the dialogue seem *too much* like normal speech,** with too many incomplete sentences, pauses, restarts, profanity, clichés, etc. that it was distracting?

8. **Did the author use dialect that was too heavy, making it difficult to read?**

9. **Does each character have their own speech rhythm, accent (if necessary), vocabulary, and even length of sentences?**

10. **In an exchange of conversation, can you easily tell who is speaking if you didn't have their names or gender attached to their sentences?**

#### G. POINT OF VIEW

1. **Was a given chapter or section written from one person's point of view?** Are there too many points of view in the story?

2. **Did the story skip around between the first person or third person point of view (POV)?** Were the changes in POV signaled clearly? There is nothing inherently wrong in changing POV, as long as it is not done too often.

3. **If the story was written in the third person POV, as most stories are, did the story stick with the omniscient (all knowing) POV,** use a limited POV (where we don't know everyone's motives except by clues from their words or actions), or did the author mix the two? Did the author's choice seem right to you?

*"The key point is to get the reader to engage in a contract in which the writer offers: 'I'm not going to show you everything in the character's head because that would spoil the story for you. Instead, I will reveal things as we go along but I promise that I won't cheat.'"*—Trevor Lawrence

4. **When the POV changed, were you able to quickly sense who the new viewpoint was from?**

#### H. SHOW VERSUS TELL

1. **When in the POV of a character, did the author describe what his/her senses showed,** e.g., sight, sound, smell, touch, taste? Or did the author just tell you the dinner was very good?

(Continued on page 14)

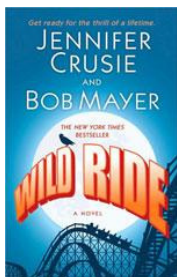
*(Stalking the Wild Editor...cont from page 12)*

points. Start with nine index cards. At the top write the following:

1. The Trouble Starts.
2. The protagonist makes a plan to cope with the trouble.
3. The Trouble Gets Worse.
4. The protagonist regroupes and presses on harder.
5. The Point of No Return: The protagonist has changed too much to go back.
6. The protagonist is pushed to the brink and struggles even harder.
7. The protagonist appears to have lost.
8. The protagonist fights on because there's nothing else she can do.
9. The trouble ends.

Now make notes under each of those points as to what actions take place that describe or result from that situation. Then write no more than a page, preferably half that, for each point. Remember, your synopsis is there to show an editor you can tell a story, so concentrate on events in cause and effect order, escalating to a climax. Don't stop to explain theme or back-story. Just show her the plot, writing it in your voice, using the synopsis as another opportunity to sell her on your writing.

So now you're ready to send it out, complete with another SASE. How long will it take to get an answer? Hard to tell. I'd say that after a month, you can e-mail and ask about it. At this point, it's a solicited manuscript, not slush, so a polite inquiry is completely within the



bounds of acceptable behavior. At six weeks, I'd say it's fine to drop the editor a line saying that you understand she's very busy, but that you're going to submit to another editor also and then move on to the next

name on your list.

So why not just submit to multiple editors to begin with? As long as you make it clear in the submission letter that you're sending the proposal to other editors, you can. The problem is that if you've written her to tell her that you're targeting her in particular because of the books she's edited, telling her you're submitting to other editors at the same time undercuts that by telling her that she's really not that special. And you do have to tell her if the proposal submitted is a multiple submission, that's just polite.

My personal stance on this is that it's a bad idea to be in a hurry to get published. Your concentration should be on writing the best book possible and then finding the best of all possible editors to publish it. If there's an editor who stands out for you, it makes sense to target her first, concentrating on her and letting her know that she's your first choice. You are not throwing your book at the wall to see where it sticks; you're looking for a publishing partner who will take care of you and your stories for a long time. Your goal is not to find any editor who will publish you, it's to find the right editor to publish you.

So if your first choice rejects you, regroup. Read the letter she sends, looking at any reasons she gave for rejecting you. If she didn't give any, you were just a completely bad match for her, so she's off the list, but if she gave you some pointers, look at your manuscript again. Do not make any changes just because she said to, but do look at the places she tripped in the story and see if there's something there that could be made better. And while you're doing that, study the next editor on your list and then send your query letter to her. You liked her a lot, too. You're not lying when you tell her that you think the books she edited are special, that's how she got on your list. Repeat until your book gets better or you write a new and better book to pitch, and an editor accepts you.

Yes, that's all probably going to take a long time. With any luck, your career will also be long. Getting it off to a good start with the right editor for you is worth the extra work because once you're published, the real nightmare starts, and you're going to want somebody to light a candle while you curse the bad cover, the nasty reviews, the late royalty check... but that's another column.

Take your time and search for the editor who understands you and loves your work. Just as in hiring an agent, you deserve nothing less. ♥♥♥

Written by Jennifer Crusie, this essay was originally published in *Romance Writer's Report*, August 2005.

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Jenny has written 15 novels and one book of literary criticism, edited two essay collections, and contributed over thirty essays to magazines and anthologies. Her work has been published in 20 countries.

Her work has earned a place on many bestseller lists including the New York Times, USA Today, Publishers Weekly, Wall Street Journal, Bookscan, Barnes & Noble, and Waldens.

Her education includes a BS in Art Education from Bowling Green State University, an MA in Professional Writing and Women's Lit from Wright State University, an MFA in Fiction from The Ohio State University. She is currently ABD on her PhD in Feminist Criticism from The Ohio State University.

Jenny was an undergraduate and graduate instructor at Antioch University, Wright State University and Ohio State University.

<http://www.jennycrusie.com/>

**He has the right to criticize,  
who has the heart to help.**

**Abraham Lincoln**

*(How to Critique Fiction...cont from page 13)*

**2. Did the author describe exactly how the people acted?**

**3. Was there too much abstract language** where specific details would have made a greater impact on the reader?

**4. Were there many instances of words like "very", "much", "really", "great", or "nice"** when a more detailed description would have been more colorful?

**5. Did we get the chance to interpret what the characters were**

**feeling or did the author just tell us directly?** For example, I once wrote:

"Two weeks later, after more hours than he cared to remember, Jet felt very, very tired" and let it go at that and missed the opportunity to describe his fatigue instead.

#### **I. FORMAT OF THE TEXT**

**1. Was it easy to read** or were the paragraphs too long or the lines too long (not enough margin)?

**2. Would it help to put blank lines between paragraphs?** If the piece is to be read on a computer monitor, adding

a blank line between paragraphs will make it much easier for your critics to read. Note: when you submit the final version to print publishers, it is best to adhere to their manuscript format (no blank lines between paragraphs).

#### **J. GRAMMAR AND SPELLING**

**1. Was the English readable?** Were there too many grammatical errors, misuses of punctuation, run-on sentences, etc.?

**2. Did you point out any typos or misspelling?** How many times have  
*(Continued on page 15)*



# Choosing the Right Dictionary



From “*cicisbeo*” to “*susurratio*”.

**Lesley Marshall of *Editline* highlights this essential tool of an editor's trade.**

**F**or most people, when they're stumped by a word "the dictionary" is what they consult. This doesn't work in my house because I own so many, and I use them the way a cook uses spices—the right one in the right place. Do you know the pleasures of using a new one? Its distinctive smell, the unfamiliar headwords that make looking up a word an exercise in distraction, and the joy of coming across a particularly satisfying one? Dictionaries are my passion as well as part of my livelihood. And they should be part of yours, too.

I own dictionaries for different countries, because I work for writers who either live there or are publishing there. So I have US, Australian, NZ and British dictionaries, and these include slang dictionaries for each country. Plus a slang thesaurus or three. Not to mention style manuals for New Zealand, Australia and the US.

When I work with writers from other countries whose dictionaries I can't access, I'm usually working on screen, so I change the default language and this is some help. After that I use the Oxford. Canadian spelling, I discovered, is an odd amalgam of British and US, and contained a few surprises. Some publishers stipulate which dictionary I'm to use; the first time HarperCollins sent me work I had to get a local bookshop to courier me the preferred dictionary since I didn't own a copy. I use it for their manuscripts, but no one else's because I don't really like it. It uses far fewer hyphens than most other dictionaries, which is why they prefer it, but it doesn't suit me.

Each time I buy a new dictionary—which I do at least every five years—there are two test words I use to check whether the coverage is comprehensive enough. If I can't find

them in it, the dictionary's too small. My words are *cicisbeo* and *susurratio*. *Susurratio*, in case you haven't met this wonderful word, was originally the sound of a taffeta dress brushing against the floor, but is now used for other things that have a similar whispering sound. *Cicisbeo* I used to mispronounce until I did a Latin course while my babies were little, and it refers to one of those sixteenth-century blokes who used to come into a lady's dressing room and watch/comment on the last stages of her dressing, and then escort her to parties that her husband was too bored to attend. I don't think her *cicisbeo* necessarily made love to her, but it undoubtedly often happened.

Unfortunately my rule of thumb for choosing dictionaries falls down when I'm updating my US ones—there don't

(Continued on page 20)

(How to Critique Fiction...cont from page 14)

you missed that in your writing because you passed over it without seeing it? Were there so many such errors that they made reading the piece difficult for you?

**3. Did the author use too many exclamation points (one of my weaknesses)?**

**4. Were there any clichés in the narrative?** For example, I once wrote "fruits of mother nature" and "thoughts burning in his mind", both of which are clichés. (In dialogue clichés are okay if the character would speak that way.)

**5. Did the author use melodrama?** For instance, I once wrote: "With tears in her eyes and barely able to speak, the head nurse dialed the Chief of Staff. There would be a lot of crying tonight." Can't you just hear the violins in the background?

## K. STYLE

You may wish to comment on the style the story was written in, e.g. humorous, wordy, sparse, literary, homespun, technical, etc.

## SOME TIPS

**A. Let the author know if this is not your favorite type of story.**

This may help them better understand

your viewpoint. Things you do not like in the story may very well appeal to a fan of that genre.

**B. "But don't be afraid to critique something, even if it's 'outside your genre'.** There are certain things that are important to *all* types of fiction, and any good writer/critiquer should be able to pick them out. I get some of my best critiques from people who 'never read science fiction'."—Joan Shapiro

**C. Read how other critiques are done.**

"I think reading critiques in general—perhaps about other unrelated stories—can help a new critic see how it's done. For example, I agree to critique a story—and because I don't know any better, I spout off personal preferences ("I don't like female heroines!" or "Do you really have to use religious imagery? Religion turns me off."—when those things may be central to the story and nothing more than my own tastes). Reading good critiques may help a newbie learn that a pro offers objective advice about more tangible problems (character development, grammar, advancing the plot, use of dialogue)."—Anthony Boyd

**D. Consider the target readers.**

Do you as a critic have a good idea of

the type of readers this author was writing for? Before you criticize something that you may not like personally, ask yourself: who are the readers this author wants to write for? Is this appropriate for that audience?

**E. Give your relevant experiences (optional).**

If you have some experience or knowledge that is very relevant to a comment of yours, you might mention it. For instance, when I found the description of a device in a computer to be in error, I pointed it out to the author, suggested an alternative that would be more plausible to computer sophisticated readers, and qualified my comments by telling her of my years of computer experience. By the way, she thanked me.

**F. Short stories versus novels.**

**1. When critiquing a short story, remember that every word must count.** Are there sentences and/or paragraphs that don't appear to contribute substantially to the story and maybe should be thrown out?

**2. Are there too many subplots?** In short stories, one subplot may be okay, but two or more is often just too much.

(Continued on page 17)



# Critique Notes

*How do you see what's in front of you?*

*Historical and suspense author **Grace Kone** gives her fifteen favourite keys to critiquing.*

**T**he following notes are created from ten years of judging four hundred RWA chapter contest entries, many years as a RITA judge, and twenty years struggling with my own work. My intent is to help you edit your own work, make you a better contest judge, and make you a better critique partner.

**1. Always find something good to say.**

**2. Encourage the author to develop his/her own voice** (i.e. don't try to superimpose your own).

**3. Yes, grammar, punctuation and spelling count.** That doesn't mean a fiction author has to use schoolroom English. Fragments, vernacular, natural dialog are all good. Keep in mind that romance pretty much ignores the academic semi-colon and colon. Most editors were English majors. Do you want them to be blown away by your book or wincing over your mistakes? I've found *The Blue Book of Grammar and Punctuation* by Jane Straus to be helpful.

**4. Don't use Storyteller mode.** This is that old bugaboo, Show v. Tell. I've seen a lot of contest entries where the author uses "storyteller" style to present their story. This is, in fact, the opposite of what romance readers want. They do not want someone sitting on the outside telling them a story. They want the author to show them the story through the eyes of the hero and heroine. They want to see what they see, hear what they hear, feel what they feel. They do **not** want to be told about it. They want to experience it.

It is harder to "show" than to "tell." It takes more effort, more words. **But** do not be afraid of "was" and "were." These words have been raised as such warning flags for "Tell" that some authors are terrified to use them at all. "Was" and "Were" are perfectly legitimate words. Yes, if an author has used a lot of them, he/she should probably see if they can find a more interesting way to say those sentences, but if not, it's not the end of the world. Many multi-published authors use these words all the time. So do not be a lazy judge and criticize an author for "was," "were," or any other so-called "Tell" buzzwords. Be more intelligent

than that. Judge the writing on whether it is Active instead of Passive, not on the kind of words the author used.

**5. Did the author put all the backstory in the synopsis and forget to put it in the book?** Always remember that only an editor or agent sees your synopsis. Everything you want the reader to know must be on the pages of the book itself.

**6. Character introduction.** Identify, identify. Not just the hero and heroine, but all secondary characters (with the possible exception of the second footman) need some sort of ID. Some physical description plus background information. Who is this person, what does he/she do? I so often see manuscripts that read: "Mary said" or "Lord Exmouth said," and the reader hasn't the slightest concept of who these people are. Without identification, characters become that fiction horror, "talking heads."

**Conflict is much greater than simple bickering. It's perfectly all right for a couple to disagree if there's ample reason, even better if it adds a touch of humor or true drama to the story. But don't let the h/h come across as rude and/or negative.**

**7. Set-up.** In a similar fashion, enough background must be given to make action in the story believable, whether it be a simple quarrel or a big plot-changing moment. Books where the hero or heroine are worried about some possible event that has never been described or explained sets readers' teeth on edge.

**Example of no set-up:** heroine is anguishing over some scandal involving herself, but at no time (over maybe 25 pages) does the heroine let the reader know what that scandal is. Always remember that readers need to understand what is going on. Save mysterious circumstances for a mystery or suspense plot.

**An example of good set-up:** leading up to an act of heroism, hints are given that the hero or heroine fears heights or water, etc. Then, when he/she rescues someone from a great height or in water, the heroic act is that much stronger.

**8. Point of View.** Just when I thought publishers were getting away from the old Hero, Heroine and maybe the Villain POV, conservatism is rearing its ugly head again. Simplicity seems to be the name of the game. Ten years ago, e-publishers were taking chances, publishing the mainstream-style books New York wouldn't accept from beginners. But in these hard economic times e-publishers have also cut back to bare bones—two POVs preferred, up to four if it's absolutely necessary, for the simple reason that one-on-one stories without the distraction of multiple POVs sell best. So any unpubbed author should be very careful about inserting too many POVs.

**9. Are the hero and the heroine hostile for no apparent reason?** A negative for both of them. Always counsel an author that this kind of thing is not "conflict." Conflict is much greater than simple bickering. It's perfectly all right for a couple to disagree if there's ample reason, even better if it adds a touch of humor or true drama to the story. But don't let the h/h come across as rude and/or negative. Readers want to empathize with them, root for them, love them. They can't do that if the two of them are acting like naughty children for no justifiable reason.

**10. Justify, justify, justify.** (In case you missed the point in #7). You can get away with almost anything if you can explain to your readers how such an incident or behavior came about. Romance plots are frequently "over the top." It's up to the author to find a way to make them plausible. You can't just write an outrageous action scene or situation and say to your readers, "Here it is, take it or leave it."

**11. Setting.** Has the author included enough setting to add color to each scene? Or has the author wimped out, using nothing but dialogue because it's easier? Is the author's story told against a rich background like a work by a famous artist? Or is the author's story told against a blank canvas? Is it set in nothing more than an unidentified room—the reader doesn't know if it's in the city or the country, the US, Europe, or China. Is it a single-family home? A condo? A gated community or the

*(Continued on page 18)*

(Finished The Damn Book? cont from page 9)

first half of the chapter in one character's POV and then switch the last half to the other character. Some do only one POV per chapter and then switch. Whichever way you choose, make sure it is done in a way that does not confuse your reader. A note here on secondary characters: it is fine to do a scene in a secondary character or two's POV. But don't go overboard. And above all, remember this is a story about the hero/heroine. You don't want secondary characters to take over.

GMC—Make sure your characters have goals, motivation for those goals, and conflict that impairs them from reaching their goals. This is the what, why, and how. Make them strong, believable and meaningful. If your GMC is not rock solid, your story won't be either. You don't want to have wishy-washy characters. If your characters are flaky, the reader will become frustrated. Characters can have more than one goal. Their goals can also change throughout the story as they grow and change. Don't forget your secondary characters! They need to have believable GMCs also. Don't forget conflict is both internal and external. What inside the character is keeping them from meeting their goal? What outside force is interfering?

Story Development/Setting/Plot/Characterization—Create a world, this is your setting. Make it interesting and unique. With this and your characters' GMC and Arc (how they grow and change), develop a story line. What if...? Develop your who, what, when, where, why. What is the black moment? What is the resolution?

Show vs. Tell—Instead of telling the reader your character is scared, describe it. How does this feel? What is happening inside the character? What are they thinking? Show us so we "see" it in our minds, rather than just being given a recap. As I said previously, a reader wants to experience a story. They want to visualize it as though they are watching a movie. Ramp up your sensory detail, paint a picture, get those gut-wrenching emotions pulled, thrill them. Show us what is happening through dialogue, action and reaction.

Active vs. Passive—Make sure your writing pops. Instead of saying "She felt sad." Say, "Despair clouded her mind." This goes hand in hand with show vs. tell. A passive writer tells the reader a story, whereas an active writer shows the story. Get rid of as many: saw, felt, feel, heard, look words as you can. Replace them with sentences that allow the reader to experience the story. Instead of telling the reader: "She saw a hundred troops lining the top of the

hill." Show: "At least one hundred mounted troops topped the hill. The sun glinted blindingly off the metal of their helmets. Their horses' hooves pawed and stomped the earth." Use the senses. Make sure your pacing isn't being bogged down by too many wordy sentences.

Dialogue—Use dialogue whenever possible to bring your characters to life. Dialogue shows the reader your character's personality, sets the tone for the scene, explains what is happening, shows reactions, shows us the character's unique beliefs, values, etc... It also shows us the personality/beliefs/reactions of other characters. Read your dialogue aloud to make sure it flows naturally. Don't overuse "he/she said" tags, and on the flipside, don't use too little. Whenever possible use an action tag. "Wow, I hate editing." She threw her pen down.

I hope these tips will help you with making sure your book is in tip-top shape! Take your time, and do it right. Don't rush the editing process—but don't take the next ten years to shape your book either. Try to do it in thirty days. If you make daily/weekly goals for your editing process, you will get it done in a much more orderly fashion. Always read through your book one more time before sending it in for submission—and better yet, see if you can have one or more people read through it, too.

Best of luck! Happy Editing! ♥♥♥

If you are interested in taking the *Edit Your Book in a Month* workshop, it will be offered online during:

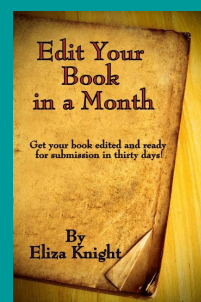
November 28—December 23, 2011: Hearts Through History Online <http://www.heartsthroughhistory.com/category/classes/>

Entire Month of February 2012: Maryland Romance Writers Online (registration from Dec/Jan) <http://www.marylandromancewriters.com/online-workshops/>

*Edit Your Book in a Month* is now also available in ebook and print! Check it out: <http://elizaknight.com/EditYourBookinaMonth.aspx>

Eliza Knight is the multi-published author of sizzling historical romance and erotic romance. While not reading, writing or researching for her latest book, she chases after her three children. In her spare time (if there is such a thing...) she likes daydreaming, wine-tasting, traveling, hiking, staring at the stars, watching movies, shopping and visiting with family and friends. She lives atop a small mountain, and enjoys cold winter nights when she can curl up in front of a roaring fire with her own knight in shining armor. Visit Eliza at [www.elizaknight.com](http://www.elizaknight.com) or her historical

blog, *History Undressed*, [www.historyundressed.blogspot.com](http://www.historyundressed.blogspot.com) which was recently mentioned in a feature article in The Wall Street Journal.



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And  
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<http://www.bookdepository.co.uk/Edit-Your-Month-Eliza-Knight/9781460968703>

(How to Critique Fiction...cont from page 15)

**3. Did the author go overboard on flashbacks?** Generally, in short stories, flashbacks should be used very sparingly.

**4. Novels, however, not only allow more room for expression, talk, details, and moods, but readers of novels expect more.** ♥♥♥

Victory Crayne is an Independent Editor, Writing Coach/Mentor, Ghostwriter, Public Speaker. Visit her website for details of her services.

<http://www.crayne.com/>

**Recommended reading:**

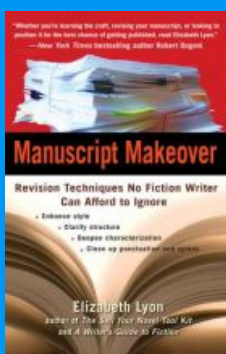
A. For fiction in general

1. "Characters and Viewpoint" by Orson Scott Card
2. "Creating Unforgettable Characters" by Linda Seder
3. "How to Write a Damn Good Novel" by James N. Frey
4. "How to Write a Damn Good Novel, II" by James N. Frey
5. "Art of Fiction" by John Gardner
6. "Becoming a Novelist" by John Gardner
7. "Writing the Breakout Novel" by Donald Maass

**Acknowledgements:** The author wishes to express sincere gratitude to the following people who have contributed valuable ideas to this document: Anthony Boyd, J. R. Lankford (Jilla), Trevor Lawrence, Pete Murphy, Christopher Olson, Joan Shapiro, and Debra Littlejohn Shinder.

Victory Crayne has provided detailed and high-level critique on novels as well as coaching on how to improve writing skills for millions of words for over 300 writers in the United States, Canada, Europe, Africa, the Mideast, Asia, Australia, and New Zealand.





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And  
 Book Depository  
<http://www.bookdepository.co.uk/Manuscript-Makeover-Elizabeth-Lyon/9780399533952>

From "THE FUMBERULES OF GRAMMAR"  
 by William Safire

1. Join clauses good, like a conjunction should.
2. Don't use no double negative.
3. Make each pronoun agree with their antecedent.
4. About them sentence fragments.
5. When dangling, watch your participles.
6. Verbs has to agree with their subjects.
7. Just between you and I, case is important too.
8. Don't write run-on sentences they are hard to read.
9. Its important to use your apostrophe's correctly.
10. Proofread your writing to see if you any words out.
11. Correct spelling is esential.

(Critique Notes continued from page 16)

ghetto? It doesn't take a lot to make a setting come to life, but the story is dead without it.

**12. Does the author have too many characters in the opening scenes?**  
 I've seen many a contest entry ruined by including so many characters that the hero and heroine were totally overshadowed.

**13. Plot.** You may wonder why I've put plot last. Frankly, it's because you can get away with almost anything if you take the time to justify it; i.e. give good reasons why this plot twist might be possible. Or so I thought until I read a couple of books recently that had me shaking my head. Yes, there's a limit to reader credulity. Try not to stretch it too far. If you're dealing with fairies or wizards, then waving a magic wand and having something totally incredible happen is okay, but otherwise, be careful you don't strain readers' "suspended disbelief" too far. As in #10 above, justify, justify, justify!

**14. Recommend a book** if you think an author could benefit from reading one that's helped you, or one you know helped others.

**15. Find something nice to say.**  
 Again! ♥♥♥

Gracie Kone writes as both Blair Bancroft and Daryl Parke. She writes historical romance and suspense.

Grace has always been interested in

assisting beginning authors, and she's decided to create an editing service that will help authors put their Best Foot Forward. 'My primary aim is to reach out to romance and mystery authors, but other projects will be considered upon request.

**Professional Qualifications:** For twenty years before I began to write fiction, I was editor of an educational publishing company (which guarantees my spelling, punctuation and grammar are rock solid!) I am the author of sixteen published romance novels and one mystery. I'm a RITA finalist and Golden Heart winner. My first Regency for Signet was declared "Regency of the Year" by Romantic Times magazine. I've received a "Best Romance" award from the Florida Writers Association and twice finaled in EPIC's Eppie awards. I am a member of RWA and Mystery Writers of America. In addition, I've been a "published author" judge for approximately four hundred RWA contest entries over the last ten years. My favorite thank-you note was the one that said my score was the lowest of the three judges, but the author had learned the most from my comments. I plan to continue this attention to detail and the desire to be helpful into my return to professional editing. **Note:** I do not do re-writes. I point out errors, make suggestions. You do the re-write. It's your book.

For a brochure with details on prices for copy edits, critiques, editing, and Beta reads, please contact Grace at [editsbyBFF@aol.com](mailto:editsbyBFF@aol.com)

<http://www.blairbancroft.com/authorscorner.htm>

(A Successful Synopsis...cont from page 5)

vision of her father in the Beast's magic mirror; he's lost and gravely ill. The Beast insists she must leave the castle and find him.

Belle finds her father, takes him home, and tends to him but is plagued by the local villagers who wish to have proof of the Beast's existence. Belle shows them his image in the magic mirror. Terrified at the thought that such a monster lives nearby, the villagers rally to storm the castle, intent upon killing the Beast. Belle and her father follow, hoping to stop them.

The Beast, meanwhile, is devastated at Belle's loss for it means that he will remain a beast for the rest of his life. The villagers arrive, but he plans no defense, surrendering to what fate has in store for him. However, when he sees Belle has returned to him after all, he fights back, too late.

One of the villagers stabs the Beast, and as Belle watches in horror, the Beast sinks to the ground. She cradles his head in her lap, and the two profess their love for one another without a moment to spare. Just as the words, "I love you," leave Belle's lips, the Beast

closes his eyes. But in the next instant, shooting stars explode around them as the Beast's body is lifted high in the air by a magical force. Before Belle's very eyes, he is transformed into a handsome prince, alive, well, and still very much the creature with whom she's fallen in love.

At last, Belle has had her adventure, and the Beast has regained his true self. Shortly thereafter, the two are married and plan a beautiful future together in their castle."

Behold! We've just condensed a two-hour movie into a page and a half of facts. Grand total: 458 words. Not bad.

Notice that in my synopsis, I do not mention Gaston or the enchanted servants. While these characters may be important to the inner workings of the story, **they do not affect the relationship between the hero and the heroine.**

In a synopsis of a romance manuscript, the relationship between hero and heroine is all that matters. It's easy to get bogged down in details if you allow it; Gaston's plans for Belle's father, or the quaint characters of Lumiere, Mrs. Potts, and Cogsworth. They might add

danger or charm to the tale, but secondary characters are not required elements of the romance, and their inclusion in the synopsis should be kept to a minimum.

And there you have it. Wouldn't David Letterman be proud? Now, ask these questions of your own work, write the answers into a present tense summary and snap! You've got your synopsis. Give it to your child; it's a book report. Fold it into three triangular columns and it becomes a paper airplane. Any way you look at it, it's just that simple.♥♥♥

Gina Ardito is the author of more than ten books in contemporary romance (and historical romance under the pseudonym, Katherine Brandon). As founder of Dunes & Dreams RWA, the Eastern Long Island Chapter of Romance Writers of America, she served as its first president. Since she loves to share her passion for romance writing with others, she is a frequent speaker for libraries, book clubs, and RWA chapters, including the RWA National Conference. Online, she hosts workshops on everything from the basics of fiction writing to the secrets of body language. For more helpful tips and writing articles, visit her website: [www.ginaardito.com](http://www.ginaardito.com)

# RWNZ News Around the Regions

*Keeping in touch with each other.*

## AUCKLAND

Twenty-two people attended our Auckland Chapter meeting. Karina Bliss gave us an inspiring talk on 'Wrestling with the WIP.' We will all remember "I am devoted to the work" for our starting mantra in the future. Barbara Clendon also gave us valuable insight on what's hot in the publishing field right now. Susan Napier is our guest speaker for November. Her topic is "Love Words." The date will be Saturday 5 November at the Three Kings Tennis Club Rooms, 12.30 to 3.00pm. Bring your coins for the raffles and do let me know of your successes in case I miss the news. It's inspirational for us all to share members' good news at our meetings. ♥♥♥

## CENTRAL NORTH C2C

Our October meeting saw record attendance with eighteen members. Thanks to our hostess, Elise Penning, and her husband Ruben—a hero, who took the three little ones out to the park for the afternoon. What an intro to RWNZ for our first-timer-hostess and meeting attendee, Elise. Hope you enjoyed it! We had one other new member attending her first meeting—welcome to Vivienne Jones, also from Hamilton. And welcome back to re-joining member Sandra Toornstra. From the chat and high-jinks at the meeting I'd say C2C is in very good heart and even better spirits.

Tyree Connor's workshop on 'Pace' was well received and informative. Thanks, Tyree, for the ice-breaker start: T had us moving outdoors to the back lawn, and lining up to pinpoint where we put ourselves on the spectrum regards the level of sensuality in our writing. There was lots of enthusiasm and discussion on the topic—we range from Sweet to Triple-XR! And write across the genres.

Our Christmas and last meeting for the year, is to be held on the Awhitu Peninsula (4th, 5th, and 6th of November). Liz Heywood and Linda Dawley are our hostesses. Liz and Linda have a great couple of days lined up for us. Daphne Clair is giving the main workshop on the 5th (so there is bound to be fireworks), there will be a pot luck Christmas style luncheon, and Gracie O'Neil will take the main workshop on Sunday. There will be prizes and surprises! For more info email [liz.heywood@gmail.com](mailto:liz.heywood@gmail.com) or [misslindy@clear.net.nz](mailto:misslindy@clear.net.nz)

2012 is just around the corner and I don't see the pace or size of C2C meetings decreasing. Happy and successful writing to us all. ♥♥♥

## HAWKES BAY

If anyone would like to join the Hawke's Bay Group please contact Ginny at [ginny.suckling@xtra.co.nz](mailto:ginny.suckling@xtra.co.nz). ♥♥♥

## WELLINGTON

Fourteen of us had a lively October meeting at Meryl's, with plenty of discussion about the work we're doing after pitches and requests from conference. Work read out included the start of a haunting new story from Bernice and a synopsis from Bron and most of one from Kris. Meryl read part of her Italian story—which started a discussion on male and female POV.

Next meeting is 1pm, Saturday November 5th at Meryl's. Please bring no more than 250 words written in female POV—plus the same scene rewritten in male POV. Now that's a challenge! ♥♥♥

## CHRISTCHURCH

Xmas holidays are only weeks away and next year's competitions will soon be here. Come along and discuss what you are writing, or ask for input on your writing problems. Don't be shy! We are really nice people. If you're feeling brave bring along some pages to read aloud. Whether you are writing or plotting, or just want a chat with like-minded people, the next meetings will be on Monday 14 November and 12 December at 7.00 pm. ♥♥♥

## OTAGO

Though busy lives again prevented us from meeting in person last month, we did keep in touch via email. And we are still writing. Several of us are currently editing finished manuscripts, and Brian entered the M&B New Voices Contest. We're determined to get together for a lively catch up meeting on Saturday, 5th November. Please contact Viv for further details. ♥♥♥



## REGIONAL CONVENORS

**Auckland:** Pamela Gervai  
email: [pamela@petware.co.nz](mailto:pamela@petware.co.nz)

**Central North (C2C):**  
Gaylene Atkins  
email: [ada.farms@xtra.co.nz](mailto:ada.farms@xtra.co.nz)

**Hawkes Bay:** Ginny Suckling  
email: [ginny.suckling@xtra.co.nz](mailto:ginny.suckling@xtra.co.nz)

**Wellington:** Leeanne Morgan  
email: [morgan.leeann@clear.net.nz](mailto:morgan.leeann@clear.net.nz)

**Nelson:** Annika Ohlson-Smith  
email: [allan-annika@xtra.co.nz](mailto:allan-annika@xtra.co.nz)

**Blenheim:** Iona Jones  
email: [iona.jones@xtra.co.nz](mailto:iona.jones@xtra.co.nz)

**Christchurch:** Jill Scott  
email: [scotts@snap.net.nz](mailto:scotts@snap.net.nz)

**Otago:** Viv Adams  
email: [whitecliffodge@xtra.co.nz](mailto:whitecliffodge@xtra.co.nz)

## ON EDITING

For I am a bear of very little brain  
and long words bother me.

Winnie the Pooh

## Here Comes The Judge!

Have you ever thought about volunteering as a judge for one of RWNZ's great contests but been put off because you weren't sure about the judging process? Are you already a judge but would like a bit of a refresher? Well, we have the answer for you. RWNZ's Judge Training Scheme is now underway.

By enrolling in the scheme, not only will you receive some great guidelines on how to score, what to score, what to look for and what not to look for, but you'll also get a chance to study some pre-judged samples to see how it's done. After that, it will be your turn to have a go at judging a sample piece of writing in a non-competitive environment and you'll get feedback to let you know how you went. So, how about it? Ready to give it a go?

If so, then email the Judge Training Coordinator at

[rwnzjudgetraining@gmail.com](mailto:rwnzjudgetraining@gmail.com)

To communicate, put your words in order;  
give them a purpose;  
use them to persuade, to instruct, to discover, to seduce.

William Safire



(Choosing the Right...cont from page 15)

seem to be the choices with Webster, and I find most of the editions infuriatingly inadequate. If I'm working on a US manuscript I use the Webster as a base, but have to supplement it with what I call a "real" dictionary. One publisher's editor, for instance, changed a writer's susurating stream into a gurgling one, to our horror—it doesn't have anything like the same sound—but when we checked the edition of the Webster that we knew the editors used we discovered the word wasn't there. I really don't know how those editors manage with such a deficient tool.

If you write historical fiction you will need a dictionary on historical principles. These dictionaries have dated quotes for each word, starting with the first recorded written use and working up to the present day, or whenever the word dropped out of use. This means you can work out if the word could have been used by your character, and the precise meaning it had at that time. There, again, you can get surprises. I was going through one historical book and checking even the words used in narrative since the writer had high standards, just to make sure they were current at the time. I nearly didn't look up *sibling*, since it sounds oldish and Latin, but to my surprise (and the writer's!) it turned out to have been coined too recently to be used in a book set in the 1840s. So don't take anything for granted.

The dated quotes are also useful if you're not sure about a particular use of a word, or its placement in an unusual sentence structure. Occasionally they're my best way of checking whether a writer really can get away with using a word in an unusual way.

My ultimate dictionary, the one I consult when the others fall down, is a micrographed version of the 13 volumes of the Oxford. I originally had the Shorter Oxford, but the two volumes drove me nuts—whichever one I picked up first was wrong, and two heavy books are hard to share a working space with when you already

have the ms plus a regular dictionary and stylebook at hand. It also didn't have enough words. So I upgraded to another two-volume version that had four times as many words since each page displayed four original pages from a reduced version of the Oxford, reduced to small but readable print. But there was still the problem of there being two volumes to manhandle.

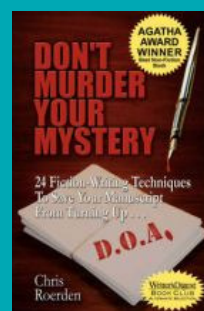
Then one day in Australia (Surfer's Paradise, believe it or not) I saw the micrographed 13 volumes in one single volume, something I hadn't known existed till then. It was on a top shelf, and I only got Don Kingston to get it down for me so I could fondle it. But then I discovered it was actually affordable—about \$NZ300 I think, from memory. Not much more than I'd paid for the other, and this one contained every word in the English language. Unfortunately that was 1993 and it's getting a bit out of date now, but I can't afford to upgrade yet—it would be over \$1000 now. It's got minute print—there are nine regular pages on each page—and some people can't read it, but it does come with a large magnifying glass that includes a light. For years I never bothered with that, just removed my long-distance glasses to read the print, but about a year ago I discovered I often need the magnifying glass, to my intense irritation.

It does weigh a ton since it's larger than A4 size and has over 2300 pages, which means it's too cumbersome and heavy to consult on my lap. But I'm sure the children's muscles have benefited from lugging it around—if I could only take one dictionary on beach trips, etc it had to be this one, and for years my ME meant I couldn't carry it so the kids got the job. (It's also a superb footstool at marae workshops if my feet won't reach the floor.)

All in all it's a great dictionary, and if you can justify the expense I recommend it. It not only has my two test words, it includes an extra meaning for *cicisbeo* (a ribbon tied onto the cavalier's sword hilt or walking stick, presumably belonging to the lady in

question). And then there are all the other delightful words normal dictionaries don't have room for—words like *kennedy* (a blow inflicted by a poker) and *ventureling*, which means just what it sounds like (a young adventurer). I think I have a long-term love affair with this book—and I suspect there's going to be blood on the floor when I upgrade and have to choose which of the needy children will get to give it a new home! ♥♥♥

**Lesley Marshall runs Editline, a freelance editing service in Northland. She has over 30 years' experience in editing and assessing general fiction, short stories, thrillers, romances, historical novels, women's fiction, SF/fantasy, plays, government documents and family histories, plus other oddments like the rules for card games. She has worked as an outside assessor for the NorthTec and Whitireia Polytechnic writing programmes, and she is currently teaching online writing and editing papers for NorthTec. She regularly works for NZSA as a mentor, assessor and appraiser. She is also the NZSA Coordinator for PEN (the part of NZSA that works like Amnesty International to help writers in prison). She periodically acts as judge in writing competitions, for both NZSA, the Rawene Book Festival and Romance Writers of New Zealand. She is a member of the NZ Association of Manuscript Assessors.**



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<b>Principal Contest Co-ord:</b> Viv Constable <a href="mailto:vconstable@xtra.co.nz">vconstable@xtra.co.nz</a>	<b>Judging Enquiries:</b> Kamy Chetty <a href="mailto:kamychetty@yahoo.com">kamychetty@yahoo.com</a>	<b>Founder:</b> Jean Drew (RWNZ founded Sept 1990)		