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Leeann Morgan

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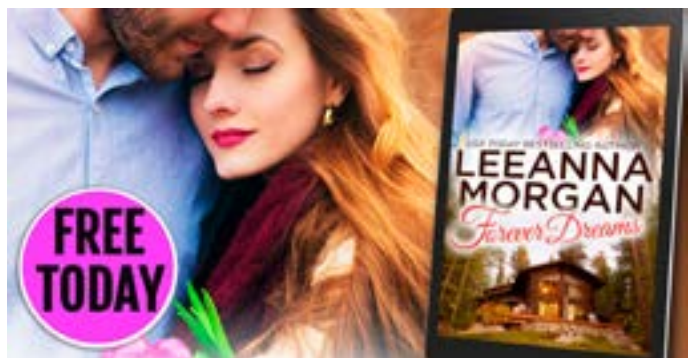
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★★★★★
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LEEANNA MORGAN
SEALED WITH A KISS
BEST SELLING AUTHOR
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[Leeanna Morgan](#) is a USA Today bestselling author. She lives on the Kapiti Coast surrounded by green hills on one side and the ocean on the other. She enjoys going for long walks, especially if she can convince her husband and two children to go with her!

Leeanna writes contemporary romances set in Montana. Her books contain all of the things that are important to her; good friends, family, a strong sense of community, and a happy ending.

Main Character and Love Interest: Inclusive Language and Romance

Jamie Sands



I've been thinking for most of a week on how to frame this article so that it's easy to understand, because I think if you haven't been through the whole coming out process you don't know how vulnerable it is, how othering it can become even if no one is doing it on purpose. Even if there hasn't been any outright aggression against you. So please, indulge me for a moment in a game of make-believe.

Here we go. Imagine, for a moment, that you are a kiwi, born and raised in New Zealand (shouldn't be too hard to imagine, I hope.)

You, a kiwi, are excited about going to a conference, and when you get there you meet a few of your fellow kiwis and celebrate your shared love of writing and sharing stories.

When you get there someone greets you. "Oh, you're Australian!" someone says, and you politely correct them.

"Uh, no, I'm a kiwi," you say.

"Oh, my mistake, so sorry," the person says. It's a bit of a weird moment but it passes.

At one of the talks you go to someone says that the only kinds of romance - as we all know - are about Australians falling in love.

You feel a bit weird about it, because you - a kiwi - would rather tell stories about kiwis falling in love. But you're hardly going to interrupt a conference speaker to do it.

Later someone asks you about what Australians falling in love story you're going to write. You should correct them, right? But it's starting to get wearying.

At a craft workshop, which has a lot of brilliant stuff in it, you keep grating when the speaker talks about the Australians in your story. Obviously you're going to be writing about Australians. Historically, Australian romances are big sellers. If you want to make money, you'll write about Australians, it's just common sense.

One of the leads will be from New South Wales and one will be from Queensland, right?

You notice a lot of the people in the audience are nodding along - this is a known fact. You start to feel like the weird one, because you write about Kiwis.

On the drive to the airport, the taxi driver mentions that you're Australian and after three days of the conference you can't be bothered to correct him. What's the point? It'll be awkward to tell him now, and like, you're never going to see him again? Why not just let him think you're Australian.

Kiwis aren't really that different to Australians, right? It's not bad to be mistaken for one. It's just not who you actually are.

... you might have worked out by now that I'm not really talking about Nationalities.

I'm talking about sexual orientation and the assumption of heteronormativity in romance writing. Also about gender absolutism, but we can tackle that later.

I write queer romances, I'm a queer author, and I want to write about men falling in love with men, women who love women, genderqueer, trans and non-binary people finding love and all sorts of non-hetero pairings.

So when people frame their writing tips as 'your hero will think and speak like this, but your heroine will be more like that' I'm reminded that I'm not in the majority of writers.

I know there's a big history of male/female romance, I'm aware that it's the biggest seller. I'm also constantly bombarded with straight love stories in almost every movie I see, most of the books I have on my shelf, and just walking down the street on a busy day. Straight love is everywhere.

But it's not the only kind of love.

There is a small but strong group of writers in New Zealand who write queer romances, and we like to come to conferences and learn and be inspired. But again we're bombarded with the language of straight love.

Just like how a lot of the world assumes I'm straight and that the ring on my finger means I'm married to a man. Because one thing I didn't realise before I had to do it, was that coming out is a constant action. It's not a once and done thing like in a movie, it's every time you meet someone new. Even a taxi driver.

As writers of romance, either long experienced or just starting, the default language of love we have been taught is straight. A heterosexual Hero and a heterosexual Heroine, falling in love, having a HEA, and that's just the default. And that sucks. It is being constantly reminded we're different, and with that reminder comes a sense of 'not welcome' that you start to feel as well. If you're aware that most people aren't like you, it's hard to feel comfortable or like you belong. It's hard to raise your hand in a conference and ask for advice when you have two heroines or explain that you are not pitching because none of the agents rep those kind of romances.

Romance likes to argue that it is progressive, that it moves with the times and is on the forefront of culture. We will jump on anyone who describes our work at 'bodice rippers' or 'mommy porn'. Where romance goes so goes publishing, eventually. And yet, despite the ever-growing numbers of queer romance books, authors, and





readers, the language we use to teach our craft (as well as many of our ideas about gender) remains heavily rooted in the past.

So, here's my pitch for a solution: when you talk about craft, consider making just a tiny change to the language you use.

Instead of hero and heroine, consider saying Main Character and Love Interest. That's it. Two extra syllables and your talk, or blog post, or rant at the judgmental in-laws becomes that much more inclusive and welcoming.

Or try lead and secondary lead, or protagonist and romantic prospect.

MC and LI is a really good shorthand.

These are all pretty common terms which are already in some use.

It's a little change that can make a world of difference to those of us who aren't straight, aren't writing straight, or just don't quite fit into the existing default.



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Jamie is a non-binary kiwi who's always been wondering 'what if'? They write stories about queer people, love, monsters and ghosts and how the world could be. Jamie grew up in Wellington but now lives in Auckland with a wonderful wife and a round cat.

Seven Elements a Developmental Editor Will Look for in Your Romance

Kathy Swailes



A developmental editor of fiction will always look at the parameters which are essential to all fiction, regardless of whether you're writing a stand-alone or a series, a novella or the follow-up to War and Peace. However, editing a romance is different from other fiction genres as there are rules a romance must adhere to. You can break those rules, but then you must decide whether your story is truly a romance, or whether it's more appropriate to call it 'literary', or 'women's fiction', or even 'chick lit'. It's your story, so you write it the way you choose, but if you're wanting to appeal to the romance-reading public, and especially if you want to publish with a traditional romance publisher, you've got to be aware of the following seven aspects.

Does it have a Happy-Ever-After (HEA) ending?

An HEA is one of the two absolute requirements for a story to be a romance. Whether you're writing a sweet romance, hot and steamy erotica, an urban, cowboy, billionaire prince, supernatural or sci-fi alien love-fest, it must have an HEA or, at least, a Happy-For-Now (HFN) ending. If it doesn't, it's not a romance!

Have you created two or more compelling protagonists?

The essential nature of a romance is that two (or more if it's a ménage story) people (or creatures, not to offend sci-fi and supernatural writers) will fall in love against all odds. The odds being whatever prevents them from believing they can fall in love. Bear in mind that whatever





they believe, the plot line will throw obstacles in their paths. The characters who will fall in love by the end of your story must be fleshed out thoroughly, and we must be able to see the relationship tangle through their eyes. While we don't necessarily have to like the protagonists, we must be captivated by them. The reader must want to observe how they behave, otherwise they won't read any further. Questions about your protagonists: is it evident that he/she is larger than life? Someone who can't be held back? Someone who is very rich, or foreign, or alien in some way, or a shape-shifter, or a seeker of forbidden fruit? And so on. Is he/she someone the reader aspires to be like, or feel superior to, or wants to understand better? Whatever your protagonist is like, and whatever feelings or questions they arouse in the reader, they mustn't be boring.

Have you hit all the romance beats?

A must-read for any romance author is *Romancing the Beat: Story Structure for Romance Novels* (Gwen Hayes: 2016). Gwen has broken down romance into twenty essential beats or aspects that a romance story must contain. The beats fit well into the typical three-act plot structure: Act I – set up and incitement; Act II – escalating obstacles and final crisis leading to despair; and Act III – the finale with the climax and resolution. Each act is further broken down into component parts, without which your romance will wallow in self-pity. Or in simpler terms: two people meet who can't or won't fall in love, but like each other; they're forced together somehow, start getting to know each other, and then with successive events reassess themselves and their potential love partner/s – but just as they get the hang of falling in love, they're thrown apart at the end of the second act in a manner that seems irreparable. In Act III they realise what they've lost. A huge and glorious effort is undertaken to prove their love to the other(s), and it's reciprocated. The resolution is their HEA or HFN.

Is the switch from 'I can't/won't fall in love' to 'I love you' believable?

So you've given your book to a beta reader or two and they've told you, yes, they like the story, and yes, they accept your characterisation. But they just don't believe that one or both the protagonists could turn around from their starting position (e.g. 'never again'/'no one could ever love me'/'it's biologically impossible between alien races/mortal enemies') and they fall in love. That's a problem. The story has to be believable within its context. As a developmental editor I would immediately analyse Act II, which should be roughly the middle half of your book (Acts I and III being the 25 per cent before and after). Act II is where you should be changing your protagonists' perceptions about themselves and their potential love partner(s). There must be events within your plot that make the reassessment not only possible, but probable. Try to imagine what would make you change your mind, given the events of your plot. Dialogue alone is not sufficient; there must be physical acts or scenes where

your protagonists can observe for themselves that their preconceptions don't hold water.

Are your highs and lows extreme enough?

So now there's the transition from the black moment or crisis at the end of Act II into the climax of Act III. But why does it happen? If the crisis is black enough to be apparently irreparable, why does one protagonist (at least) decide to do the impossible and try to repair the rift? Incidentally, if the crisis isn't irreparable, then it's not a true crisis moment and needs to be made still darker.

The reason must lie in the love-building of Act II. The high points within the second act must be high enough and each one must be higher/better than the previous one, to build the tension. So much so that the protagonists will realise after the crisis that what they had was the best thing ever. If the highs and lows aren't sufficiently extreme, the reader either won't believe the turnaround in the protagonists' perceptions, or they simply won't care – and probably won't even get to the third act.

Does your romance sub-genre plot work around the romance arc?

Few stories are just romance. There has to be a plot that's external to the romance arc, to create the setting in which the romance can take place. This is the sub-genre, such as sweet boy/girl next door, the element of suspense, the supernatural, fetishism or BDSM, dystopian or fantasy worlds, the historical or the aspirational. Whatever the setting or the world you create, there must be an associated plot woven through the romance arc. Often the external plot arc and the romance arc coincide, but they don't have to. Nevertheless, both the romance plot and the external plot need to be developed as complete arcs, with nothing left hanging unresolved, in mid-air.

If you write an epilogue, is it too trite?

And finally, the resolution or epilogue. A romance must have a happy ending, but to make your protagonists fascinating from the outset, they must have flaws. Just because they've overcome their self-imposed prohibitions against love doesn't mean that they've become perfect. That would be boring, trite, and unbelievable for your reader. Your editor will look at the resolution to see whether your characters' traits still shine through in the ending – but in a manner compatible with their future happiness together.

You need compelling protagonists, an HEA or HFN ending, all the romance beats including extreme highs and lows, a romance arc from 'I can never love you' to 'I'll always love you', another arc that's external to the romance plot, and a satisfying resolution.

But all these features of your romance must be authentic, so above all, and with every element of your story, you must have believability. Keep writing, and enjoy your creative process!





This article was originally written and published at [BetterWrite.com](https://www.betterwrite.com), a network of fiction editors who are members of the Society for Editors & Proofreaders. To learn more about the members of SfEP, you can view their directory here: <https://www.sfep.org.uk>



I've been fortunate to have lived in several countries and to have worked in some very disparate industries, giving me the opportunity to draw from a broad knowledge and experience base when working on my editing projects.

Prior to qualifying as an editor and proofreader, I worked in scientific research when I attained a doctorate in metabolic biochemistry, with concomitant scientific publications to my name. After qualifying, I worked in data management, market research and b2b pharmaceutical marketing. Later, I qualified as a personal trainer and sport's therapist and worked in the fitness industry for eleven years.

After gaining my Diploma in Editing and Proofreading, I thought to focus on medical editing and other non-fiction publications including health & fitness, nutrition, and other life science associated documentation. Whilst I can still do this, I discovered that editing fiction is where my heart lies. I thrive on fiction editing and have turned my career to all types of editing for fictional material.

Top Tips to Improve Your Manuscript: Structure

Iola Goulton



I presented a workshop on Ten Top Tips to Improve Your Manuscript at the RWNZ conference in Christchurch (which was brilliant, by the way. Thanks, team!).

This article is the first in a series covering the information I shared in my workshop. These tips have been gleaned from my work assessing and editing fiction. These aren't the only issues I see. But they are the issues I see most often.

One common mistake is structure.

Most successful fiction follows the traditional three-act structure, which dates back to Aristotle. Consciously or subconsciously, readers expect a novel to follow the three-act structure.

ACT ONE

Act One should comprise between 20% and 25% of your word count. It:

- ♣ Starts with an opening hook, something that draws the reader into the story.
- ♣ Introduces the protagonist, antagonist and other major characters.
- ♣ Presents the time and setting.
- ♣ Includes a change that pushes the main character into the story (often called the inciting incident).

Act One usually ends with an event that changes the character's plans.

ACT TWO

Act Two is between 50% and 55% of the manuscript. It develops the conflict and deepens character relationships:

- ♣ The first half of Act Two shows rising action, with the main character reacting to events around them.
- ♣ The main character faces a turning point somewhere near the middle. This forces them to change from reactive to proactive.
- ♣ The action continues to escalate in the second half of Act Two, with the main character driving some or all of the action.
- ♣ The Act finishes with a major crisis or discovery.

A clear turning point at around the halfway mark will help prevent or eliminate the "saggy middle".

ACT THREE

Act Three should be around 25% of the manuscript. It includes:

- ♣ The black moment or the dark night of the soul, where the main character thinks all hope is lost.
- ♣ The climax, where the main character is victorious (or defeated. Personally, I prefer victorious).
- ♣ The resolution, which ties up loose ends, except for those that will be covered in a sequel.

These percentages are suggested guidelines, but straying too far from them will mean that the plot drags in some places and feels rushed in others:

If a film or book seems to drag, it's usually because it is off structurally. (James Scott Bell, Revision and Self-Editing for Publication, Second Edition, Writer's Digest Books, 2012, p62)

Yes, there are exceptions—The Luminaries by Eleanor Catton springs to mind—but structure is one of the many areas where writers have to understand the rules in order to break them. Otherwise, we're liable to produce a slow and unfocussed story.

One of the most common structure mistakes I see is that Act One is too long (say, 35%–40%). This is usually because the author has included too much unnecessary backstory. The result is a story that drags in the beginning, and feels rushed towards the end.

Some writers don't like the idea of working to a defined



Write With Love

structure. They say it feels formulaic. Yet formulas (formulae?) work. Take baking as an example. A chocolate cake is made to a formula—a recipe—and leaving out the chocolate will mean disappointing the person who expected a chocolate cake. We don't want to disappoint our readers.

Entire books have been written on structure. Some follow the traditional three-act structure, and some have four or more acts. But even these tend to be variations on the three-act structure:

- ♣ The four-act structure breaks Act Two in two at the halfway point.
- ♣ Michael Hauge's six-stage structure breaks each act in two, with the first and last acts being 1%–10% each.

RESOURCES

Here are some of my favourite resources on structure (you can find these books—and more—in my Amazon store:

<https://www.amazon.com/shop/iolagoulton>

Write Your Story from the Middle by James Scott Bell

You'll never go wrong with a writing craft book from James Scott Bell. I like *Write Your Story from the Middle* because it emphasises that every novel has a turning point for the main character. If we can identify that turning point—what changes for the character—then we can work backwards to the beginning, and forwards to the climax.

Writing Screenplays that Sell by Michael Hauge

This is a useful refresher for those who were lucky enough to attend his full-day conference session a few years back. If you missed out, check out his Udemy course, *Screenwriting and Storytelling Blueprint*: <https://www.udemy.com/user/michael-hauge/>

I like Hauge's Six Stage Plot Structure because of the way it combines the three-act structure with the character arc—something that's especially important in character-driven genres such as romance.

Randy Ingermanson and The Snowflake Method

Also check out Randy Ingermanson's monster blog post on the Snowflake Method. I like Randy's methodology because he starts with a sentence, then builds that out to a plot. I also like the way he intertwines plot and character.

<https://www.advancedfictionwriting.com/articles/snowflake-method/>

Structuring Your Novel by KM Weiland.

I like Katie's no-nonsense way of dissecting structure. The book covers the three-act structure, and how to write a great scene ... which will be the subject of a later article.

*If you'd like to find out more of my top ten tips (and can't wait for the next Heart2Heart), then visit my website at www.christianediting.co.nz and sign up for my free email course, *Learn to Revise Your Novel*.*



Iola Goulton is a New Zealand book reviewer, freelance editor, and writer. She holds a degree in marketing, has a background in human resource consulting, and works as a freelance editor specialising in Christian fiction. When she's not working, Iola is usually reading or writing her next book review.



Replay of the podcast.

G'day, I'm Sarah Williams Romance Author and host of *Write with Love*, a weekly podcast for writers and readers of love stories. Haven't heard of it? Well then here are four good reasons to tune in!

With conference season in full swing, the podcast went into replay mode last month. We got to revisit some of my favourite chats.



Claire Connolly got a replay this month because she's quite simply amazing and worth a repeat! Sheiks anyone?

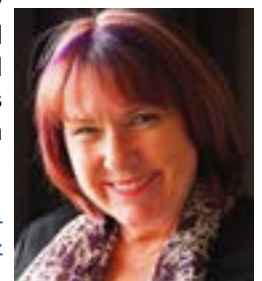
After many years of perseverance, Allison Stuart has finally gotten what she wanted. Now with a stack of new books scheduled for release this historical fiction author has never been busier.



Amy Rose Bennett writes sexy regency and historical romances you won't be able to put down! I sure couldn't.



And Koru winner Fiona McArthur and I had a great chat about her contemporary medical dramas and why she loves the Australian outback.



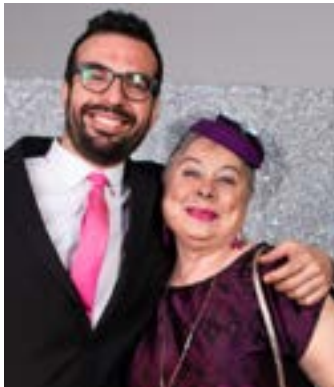
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My First Conference Experience – Christchurch 2019.

Annika Ohlson-Smith



First of all, I want to thank RWNZ for having the conference on the South Island this year. I think it was the for the first time that happened. I have never been able to go to the previous conferences because of the expenses, but this time everyone (except our newest member) decided to go to support the Christchurch Chapter.

As soon as the decision was made, I got increasingly excited. When I realised how much I needed to learn about what to do at the conference, I got increasingly nervous. So much to think about, to choose from, and above all – how to do it.

I wanted to pitch two novellas I had finished, and which my buddies had edited and proofread numeral times. So, how to do it? Buddies, heelp!

‘You just write a pitch sentence, to make the agents wanting to read more.’

Oh, just a sentence. No sweat. Ha! Trillions of tempting attempts later, I finally managed to create a sentence short and exciting enough for my buddies to nod approvingly.

THEN it was the actual pitch, i.e. how to write a summary of the plot – without revealing the end, a description of the hero, heroine and eventual villain AND a short presentation of myself. All to be read out loud (or preferably learnt by heart) within five minutes. But no rush. Don’t stress.

A dear friend of mine offered to come home to me and play ‘the agent’, and for two hours I practised, changed the wording, practised again and again, until ‘the agent’ nodded approvingly.

Then it was how to dress for the cocktail party and the awards dinner. Bless the Hospice Shop; they had a cocktail-dress just in my colour and size for just \$9.00. A purple hat with black gauze was another bargain at the \$2-shop. The result made me nod approvingly in the mirror.

As I love to read and write suspense, that’s what I chose as theme for my dinner outfit. Most of it I had in my wardrobe, just a few accessories from the \$2-shop was needed.

With just two weeks to go I was told to check with the

publisher I had chosen to pitch one of the novellas for whether the company she represented would accept novellas at all. Their website said no. My buddies suggested to pitch both novellas for the agent as two in one book, which I did. I also got the tip to submit the first two pages of them to the ‘Cold Read’ session, which I did.

Despite all preparations I was all nerves on the way to the conference, but as soon as we arrived at the Double Tree Hotel there was more excitement than nerves thanks to the fabulous welcoming we had, both from RWNZ volunteers at the registration desk and from the hotel staff in the reception.

From then on it was FULL ON from early mornings to late evenings.

The speakers and workshops were of high quality and the subjects very useful. Melissa Storm’s speech about her writing career was not just funny and moving, but very brave.

The ‘Cold Read’, which was too early in the morning for my body clock, was a great experience and to my surprise it was my chosen pitch-agent, Nalini Akolekar, who listened and commented on the stories read. And an even greater surprise was that she liked what I had submitted. This happened two hours before my pitch, so sitting down opposite her later, the nerves were not as eager to fight excitement and hope, as before.

Nalini is an awesome person, kind and with a great sense of humour. She told me that no, the market didn’t have much interest in such short novellas as mine. On the other hand, she wanted me to expand both stories with another 50, 000 words and then contact her. Stunned and with her card in my hand, I left the room, had lunch, and then went to my room for a lay down.

When I woke up from my Nana-nap, I had missed the AGM and the raffle draw, so it was a HUGE surprise to hear I had won two awesome prizes: a big box filled with books, chocolates – yesss – and coffee. The second prize was an unbelievable one – a Coaching Session with Nalini Akolekar!!

The envy of my buddies was almost palpable, but as they are the tops, they were really happy for me. Through the rest of the conference I wasn’t just relaxed, but over the moon.

With the risk I sound like I’d won an Oscar, I want to hugely thank ALL OF YOU who helped organising this conference.

The Christchurch Chapter had chosen the perfect venue – huge place and yet with an intimate atmosphere. The food was to die for and plenty of it.

The pleasure of meeting all of you that I only had seen pics of in Heart to Heart or just your names, was so lovely.

The hotel staff were so friendly and helpful. I want to thank my buddy Sally, with whom I shared a unit, for not snoring. Last, but not least, I want to thank my darling husband Allan, for driving me and Sally to and from the conference, and for calling me every evening to hear ‘all about it’ and share my joy.



Annika Ohlson-Smith was born in Stockholm, Sweden, 1946. Since toddlerhood her greatest passion is reading books. She married young, had two children. Divorced, went to New Zealand and met her Kiwi-husband Allan. They decided to live in sunny Nelson. She writes poetry, short stories & novellas – genre: sweet romance & suspense – but is also working on a fictional autobiography.

My first conference: perceptions from the 'other' recipient.

Bel Macfie

Convenor, Coast to Coast



My writing journey started nearly ten years ago when I decided to write a book for my then teenage daughter. After it as finished, three friends who encouraged me and helped me edit the book requested I write them a book too. Over a few wines together one evening an angsty, sexy, convoluted story line was mind-mapped and has resulted in about 12 books. While I adore my story lines, it is only in the last year that I have been learning the craft of writing with the intention of rewriting these books for publication. Using writing craft is akin to having a profession minus the academic preparation and code of conduct.

So, a year after attending an incredible SPA girls workshop and joining the Coast to Coast chapter I found myself sitting in a conference room in Christchurch attending my first RWNZ conference. I was there at the behest of Nalini Singh who had generously sponsored me to attend and I would like to offer my observations and thoughts as a first time attendee.

The key themes I identified were inclusion, vulnerability, generosity and gratefulness.

THE POWER OF INCLUSION

I have worked in nursing for over thirty years and I still recall as a student looking at the registered nurses in awe. I coveted their level of experience, calmness, and ability to navigate a system which I was a novice at. Decades later at the RWNZ conference it was like déjà vu.

The critical question for me was how would the conference provide a sense of 'can-do' to inspire me as a novices to continue and persevere instead of overwhelming me with feelings that accomplished writing is too large and difficult? I knew the answer lay in the level of inclusion I felt. I have attended many health conferences over the years of which many are epitomised by a group stroking of egos for an elite inner circle which the majority of conference goers don't have access to, coupled with competitiveness narrowly disguised as hearty collegiality. So I was interested to see how this would pan out at a writers conference.

Having the key note speakers spread themselves around the tables was a stroke of genius. It made those best-selling authors become 'real' and reachable. In fact, it was surprising to see how normal everyone was (at least until the dinner where I applauded the ability of so many introverts to let loose and have fun!). Having meet-up sessions for first time attendees (thank you Kristina) was also useful and having this more formally structured into future conferences would be advantageous. Leave no wo/man behind.

It is challenging when attendees are at all at a different stage, however in sports team I have been involved with over the years a priority focus has always been on the novices, as their first experiences of feeling like they are part of something worthwhile and supportive is critical to their longevity and success.

The considerable learning from informal discussions, corridor conversations and opportunities to have small group discussions should not be underestimated, and I was sometimes late to sessions because of these worthwhile conversations. Everyone needs to get something out of attending because meeting needs and feeling included enables us to share a common purpose, and results in trust and a sense of belonging.

WALKING IN THE SHOES OF VULNERABILITY

Vulnerability could be seen everywhere – from the overt presentation of Melissa Storm to the more subtle small group discussions during breaks to the creative regalia worn at dinner. I view vulnerability as a strength because of the courage it takes to be vulnerable. As Brene Brown posits, vulnerability is the birthplace of innovation, creativity and change.

I have been privileged to observe the journeys of my writing colleagues and witnessed that the euphoria of success only usually comes after a lengthy period of struggling, second-guessing, hard work, and vulnerability. Writers are not one homogenous mass of same-ness; we are so diverse and different that it's hard to imagine sometimes that we would choose to spend time together if we weren't brought together by our passion for writing.

For many at the conference, I saw that publication was the ultimate pinnacle, although this was overshadowed by constant need for analytics, reviews, and ambivalence over platform choices for newly published authors. While I understand this I don't necessarily agree with it. If we are defining ourselves as worthy only when we successfully





publish we are denying ourselves the ability to appreciate the writing journey in its entirety. This journey enables us to become more skilled as a writer, to learn courage through vulnerability, to connect with others in a meaningful way, to manage the emotional highs and lows and to achieve through perseverance and bloody-mindedness. This is a far cry from the recently perpetuated stereotype that appears to once again imply that writers are usually bored housewives who sit around and fantasise about erotic stories to make their lives more interesting and when compared to world issues our efforts are unworthy. Unsurprisingly, nor were we a room full of lust-filled beings that continually talked of penises, although we certainly know that sex sells. While we were brought together by writing, we connected with each other because of our lives, our values and our motivation.

Living in a writer's shoes is not a comfortable journey. While we long to spend more time in our slippers, we actually wear stilettos that blister our heels, make us prone to roll our ankles, and occasionally get stuck in the pavement, while we attempt to keep them shiny and hope they exude the confidence and class we want to be known for. If we are really fortunate we become adept at negotiating the rough terrain however we are still wearing those bloody stilettos which at any given moment could make us fall. People see what they want to see however considerable skill is involved to continuously dance on a moving carpet in stilettos.

THE FLOWERS OF GENEROSITY

Having successful internationals give keynotes was exciting and undoubtedly provided a rich learning platform however just because you can write well doesn't mean you can present or teach well. Yes, presenters have an advantage because they are talking from a point of knowledge but I know that communicating practical information at a level that audiences can understand and use is another skill entirely. Many accomplished authors may not be able to do large presentations but are perfectly able to do small group discussions and maybe this could be accommodated into programmes.

Christchurch is known as the Garden City and this analogy decided to take a prominent position and implant itself in my brain. Some presenters provided a clear landscaping plan; a framework which showed what must be planted where and at which times to gain the highest chance of colourful blooms. Laura Kaye and Michele Somers were perfect examples. Their presentations added an inherent practical nature that I could identify with and understand due to the way my structured brain processes information. Others were more esoteric and fluid with a less structured approach throwing seeds out and letting them grow where they landed. For the audience these presentations were like walking through a field of wild flowers where you could pick the flowers that were relevant for you to make your own unique bunch. In other words, everyone's take-a-ways would be different, yet the blossoms available were substantial. It would be easy for the untrained eye to trivialise the garden and see just the colour of the flowers or even the rancid smell of the fertiliser, without seeing

the care and nurturing needed to grow the flowers.

Giving back, sharing knowledge, taking an interest, and mentoring by the more experienced writers were invaluable gifts given at this conference. Video recording of sessions for paid conference attendees would've been helpful since I experienced the inevitable decision-making ambivalence when I wished to go to simultaneous presentations. I wanted to luxuriate in all the goodness possible in the short time we had.

PRACTISING GRATEFULNESS

The feminist in me knows that when you get a group where females form the vast majority it inevitably eventuates in forming a societal discourse from men (and unfortunately from other women), that serves to minimise the efforts and skills of the group. It is imperative that our group is clear and unwavering about their purpose and are confident in saying we are romance writers. I admit this is a challenge at times and is worthy of further conversation. Gaining public respect and understanding of our skills is something we can work on.

I have found that practising gratefulness counteracts feelings of judgement. It allows me to present an optimistic view of writing and writers. It centres me and gives me a feeling of pride about being involved. I do believe writing is a professional calling and an under-rated skill and we should be grateful for the skills we have.

Some people I know run marathons, and people are in awe of them whereas I am in awe of people who write books. Why is running a marathon seen as more successful than writing a book? Because we keep our skill under the radar. The best kept secret. As if it's a little dirty and unacceptable perhaps? We need a little more grit.

At the conference I witnessed many words of gratefulness being openly communicated. It was probably considered a safe place to talk and share. Being publicly open about what we do and the skill it takes is akin to showing people we are grateful, real and deserving.

I am grateful to Nalini for paying it forward so I can attend the conference. I am grateful for the professional and inclusive management of the conference. I am grateful for the gifts of learning from this conference. I am grateful to have met so many incredible and diverse people through writing. I am grateful that I am part of the awesome Coast to Coast group. And I am grateful that I have the skill to write and the motivation to learn to write better.

My request is that we do not allow that to trivialise the important emotional and psychological work we do of feeding the soul. Writers are worthy and their work is important in and of itself, and stands on its own merits without comparison.



Meet the New Exec!



Susan Sims,
President.

1. Introduce yourself: what you do, what you write and where you're based.

Susan Sims, Director of Development (Otago Medical Research Foundation if you need this too), Victorian historically with a twist.

2. What do you want to achieve in your executive role?

Continue the work of former executives to ensure we remain the generous, supportive, inclusive organisation that our international conference visitors are so amazed by.

3. What is your favourite trope?

Second chance

4. Turkish Delight or Cherry Ripe?

Turkish delight, the real thing :)

5. Favourite book? (You are allowed to pick more than one)

Jane Eyre, The Farming of Bones

6. What is the last thing you read?

How About Thursday

7. What is your superpower?

Connecting people

Your kryptonite?

Overthinking



Mollie Smith,
Vice-president.

1. Introduce yourself: what you do, what you write and where you're based.

My name's Mollie Smith. I live on a lifestyle block just outside Ngongotaha with a dog, two cats, a husband, and many shenanigans. By day, I'm a production planner and a dedicated customer service rep for the Kinleith and Penrose paper mills. By night, I'm a co-instructor at a martial arts school where I pretend to know what I'm doing. I'm still attempting to figure out what I write- definitely kink-based erotic romance and erotic romance, but there's contemporary, urban fantasy, and science fiction settings, with dark romance, special operations/black ops, and mercenaries thrown in there for good measure.

2. What do you want to achieve in your executive role?

I want to achieve a better understanding of the needs and wants of our members in NZ and overseas, and bring those ideas/wants/needs to the exec so we can better serve the members. I'm a firm believer in the exec being the custodians of an organisation, rather than the head of it.

3. What is your favourite trope?

I have so many, and they mainly fall into the dark romance, mercenary, black ops, and magical tropes: dark-romantic male leads, female mechanics (where a woman is highly gifted in a male-dominated role or job), most magical tropes (elemental bending/manipulation and necromancy being my two favourites at the moment), power imbalances, criminality/taboo among protagonists (where they're set up as dark anti-heroes than nice guys/gals). Obviously, I like the darker side of human nature.

4. Turkish Delight or Cherry Ripe?

I'm more partial to Cherry Ripes than Turkish Delights (though if you're talking *actual* Turkish delight, then it's hard to beat cranberry and pistachio).

5. Favourite book? (You are allowed to pick more than one)

So glad I'm allowed to pick more than one. Pride and Prejudice, Jane Eyre, and Dune are my standouts. I'll also read anything by Tom Clancy, Andy McNabb, Cherise Sinclair, Angel Payne, and Chuck Wendig.





6. *What is the last thing you read?*

Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six (still reading it)

7. *What is your superpower? Your kryptonite?*

My superpower is public speaking. I've never minded getting up in front of people and speaking. But, my kryptonite is small talk. I want to know your opinion on things that matter to you, what you think of celebrity culture and the cults of personality we see every day. I want to get into deep, meaningful conversations, but small talk? Yeah-nah.



**Josie Berliner,
Publicity Officer.**

1. *Introduce yourself: what you do, what you write and where you're based.*

I live in Christchurch and am a Law and English student at UC. I live with my family, three greyhounds, and a munted cat. I also spend time with my boyfriend (who's in the army but puts up with my life size Mr Darcy cutout and my Colin Firth pillow case).

2. *What do you want to achieve in your executive role?*

As Publicity Officer I would like to boost our visibility and positive reputation as an organisation, and create a clear and useful role based on the needs of the group.

3. *What is your favourite trope?*

My favourite trope is Second Chance Lovers, but I do enjoy a good Enemies to Lovers.

4. *Turkish Delight or Cherry Ripe?*

I LOVE Turkish Delight!!

5. *Favourite book? (You are allowed to pick more than one)*

My favourite books are Emma, The Secret Garden and Pride and Prejudice.

6. *What is the last thing you read?*

The last thing I read was The Great Gatsby which I enjoyed more than I expected! The other last thing I read was my Criminal Law textbook, but trust me, that was not a page turner.

7. *What is your superpower? Your kryptonite?*

My Kryptonite is chocolate, it gives me migraines.

I reckon my Superpower is my tenacity and confidence, but others may say I have an obnoxious amount of ego and talk too much.



**Gillian St. Kevern,
Membership Secretary.**

1. *Introduce yourself: what you do, what you write and where you're based.*

I'm Gillian, I'm based in Christchurch, and I'm a remote customer service Guru (I didn't choose that, Guru is my actual job title, and I have to capitilise it—I got told off for not captilising!). I write paranormal romance, urban fantasy, contemporary comedy and vintage mystery, all with an LGBTQ twist. Currently I am combining as many elements from all of the above as I can by writing gothic romance.

2. *What do you want to achieve in your executive role?*

I see the membership secretary's role as making sure that RWNZ is not only meeting the needs of its members, but actively making people feel welcome and heard. As such, I would really welcome suggestions as to how I can do this!

3. *What is your favourite trope? I love enemies to lovers, friends to lovers, and found-family. I'm also partial to frenemies, rivals, and vampires.*

4. *Turkish Delight or Cherry Ripe?*

Turkish Delight in any form.

5. *Favourite book? (You are allowed to pick more than one)*

The Changeover, Persuasion, The Dark is Rising sequence, Jane Eyre, Carmilla, and the ghost stories of M R James.

6. *What is the last thing you read?*

Caesar's Last Breath by Sam Kean.

7. *What is your superpower? Your kryptonite?*

My superpower is worrying. My kryptonite is being unable to say no to my niece and nephew (also cute cats who want to cuddle, cuddly dogs...).



Join the DREAM TEAM

Become a conference
committee member or
workshop presenter

Come join me and Linda Shaw on the Conference 2020 DREAM TEAM to inspire, educate and build networks for our members. We're looking for talented, enthusiastic and dedicated people to create an amazing conference in 2020.

You might've already been involved in previous years or new to the behind-the-scenes delivery of a successful conference. Regardless, we're looking for you! Give back to your association, learn how to put together a brilliant event, be part of creating something EPIC and have an amazing time with like-minded writers. There will be fun and laughter too!

We need... committee members

You might be an attention-to-detail person or someone who loves creativity. Whatever your strengths, there is a role for you over the next twelve months to learn new things or hone your devastatingly wonderful skills. We'll hold regular Zoom meetings and stay in touch mainly via email.

Please apply by completing [this form](#) with your contact details and a bit about your skills and talents. We've included the list of roles – and you can have more than one role or share a role if you want to. We'd love to hear from you by 1st November 2019. If you have a particular role in mind, please tick it. If not, we'll find somewhere for you :) If you need more information about the roles please contact Linda Shaw 0220 546 320 or linda@lindashaw.co.nz

We need... Conference workshops!

We want to bring your expertise, enthusiasm, and creativity to our conference. We are now accepting expressions of interest from members who'd like to present a workshop.

Our theme for 2020 is 'Get out of my dreams, get into my book.' It's all about bringing your readers' dreams to life and making your own author dreams come true. Your workshop should speak to this theme and fit into one of our four streams: craft, business, genre, or career.

The best workshops are specific about the target audience and what they will get out of the session. Give us something we haven't seen before from your own lived experience. We'd love to include more diverse voices.

For more information and to apply, [fill in the form](#). Any questions, please contact steffgreen@gmail.com.

We welcome and value all contributions and volunteers, and you'll be part of a strong, committed and creative group. We've got things off to a great start with, 'Get out of my dreams, get into my book' – now we want to bring others on-board who love the idea of delivering on the dreams of our colleagues.

Hope to hear from you soon!
Steff & Linda
Conference co-convenors



RWNZ 2019 Conference Feedback

Thank-you to everyone who provided feedback on the RWNZ 2019 conference. There is so much information that I can't possibly fit it all in here (...34 pages and counting). So instead of wowing you with statistics and graphs, I am going to pick out some of the key messages and share them here.

1. Everyone felt welcome. This was one of our goals for the conference, to encourage open conversations and networking. The first timers gave us good feedback and made some suggestions for improvement in future. All the extras that made it fun (e.g. badges, coffee vouchers, quizzes etc) were greatly appreciated.
2. We did pretty good at communication before conference. Lots of people want more communication, more details and earlier, especially about the timing on the programme inform travel bookings.
3. The conference rated very highly, and the vast majority of people would recommend it to others, and attend again themselves. Cost is always the biggest barrier to attending, and cost is weighed up against the speakers and location.
4. There was a comprehensive wish-list of workshop topics, covering craft to business, advanced to beginner, self-published to traditional, and all walks of life in between. We are a diverse bunch. Our conferences try to offer something for everyone, but we can't do it all in one year.
5. It was almost unanimous that editors and agents must be at conference.
6. Cold reads were split between the 'absolutely yes' camp and the 'meh not so worried' camp, with little in between. Thus cold reads are there for those who want them, and were well attended.
7. The feedback on the cocktail party and dinner was great. Lots of fun had by all. And as always, good food makes everyone happy, every time.

I'd like to share some answers to one particular question, because in reading the responses, I am inspired all over again.

What was the single most valuable thing you learned at conference?

- Persevere to achieve your goals / Never give up / Keep going
- Connecting with others / Reconnecting and feeling part of 'my tribe'
- Concrete techniques / skills / craft - to improve my writing
- Calm the mind before writing
- Mix up tropes to create something new
- I don't have to stay in one sub-genre
- It is viable to be a writer in NZ and earn a living
- I don't need my WIP to be over 100K words to still be good
- Writing is a long journey and success is hard won / it's a marathon not a sprint race – so never, never give up
- Focus on the writing before business, until you've written enough good books
- If you're unsure, ask, ask, ask, ask
- Even published authors still have to pitch a new idea and some get knocked back!
- I know more than I thought and I don't know enough
- Tell my story behind my story
- Even agents and publishers are human beings
- Each writing journey is unique
- Tension!
- Keep writing at the centre of all you do
- Writers backing writers - RWNZ is a network of fiercely loyal professionals working their asses off and paying it forward
- A tribe of romance writers is a whirlwind of hope and love

I love this last one - I am proud to be a part of a whirlwind of hope and love. And on that note, I end my last communication to you as the 2019 conference convener. What an incredible journey, and thanks for coming along for the ride.

See you in Auckland in 2020.

Mel Climo
On behalf of the fabulous 2019 committee

News from the President

Susan Sims



Happy Spring everyone. I'm still trying to take in all I learned at from our amazing conference. Thanks again Mel and team for putting on a brilliant event with such top-notch speakers – you'll see the report in this issue, All those who attended are still talking about it, and those who didn't wished they could. If you haven't already started saving for Conference 2020 in Auckland I strongly recommend you do. It's a really great way to learn from people in all areas of the business and get the buzz of hanging out with a bunch of talented, like-minded people.

September was my first month as President of this terrific organisation and it has been full on already. There's so much to learn that those who came before me (thanks again Kendra, Vivienne) have been doing so well for a long time, so much they know that the new exec and I need to learn.

This is a busy time of the year with membership renewals so please, if you paid your membership subs around this time last year, keep an eye on your emails (maybe your spam or other folders if your provider automatically sifts your email) for an invoice.

If you don't renew your membership our system will automatically cancel it and we don't want to lose you, even for a brief time. If you're unsure when your membership is due, you can check this out by logging into the membership part of the webpage, clicking on 'My Account' (next to the shopping cart) and clicking 'My Subscription'. This will tell you the next payment date. If your logon for the website doesn't work, and you can't renew your password, this is a good indication you might have missed your renewal date.

A few people have mentioned that they'd like to know more

about the constitution and strategy for the organisation along with financials. There's a wealth of information about all of these on the website once you sign in, including <https://www.romancewriters.co.nz/about-us/rwnz-structure-constitution/> Have a good look around and if you'd like to make any suggestions for the future feel free to contact me via president@romancewriters.co.nz I will respond as quickly as I can. Keep an eye out for any survey emails too, we're going to check in with you all on things from time to time.

The Stuff article is still under discussion and we are waiting for their latest response to our concerns. I really appreciate the frustration this has caused and am grateful to Josie (Publicity Officer) in particular for her smart measured response and all the work she's done as someone brand new to the organisation.

Steff and Linda are working flat out to get next year's conference underway with three exciting speakers already confirmed. If you'd like to join them on the conference committee or present a workshop fill in the expression of interest forms in the appropriate section under the Events dropdown on the website.

Keep tabs on the Contests too!

Thanks to the chapter convenors, contest co-ordinator, managers and judges, magazine collators, executive and all the other volunteers that make our organisation run.



From the Editor: Time to recalibrate?

Gillian St. Kevern



I have just reached two and a half months at my new job. I've been out of training for one month now, and in that one month I have stayed in four different places. Not surprisingly, I've also been very tired, found myself feeling anxious about my ability to juggle work and writing and perpetually behind on, oh, everything.





Sound familiar? Take out the new job and the house sitting and substitute freelancing and flower picking, and I'm pretty sure I could have written the paragraph above at any time last year. I am not very good at knowing my limits.

I'm working on that. In the meantime, I had the realisation that I need to recalibrate. The full time job is not going anywhere (I hope). So I need to figure out how to manage my energy around it. Easy, right? I did the same thing in Japan. I set my alarm to 5:00 am and wrote 3000 words before school. I did this before, I can do it again.

Not quite.

A lot has changed since Japan. For one thing, I'm older. I sleep differently. If I'm house sitting, a lot of times I'm sharing my bed with a pet. Currently I've got Charlie, an aggressively affectionate cat who will perch on my shoulder and bat me with his paw until I wake up and pet him. This doesn't make for the most complete sleep.

Another big difference is that Japan gets light earlier than New Zealand. I still struggled to get up at 5:00 am in the winter, but not to the extent I'm struggling now. I've known for ages that I get cranky if I don't get enough light. However, it wasn't until I moved my desk so that I would get more sunlight that I realised just what a difference it makes. I've started sleeping in and writing later—after work. Early days yet, and while I admit I don't have a lot of words to show for this change, I am feeling much less stressed and anxious. I'll keep an eye on this, but honestly, just the realisation that I could change this made a lot of difference.

Another difference is that I've decided to ease back on the house-sitting and get myself a more permanent base. House-sitting worked great while I was writing, but it doesn't work as well for remote customer support.

I am always willing to tweak my plotting or writing techniques. I don't know why it took me so long to think that other habits could do with some adjusting. Now that I've started, I'm going to start tweaking my habits in other ways. Just because something worked well at one point of my life is no guarantee that it is working now.

Time for some spring cleaning! Is there a habit in your life that might not be serving you? Or a new habit you want to form? The cool thing about writing is that as we evolve, our writing practice evolves along with us. In life, as in writing, we don't need to fear change.



The Welcome Mat

Another red carpet roll-out this month for new members:



- Rita Henuber, Auckland.
- Madeline Robers, Auckland.
- Michelle Dalton, Overseas.
- Kim Newton, Auckland.
- Louise Forster, Christchurch.
- Leisa Harford, Auckland.
- Wendy Reid, Auckland.
- Heather Reyburn, Auckland.
- Andie Wood, Auckland.
- Jill Spencer, Southland.



Great to have you all with us.

Don't forget to read the information for new members page on our website: <https://www.romancewriters.co.nz/membership/information-new-members/>

Of course, you'll need to login before you can access the members' area, but you'll find information there about how to join the [RWNZ Members-Only Facebook page](#).

Contacts

- Susan Sims:** president@romancewriters.co.nz
- Mollie Smith:** vicepresident@romancewriters.co.nz
- Tania Roberts:** treasurer@romancewriters.co.nz
- Zoe Sojourner:** secretary@romancewriters.co.nz
- Josie Berliner:** publicity@romancewriters.co.nz
- Gillian St Kevern:** membership@romancewriters.co.nz

Heart to Heart will be published in the first week of each month except January. The deadline for every issue is the 20th of the month prior (e.g. 20th October for November issue). Please have all articles, news, reports, and advertising to Gillian at heart2hearteditor@romancewriters.co.nz on or before the deadline.

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Heart to Heart Contact: Gillian St. Kevern (Editor) heart2hearteditor@romancewriters.co.nz

To submit a woo hoo, e-mail Gillian or use [this form](#) on the website.

To join the RWNZ Members-Only Facebook page, click [here](#).

The Bookshelf

Book Review: Productivity for Creative People by Mark McGuinness

Reviewed by Emma Bryson



Title:
**Productivity for
Creative People**

Author:
Mark McGuinness

A practical guide to getting creative work done amid the demands and distractions of 21st century life.

The most creative people are the ones who make time for deep work every day. Yet modern life seems to have been purpose-built to stop us establishing creative work habits.

For over twenty years, he has been sharing his solutions with his coaching clients, helping hundreds of creatives like you to overcome these same challenges.

His latest book, Productivity for Creative People, is a collection of insights, tips, and techniques to help you create time for your most important work - while managing your other commitments. All the solutions he shares have been tested with real people in real situations.

Buy *Productivity for Creative People* [here](#)

REVIEW

I came across Mark McGuinness some time ago – I think he was first brought to my attention by one of my RWNZ friends, actually! I remember finding *Productivity for Creative People* really valuable when I first read it, way back when I was still managing interns and submissions for Entangled. His thoughts about asset building really impacted how I thought about my work – to the point that it ended up being one of the reasons I chose to leave my role to pursue my own creative dreams.

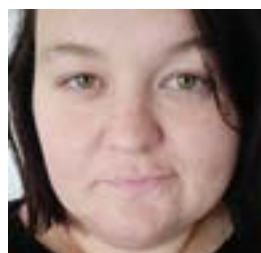
I get Mark's emails and occasionally listen to his podcast, *The 21st Century Creative*, where he interviews people from all kinds of professional creative backgrounds. This is actually how I've wound up reviewing *Productivity for Creative People* for Heart to Heart – Mark recently wrote a great article (which was also the opening monologue on

a recent episode of his podcast) called 'Making the Most of Your Creative Assets'. (you can read it on Medium here (Link: https://medium.com/@mark_mcguinness/make-the-most-of-your-creative-assets-da35b31bd743) This article reminded me about the book, and writing a review seemed like the perfect excuse to go back and read it again!

If you're not into reading non-fiction productivity, psychology and business books, then *Productivity for Creatives* is a great starting point. It digests and presents concepts in a practicable way; concepts that you could very easily learn, strategize and implement into your own workflow in no time at all. There are so many gems in here it'd be impossible to do them all justice at once, so my advice would be to pick one or two that feel like they'd have the most value for you and roll with them, before coming back for more, as I have done several times now.

The concept that really stuck for me that first readthrough was about asset creation. As creatives, creating assets (whatever those may be – books, articles, videos... content with a significant lifespan), these things are what will provide us with long-term value. Spending focused time on asset creation is, as Mark says: "the only way to ensure that you're meeting your goals and dreams and not just staving off disaster or treading water". At the time of reading, I was managing a team of over 20 interns, and most of my life was email. Email, waiting on email, and reading and assessing other peoples' manuscripts. The concept of asset building really brought home for me that while I was learning a lot in my job, this wasn't going to provide me with much long-term value. I had to get better at and spend more of my most valuable productive time on creating the things that would sustain a career long-term – and that meant not only writing for myself, but editing for myself, too; and owning the rights to the editorial thoughts and ideas I was expressing in my manuscript assessments.

If you're looking for ways to increase your productivity or just reframe your thinking about creative work and you don't have time to sit down and read a shelf of business and self-help books, *Productivity for Creatives* is one for you!



Emma Bryson is a freelance editor, creative, and writer based in Auckland. She spent five years working with Entangled Publishing, holds a Diploma in Publishing from Whitireia New Zealand, and has worked on books for Penguin Random House NZ, Steele Roberts Publishers, Victoria University Press, and Te Papa Press. Her first novella was published last year by Carina Press.

Woos and Hoos



Congratulations to Denise Fitzpatrick on her new release September Shadows, the second book in her September series. A brutal home invasion leaves Tracey emotionally scarred and vulnerable. A killer emerges from the shadows, with Tracey firmly in his sights. Can the police find the murderer before he finds Tracey - and when tragedy strikes and destroys all her carefully laid plans - does Tracey have the courage to take the new path life offers?

Buy September Shadows [here](#)



From Louise Forster: I just wanted to thank Romance Readers in New Zealand who are enjoying my small country town, Tumble Creek series. And for the most part, keeping the three books in the KOBO top 100 Fiction & Literature, Western genre. I look at the rankings every day, I might be a tad obsessed, but seeing my books up there makes my day.

Buy Tumble Creek [here](#)



Congratulations to Patricia Fenton on her new release Beyond the Rimu Grove. In the summer of 1966, a young teacher is dispatched to remote Ngarimu Valley School as a Probationary Assistant. Her coming of age narrative takes place in an isolated farming community where lives are poignantly and inextricably interwoven and nothing is quite the way it seems

Buy Beyond the Rimu Grove [here](#).



Congratulations to Pia Buck who has just published the third book in her Willow Oaks Sweet Romance series. Published under her pen name, Melissa Crosby, Love Me Again is a second-chance small town sweet romance. It tells the story of Jenna and Dave as they navigate the trials and difficulties of marriage.

Buy Love Me Again [here](#)

Heart to Heart is always keen to share new book releases from members, news of awards, contracts, basically anything that we can celebrate. Send us a 2-3 sentence summary of your good news and, if it's a new release, your book cover and buy link, by the twentieth of each month online at <https://www.romancewriters.co.nz/membership/member-woo-hoos/> or directly to: heart2hearteditor@romancewriters.co.nz.

Regional Round-Up Reports

AUCKLAND

Convenor: [Ruth Clough](#)

This month's meeting took place on Saturday 7 September at the Three Kings Tennis Pavilion. We had twenty six attendees at the meeting this month - it was lovely to see all of you.

Our speaker this month was Jackie Ashenden, who presented a talk about the Alpha Hero in romance. We learned the difference between an alpha and a beta hero and the defining characteristics of each. We also learned the difference between a stereotype (typically a preconceived idea with a negative connotation) and an archetype and how the latter can be very useful in our writing. Jackie also discussed how to avoid creating alpha-holes - the undesirable cousins of the alpha hero. Thanks for the tips Jackie - after all, no likes an alpha-hole!

A big thank you to Jackie for presenting this very entertaining and enlightening talk.

HAWKES BAY

Convenor: [Debbie Williams](#)

WELLINGTON/KAPITI COAST

Convenor: [Jane Ashurst](#)

The Wellington / Kapiti Chapter met on a sunny Saturday at Kris's house in Wellington. We welcomed new member Lynne, and welcomed back Eileen and Peter, who had not been to a meeting in ages. There were 17 of us in total, and Kris's front room was bursting at the seams!

As usual, we had a packed agenda:

- Monthly round robin catch up
- Gudrun's word game (StoryMatic)
- Conference feedback
- Blurbs: We discussed resources, and Jane shared some information that she'd picked up
- More Blurbs: The group critiqued Jane's newest blurb, and gave some great suggestions to tighten it up
- Cold Reads - we had a good selection
- Also: we shared some Woo Hoos for our recent conference prizewinners (Jeanette and Kris), and talked about our upcoming Writing Retreat (in October)

NELSON

Convenor: [LaVerne Clark](#)

The Nelson chapter didn't meet this month but have decided as a group to all take part in NaNoWriMo this year. October's meeting will be focused on prepping for that.

CHRISTCHURCH

Convenor: [Emma Lowe](#)

This month, the Christchurch chapter met at South Library for a conference debrief and general catch up. We were a small group, but this allowed us to get into the gritty details and really share some good information and ask questions of each other. We came up with some good takeaways from conference, and discovered that Moya is an Excel wizard. We've recruited her to lead a session at next month's meeting on Excel for writers.

Our next meeting will take place at South Library, Saturday October 20th. All welcome!

OTAGO

Convenor: [Samantha Burton](#)

Eight of us met up on Saturday 7 September for our usual monthly catch-up. This meeting was a special one though as a few of us had attended the conference. As such, we had a 'debrief' on our favourite moments, workshops, keynotes - and any 'aha' moments! We also did a 'cold reads' as one of our group wished to have feedback on her current WIP. The next meeting is scheduled for Saturday 5 October - and the topic of discussion will be 'self-editing'.

COAST TO COAST

Convenor: [Bel Macfie](#)

The C2C group met in Tauranga for another brilliant day with our tribe. We chatted about the awesomeness that was RWNZ2019 for those who couldn't make it. As always, there was a ton of stuff we loved but some of our groups highlights from Conference: Networking with other writers; A hook = putting a question in the readers mind; Don't have too much happening at the beginning of a story - it can get confusing; Repeating tropes for certain characters can work brilliantly; Connecting with people. We also noted how awesome the non-workshop things were - the badges, workshop spaces on nametags, staff etc and how that made conference rock even more.

After our reporting back, Meredith took us through a quick workshop on how to avoid a saggy middle - in our books, not ourselves. It was a fantastic workshop looking at how we can ask ourselves some simple questions to help ensure our story is brilliant from beginning to end.

BLLENHEIM AREA

Contact: [Iona Jones](#)