

PAPERBACK WRITER'S LEFT BEHIND & LOVING IT



2007
VIRTUAL WORKSHOPS
BY
LYNN VIEHL

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Left Behind & Loving It

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By Lynn Viehl

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VW#1: Practical Pacing

I. What is Pacing?

Pacing is what determines how a story moves along. As with cadence in poetry, and tempo in music, pacing directly affects the impact of the story as well as the reader's response to it.

Pacing can be fast. Very fast. Staccato. Immediate. Sweat on your brow. Lump in your throat. Words turn to grips or slaps or shrieks. We're not waltzing here. Oh no. This is all about now. Here and now. Right now. You with me?

Pacing can also be a lingering, luxurious stretch of story that rolls across the page in unhurried, elegant waves. When the words go all slow, hot summer indolent and cautious feline curious, they seem to envelope the reader in silk and seduction. The story wraps gentle arms around you and carries you along through the passages of prose as though you were light as a feather.

Pacing a story is not about composing nonstop *in your face speed text* or *rocking and drifting along the story river*. A story's pacing has to shift, like moods, as the plot unravels and the conflicts rise and fall.

Another way to think of pacing is as the story's heartbeat. It may slow down or speed up, depending on what's happening, but there is always a regular rhythm to it.

II. What Factors Determine a Story's Pacing?

Story elements contribute a lot to pacing. We know as readers that action and dialogue generally tend to speed up the pace of a story, while narrative and description usually slow it down. Chapter beginnings and endings can segue fast or slow, or knock us out of the story altogether. Things like footnotes, fancy font

shifts or illustrations sometimes bring the pacing to a screeching halt.

Story theme and genre also affect pacing. A typical fast-paced read would be a crime fiction thriller, as they contain a lot of action. On the flip-side, I have yet to read a fast-paced literary novel.

The word choices a writer makes also influence the pace. If you look again at my two examples up there, you'll notice that the words in the fast-paced paragraph are short, simple and provocative. By comparison, the slow-paced paragraph contains words that are longer, more complex and less aggressive.

Pacing also depends on the tone and ambiance of the writer's storytelling voice, which may be tied in with the writer's personality. I tend to be very impatient, focused and driven, and that comes out in my writing voice and pacing. One of my writer friends is a lifelong dreamer and philosopher, and his books have a far more leisurely pace compared to mine.

III. Pacing Quicksand and Avalanches

A well-paced book, like a healthy heart, has a consistent, logical rhythm to it. As conflict and tension rise and fall in the story, your pacing should shift right along with them.

Troubleshooting your pacing starts with a straight-through read of your story from beginning to end. Use a highlighter to mark passages that don't feel consistent in timing and rhythm with the rest of the story. Once you've identified these problem areas, it's time for a diagnosis.

Spots where you feel the story bogs down or drags are caught in pacing quicksand; you need to pull those passages out and get them moving. A lot of new and inexperienced writers end up in pacing quicksand because they can't

resist explaining too many details for their reader. The safe bet is you need more action and dialogue to correct these areas, but you may also just need to trim down your wording, or see if you're telling more than showing.

Likewise when the story races too fast or is confusing -- these are pacing avalanches that need to be diverted and spread out. Narrative and description are not the only ways to deal with the pacing avalanche; you might need to buff up your scene choreography, your characterizations and/or your plot involvement. Don't fall into the pit trap of piling more explanations for the reader into the problem area -- then you may be right back up to your neck in quicksand.

As with any aspect of what we write, it can be hard to judge how well you handle story pacing, especially when you're close to the work. If you're not sure how consistent your pacing is, ask for some opinions. A writer or reader friend may be able to spot those pools of quicksand or crashing avalanches, and offer suggestions on how much less or more they'd like to see in the story.

IV. Why Pacing is Important

Gone are the days when a writer could spend three chapters luring a reader into a story. Most editors now want readers hooked on the first page, and kept on that hook for the rest of the story. Whether you agree with that or not, it's got to factor into how you pace what you write.

This is not to say everyone out there has to write only fast-paced stories or they'll never work in this biz. Stephen King doesn't hurry with the pacing of most of his novels, and after reading fifty pages of Suzanna Clarke using footnotes in her big fat whatever that book was, I'm firmly convinced the market for slow-paced writers out there is alive and well.

In the end, if you find the rhythm that works for you as a storyteller and you're

consistent with it, you'll produce stories that keep the reader involved and you in print.

Some other links on pacing:

[Pacing](#) by Dr. Vicki Hinze

[Keep it Moving: Pacing a Novel](#) by Darcy Pattison

FROM COMMENTS:

1. aka_nik wrote: *What do you do when there is a section of your work that is necessary to the story but just seems to drag? Even if you move it around or re-write it there's just something... uninteresting about it.*

Scenes like the one you describe are ones I usually cut out of the manuscript and rewrite from scratch. I also find that if I take the essential information from the original scene and present it in a completely new way (from a different POV character, as part of dialogue, etc.) that I avoid repeating the doldrums.

If you'd rather keep the scene, then try to determine why it's so blah when you read it. For example, if you find you're giving the reader a lot of information via the characters' thoughts, and not much else, you may need to use more dialogue and build up the action so the characters aren't standing around delivering mental soliloquies.

2. Angelle Trieste wrote: *What I want to ask is this: In your opinion, with everything being equal, do fast-paced books sell more than not-fast-paced ones? Or it doesn't matter as much as long as the story doesn't drag too much?*

I don't think it matters. We see more fast-paced genre novels on the market these days because frankly that's what most editors are demanding we write, but it's no guarantee of success. Also, some authors just seem to get away with writing these big fat takes-forever-to-read works. I picked up the first book of a hugely successful semi-literary genre series everyone has been so crazy about, and discovered to my dismay that the author, while obviously intelligent and talented, writes like an injured snail crawls.

3. Buffyquirrel wrote: *My question would be, if two scenes with the same characters follow right on each other's heels, is it better to write a bit of a "nothing" scene to separate them, or just to let them be? They refuse to be combined.*

I'd let them be for now, and come back and read them again in a couple of weeks or when you finish the story (that may give you a creative rest, and allow you to come back to them with a fresh perspective.)

Nothing or filler scenes only slow down your story. Putting one in deliberately is like having a delicious nine-course gourmet meal during which you serve a bowl of lukewarm pureed baby food --it's not a big thing, but it could spoil the entire meal for your guests.

4. Zoe wrote: *Question: if you're writing a novel with multiple POV characters - let's say you've got one character who is impatient and driven, and another who is more patient and philosophical - should the pacing in the impatient character's scenes be faster than the pacing in the philosophical character's scenes, or would that be too jarring to the reader?*

Very good question. I often have characters who are mirror-opposites like your examples, and I find their dialogue tends to reflect their personality basics, i.e. an impatient person speaks quickly and often thoughtlessly while a patient person will take a minute to choose their words, speak cautiously, etc.

Pacing hinges on more than your characterizations, though. If the impatient character is going through a scene with little physical action and tension, their personality won't carry the pace (just as a patient character being chased and shot at by killer won't slow down the action simply because he's thoughtful.)

I would evaluate each scene based on all the components -- characters, action, dialogue, setting, plot threads, mood, everything -- and then go for the pacing that feels appropriate to the entire package (often, as many people have mentioned here, you'll also find that rhythm naturally as you write the scene, no matter who is in it.)

5. Heather wrote: *This is one reason I personally frown on working on one project for years and years... it's hard to get a good sense of pace when you only write one story. The more you write, the better you'll get, and the more natural and intuitive pacing your story will become.*

Amen to that -- excellent observation, Heather.

6. Anonymous wrote: *I read the first sentence and all I could see was pacing, as in expectant father pacing about the waiting room in a 1950's movie. How' that going to determine how a story moves along?*

Well, you can use it as an analogy -- think of your dad pacing in the labor and delivery room, and how he speeds up as he hears mom yell, and slow

down as he worries about how to pay for the hospital bill. He never stops pacing until it's all over, just as the heart of a novel never stops beating until it reaches its conclusion.

7. Rob wrote: *Considering you are the queen of pacing, I found this post most helpful.*

Finally, I get to be queen of something! Well, there was that week I spent as Latrine Queen in the Air Force . . . :) Thanks for the kind words.

Is pace something you consider as early the plotting stage in your process, or is it strictly something that comes during the word-by-word composition?

I always think about what sort of pace I want for the story before I write it, but I think it also comes out as I write the story from the characters and story elements I've set up. Voice definitely influences pacing too -- I seem to be naturally fast-paced as a writer, and I try not to fight the flow. :)

8. Sandra wrote: *So on the idea of NOT losing your reader in the first 3 chapters - how much of the main storyline plot/theme has to appear in those first three chapters?*

Enough to keep the reader turning pages to Chapter 4 and beyond. How you do this is up to you, but I think you should focus more on establishing your main characters, the novel conflict, and set into motion the events that will lead to the story's resolution -- and do it fast.

Should the savvy reader understand where the MC is at and anticipate her necessary character growth at that point?

A savvy writer should. Ideally the reader should be so involved that they aren't analyzing the story because they're captivated by it.

Or does the 1st 3 chapters just have to set things up and be interesting to the reader?

I'm not a fan of writing only to set up the reader for what's ahead -- I find writers who take that approach could delete the first three chapters of the novels and it wouldn't hurt the story, but everyone has their own preferences.

Most browsers in stores won't read more than the first couple of pages before they make a purchase decision, so I'd say you've got no more than the first five pages to get them involved in your story.

9. leatherdykeuk wrote: *I have a chapter with only one character in it and no matter what I do it seems to be passive and boggy.*

Ugh, solo scenes are the worst ones to get moving. One tactic is to put in flashbacks, but I prefer sticking the character with a physical challenge. In the very first scene in *Blade Dancer*, my protag is carrying her mother's corpse out into the desert to bury it. She has a conversation with the body, and imagines her mother's ghost responding. While gruesome, it allowed me to establish the character, the conflict catalyst and a couple of important subplot threads.

10. the frustrated writer wrote: *So, to check your pacing, you say to go back and read through your work. I'm afraid to take time away from writing b/c I don't want to fall into editing -- and for me that would involve industrial grade landscaping tools -- thus taking me out of writing and throwing me into a chasm of self-doubt. When would you suggest going back and*

reading through? Do you do this daily? Would you recommend daily re-reads for new writers?

I wait to do the final read-through for things like pacing until after I finish the manuscript. My daily edits are only for technical blips like typos and grammar. I think it's a good idea to at least spellcheck what you write, but once that edit is done I would put it away and move on (see more details in VW#2 on editing and revising, above.)

11. sierrarayne wrote: *I have a question on the telling versus showing issue. I can now recognize when I'm making this mistake but I'm not sure how to fix it. Any suggestions or better yet examples?*

The first section of Lori Handeland's article [Self-Editing](#) explains how to fix this problem perfectly -- you might want to check it out.

12. Annie wrote: *are fragments ok in the writing business?*

Plenty of writers do. I use sentence fragments sparingly but regularly, and some editors I've worked with have complained about it (depends on if you work with someone who is more concerned with grammar than story.) I consider it a style choice, and usually by the third or fourth book the editor finally gets that and accepts how I write. Your mileage may vary.

VW#2: Editing and Revising That Won't Drive You Crazy

I. The Conversation No One Hears

Writer: I've been trying to think of how to best describe a writer's internal editor. Remember Mr. Hyde from the film *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen*? Take that monster, add in the English teacher you hated most in school, plus a little rabid Doberman, and that comes close.

Internal Editor: Paging Dr. Jerkyl -- your kickoff is weak; borderline pathetic. Trying to think? Thoughts that tough for you? And ye olde movie analogy, how original. So? I'm getting insult but no insight here. Where's the burning bush? P.S. If you trot out your issues with your ninth grade English teacher one more time, I will puke on your keyboard. SohelpmeGod.

Writer (patiently): Anyway, rabid Dobermans, hated English teachers, Mr. Hyde - - dealing with that kind of attitude from the internal editor can be daunting. Especially when--

Internal Editor: Daunting? What's that? Did Mr. Peabody crank up the Way-Back vocabulary machine?

Writer: --you're trying to write, and the internal editor keeps butting in--

Internal Editor: Excuse me. Am I the one who can't remember how to spell *occasionally* with two c's and one s, or who makes her angry male characters sound more like whiny ass little girls?

Writer: --because that constant nag, nag, nag just kills your forward momentum. That's why--

Internal Editor: Oh, just wait until we go through the rest of the WIP,

Honeybunch. You're going to be my rewrite bitch for the next month. In fact, I think I'm going to changes the names of every single--

Writer (muzzling the Internal Editor): --you may find it easier to write without the internal editor shrieking in your ear the entire time.

II. Write First, Edit Second, Revise Third

I do not, under any circumstances, engage my internal editor while I'm writing. I don't backtrack, reread or make quick fixes during my writing time. When I write, I am a writer, and all I do is write, nothing else. The internal editor goes bu-bye and remains perfectly silent until I'm finished writing my new material.

The internal editor cooperates because she knows she'll get a brief shot at the new material that evening. I let her off the leash long enough to read through my new material, editing as she goes along for spelling, grammar, typos, and any other technical blips. We then put away that section of the manuscript and start over fresh the next morning with writing more new material.

Once the manuscript is finished, and I have no more new material to write, I take a couple of days off to get some mental distance between me and the work. Then I remove my internal editor's choke-chain and let her take over for the final read-through, edit and revision of the entire first draft manuscript.

This method may not work for everyone, but by completely separating the two main tasks of creating a novel -- writing and editing it -- I find I am happier and more productive on a daily basis and less likely to hit a block while composing the original story. I also have an easier time when it comes to the massive edit because I'm working with a completed manuscript, not story pieces. I have the confidence of knowing that I finished the story, which helps steady me for the less pleasant job of putting it under my internal editor's microscope and picking

out every flaw in it.

III. My Approach to Editing and Revising

As I mentioned above, I do a daily technical edit on the new material I write each day. That means:

A. Opening up the file, performing a spell-check, and correcting whatever the computer finds wrong with the work.

B. I then read through the new material from start to finish to see what the computer missed or I don't like, and make corrections again (I usually do this via a computer screen instead of printing out a hard copy because it's convenient and conserves paper.)

C. Occasionally I jot down notes on a pad while I'm reading on some aspect of the story that will affect the next day's work, because once I save this part of the book after the daily edit, I won't look at it again until I'm finished the manuscript.

As thrilling as writing the book is for me, I look forward to the final edit, because I really haven't reread the daily edits, and now look at them through fresh eyes. This waiting-until-it's-over approach to in-depth editing also creates a certain creative distance from the work which I think allows for more objectivity.

How the final edit goes:

D. I use a printed copy of the manuscript for the final edit simply because I catch more on paper than I do on the screen, and this is when I need to nail every problem.

E. As I read through the manuscript, I use a highlighter to mark non-specific

problems (such as a scene that reads flat or a chapter ending that doesn't flow into the next chapter's beginning.) I also keep a red pen on hand to make direct corrections to the text (almost exactly as a copy-editor from the publisher does.)

F. I may also jot down notes on a pad at this stage if I need to verify something or do more research.

Once I've read and marked through the entire manuscript, checked through my notes and made sure I have everything I need in order to revise, I then:

G. Sit down at the computer, open the electronic file, and begin typing in my revisions.

H. Once that's finished, I spell-check, correct typos, and then print out a second, revised manuscript copy.

I. I perform one more complete read-through for missed typos, grammar blips and so forth with the changes I've made.

J. After the last pass, I correct any pages that need it, and then ship off the manuscript to the editor.

My approach to editing and revising is very precise and tailored to my writing schedule, which is often so tight you can bounce a quarter off it. It requires a lot of self-discipline to make it work. I do recommend giving it a try, though, because if you follow my methods you have a better chance of finishing your manuscript versus being trapped in a three-chapter loop of writing, back-reading, editing, rewriting, back-reading, editing, etc.

IV. Still Crazy, Now What?

If you find you're reluctant to change even a single word in your story, you're either 1) the best damn writer in the world or 2) you've fallen in love with your manuscript. Chances are it's #2 and it's paralyzed your internal editor, who doesn't want to get between you and your sweetheart. My advice is to save a copy of the complete first draft, put it in a pretty box under your bed, and then get back to work.

Sometimes the problems in the manuscript befuddle you, and you're not sure how to handle them. When I get that feeling, I know I'm not editing at a professional, objective level. My own solution is to take a short break from the work and read one of my favorite novels by another author. I always go for the ones that I think are perfectly paced, superbly plotted or that contain something I admire, and they often change the way I perceive my own drafts (nothing makes your mistakes shine like beacons than reading a great book someone else wrote.)

The most frequent problem writers tell me they have with editing and revising is that their repair work makes the final draft of the manuscript read stilted, patchy or clunky. This is caused by trying to save too much of the original draft to avoid a big rewrite. I think your novel is worth some extra effort, don't you? So don't avoid the rewrite work.

Editing and revising are as important as writing, so you writers out there, don't ignore your internal editor. Just see that they do their job, and leave you alone while you're doing yours.

Other editing and revising resources:

[Self-Editing](#) by Lori Handeland

Holly Lisle's [One-Pass Manuscript Revision: From First Draft to Last in One Cycle](#)

[Editing Made Easy](#) by Lee Masterson

[Jane, Stop This Crazy Edit Machine](#) by Tina Morgan

Painful Prose: How to Edit Your Paragraphs to Make Them Great

FROM COMMENTS:

1. Ashlyn wrote: *How long do you get to edit a novel, on average? And what length of time would you prefer for editing?*

Depending on the project, I usually give myself five to ten days to perform the final edit. That's really my comfort time zone for a thorough edit. I never take that time for granted, though. If the schedule changes, and the editor needs the book sooner, I may only get 48 hours.

2. leatherdykeuk wrote: *Your method is fairly similar to mine, so what I'd like to know is what you do when want to add something in chapter 38 that wasn't in your original storyboard - something you just thought of that you suddenly can't do without. Do you ignore it, or go back and insert the changes that make the subplot -- or whatever -- work?*

While I'm writing, I flag the change in the draft like this:

[***Change Marcia's job from librarian to social worker]

From that point on in the manuscript I incorporate the change, so Marcia is a social worker for the rest of the book. When I perform the final edit and hit that flag, I then go back and change all the references to Marcia being a librarian.

The flag is great as an edit marker for me because I know everything preceding it has to be checked and revised accordingly, but nothing after it does.

3. Jess wrote: *What does editing in a "professional objective way" look like? Being really hard on it?*

It's hard to describe. You know when you look in the mirror and you clearly see and admit to yourself that you need a hair cut, and to lose ten pounds, and that red is not a great color on you with your skin tone, and you take action to change those things, that's the same as being professional and objective with your manuscript.

If you stand in front of the mirror and feel unattractive but you don't know why, or you see the too-long hair and love handles but you've got great excuses for them, then you're probably too emotional to be objective.

The big indicator is "But..." As in "But I haven't had time for a haircut and it doesn't look too bad" or "But I can't lose weight and still have fun during the Christmas holidays" or "But Mom says I look fabulous in red!" You'll find you do the same thing with the manuscript: "But my protagonist is tired so he shouldn't have to do anything but sit around in this chapter..."

Suppose you reread at the end of the night and the IE says "this isn't what the story needed at all!" Do you ever give up all the day's pages and start fresh the next day?

No, which is why I never edit new material for content, only for the technical blips. If there is something that is a big huge honking obvious disaster, or needs to be changed for the rest of the book, I flag it (see my comment to Rachel above) and move on, incorporating the change into the new material I write from there.

Leave it to me to wedge in plot questions instead.

Hey, plot happens. :) I believe I've got a plotting workshop lined up for tomorrow.

4. Jessica D. Russell wrote: *When I write, I go back and reread the entire thing over and over. Usually this is b/c I'm afraid I screwed up a plot a point or want to make sure I haven't lost the dialogue. How do you keep yourself from doing that? I have a vivid, but flexible outline and I still miss tiny things here and there. What do you recommend to keep me on track without losing it in my paranoia?*

I think we're all afraid that we're going to miss something while we're writing, so those feelings are natural. You already know what you're doing to feed that fear, too: when you write, you go back and reread over and over.

Think of backtracking, rereading and looking for problems when you write like this: you get ready to leave your house, and then you go back inside to make sure you turned off the coffee maker. Once is fine. Twenty times is not.

If this has been your writing habit for any length of time, it's going to be tough to break. Here's an idea of how to wean yourself off backtracking and rereading -- write for a day as you always do, but every time you backtrack, make a mark on a notepad. At the end of your writing time, count how many times you backtracked. The next day, make a commitment to cut down the number of times you backtrack in half, so that if you reread twenty times on the first day, you are only allowed to reread ten times the second day. Repeat this cutting-in-half method every day until you've trained yourself to go back only once.

5. Amanda wrote: *My question is what if half way through your plot on the first draft you realize your word count is going to be low. Would you go back and revise the first part or keep going to the end and then revise?*

I would keep going to the end and then revise, for two reasons: You get a

better perspective for adding more to a story if the manuscript is complete, and you can't really total your wordcount until you finish the novel (it may increase dramatically with future chapters, or you may discover something you need to add to the beginning of the book while writing the rest of it.)

6. Rob wrote: *Any tips on how to gag that internal editor during the first draft?*

I'd throw him a bone every now and then by letting him do a little editing on the WIP. The main reason I do a daily edit is to gratify my internal editor, so she shuts up and leaves me alone while I'm writing.

Let me tell you, he is a persistent bugger.

He should meet mine. No, wait, they'd probably spawn and overrun publishing with evil nasty little critters....

7. Rob wrote: *I can't leave a scene until it's pretty much ready for the printing press, so when I finish my "first" draft of a book it's as clean as I can possibly make it. And that first draft is actually SEVERAL drafts.*

Good point -- some writers manage to collaborate well with the internal editor, and they become writing partners versus adversaries.

I'm laughing as I type this -- not at you, Rob, but at the thought of my internal editor as my writing partner. She'd talk me out of a writing career in a week, tops. :)

8. Buffysquirrel wrote: *My internal editor won't be silenced. How on earth do you do it? It nags away at how useless I am until I'm paralysed with*

doubt.

I had this one book my internal editor was sure I couldn't write. It was in a new genre. Experienced pros had already told me I didn't have the voice for it. The research involved went far beyond the scope of anything I'd done. So did the cast of characters and the plot. I let the internal editor hammer me for weeks about it, and then I just decided to write it anyway. Whenever that voice started nagging, I agreed with it -- it was probably going to be a big steaming pile of manure -- and kept writing anyway. If it turned out to be a disaster, at least I gave it my best shot.

That novel was *Blade Dancer*. :)

The internal editor is a good thing. We can't assume every word we write is gold. But we also can't assume every word we write is manure. The internal editor has to give the writer equal time on the page.

9. JulieB wrote: *PBW, do you have any advice for those of us still struggling with spotting typos? I know that I _must_ print it out, I can never catch them all on screen. I've heard the suggestion that one should read backwrds from the bottom to the top. Have you ever tried this? Do you have any other suggestions?*

I've tried the backwards bottom-to-top trick, but it didn't improve my proofreading much. I am the world's worst speller, and I have grammar issues (see, internal editor, I didn't mention that person from my schooldays who GAVE me grammar hives.)

I write with my voice via VRS, and the Dragon often catches about half of my common spelling and grammar mistakes. I've also tried using a text-to-speech reader, which reads something you write back to you, and that helped.

Also: do you save your daily work as separate files, or do you just add on to the bottom of the previous stuff.

I save my work every day in two separate files: the first draft and the daily edited version (I keep the first draft in case I've deleted something during the edit that I need to look at again in the future.) I don't combine everything until I've finished writing the book.

I'm always looking for practical ways to make MS Word a better tool. I know you use DSN. Does that create it's on word processing page, or do you do the daily revisions in something else?

I use the Dragon's pad for almost all my writing, and cut-n-paste what I do into Word after I'm finished writing or editing. I can use the VRS in Word, but it acts a little wonky.

10. Ris wrote: *Do you use beta readers at all before shipping off a finished ms?*

I used to, but I have a high volume of output, and it was unfair to dump all those manuscript on the beta readers I trusted. Flying solo has been good for me, it's made me focus more on my editing and revising because I don't have beta readers as a safety net anymore.

11. Margaret wrote: *My question is how do you get that distance? You take a few days off, I take a few years off, and I still sink into the manuscript. I'm hoping that's because the story's that good ;), but I'd love some tips on achieving distance.*

I think it's a combination of mindset and objectives. I tend to compartmentalize everything, even my own personality, so Lynn the writer lives in a different place in my head than Lynn the editor, quilter, painter, seamstress, mother, partner, daughter, blogger, etc.

The mindset of me the writer is to create, build, entwine and progress the prose. It's all I want to think about when I'm tackling the WIP. When I'm done writing for the day, I send the writer back to her internal studio to take a nap, and shift into mother mode. In the evening, I take the internal editor (leashed) to the WIP. My mindset switches from pure creation to tailoring what's been done. The internal editor isn't interested in constructing something new, she wants to tailor what's already been made so that it fits better. (I know not everyone sews, but writing is so much like sewing for me personally that the mindset is almost identical.)

The writer always wants to come out when the internal editor is working. Likewise the internal editor wants to jump in on the writer whenever she's creating. Those two sides of my personality don't get along at all, though (the writer thinks the editor is a heartless bitch, and the editor thinks the writer is a daydreaming ninny), so I have to keep them segregated.

If you don't suffer from multiple personality disorder like I do, then try the switch on a smaller scale. Write a short piece of new material -- poem, story, whatever -- in the morning, or your ideal writing time. Focus only on creation tasks. Put it aside, and go back and edit it a few hours later. While editing, focus only on polishing what you've done. Repeat this exercise until you feel more confident in your self-discipline, and then try to tackle a larger project.

12. D wrote: *What do you do if you find, during an edit or random moment of clarity, that you've missed something major in a scene? Do you stop, go back into writer mode, and edit/add?*

I never backtrack. I have had revelation moments like that, and I tag them in the manuscript for the final edit, and change the story as I write it from that point on (see my response to Rachel's comment [here](#).)

13. Perpetualbeginner wrote: *How do you know when you're done?*

My natural inclination is to be dissatisfied with everything I write, no matter how great it turns out, and I would keep editing it forever if I didn't set up some ground rules for myself. That's why I'm so strict with myself about the one daily edit and the three-part final edit. If I can't get the problems solved during those four stages, I still have to turn it in.

I hate the rules, but thanks to them, I've never turned in a manuscript that I felt was poorly edited.

14. laubaineworld wrote: *Do you ever notice areas in your first draft which need to be fleshed out? Minor character direction within scene, scene descriptions, etc?*

My two main weaknesses -- description and emotion -- almost always need fleshing out. Sometimes my dialogue, which is the only thing I write that I don't plan out in advance -- needs trimming, because I love to write it, and have a tendency to ramble on and on with it past the point of effectiveness in the scene.

15. Anders wrote: *Isn't it a bit wasteful to do the copyediting immediately after finishing the day's writing? Maybe you don't cut as much as I do, but*

many of the mistakes I would be fixing with such an immediately-after-writing pass, I end up slicing out as part of a larger section of prose, anyway.

I don't edit the new material until about six to eight hours after I write it, so I don't have that problem. I always take the afternoon as a break to do housework and spend time with my kids.

Everyone is different, though, and some writers are able to shift directly from writing to editing mode without a hitch.

VW#3: Turn Up the Wattage ~ Story Power

I. The Terminal Manuscript

A submission lands on an editor's desk. The manuscript is perfectly formatted, printed, and meticulously proofed. The prose is well-written, the characters fully-fleshed out, the settings precisely detailed, and the plotwork completely logical. Even the title is a fitting choice.

If this submission were a bed, it would be all starched sheets and hospital corners.

The editor reads the first chapter or reviews the synopsis, and then composes a letter to the novel's hard-working author. She might praise the author for their competence, but she does not make an offer. Instead, she rejects the novel and moves on to the next submission.

Why does the editor do this? The author covered all the bases. The writing is at professional level. The story is seamless. All the i's are dotted and the t's are crossed, so what's the problem?

The problem is not the manuscript -- it's the story that it tells. It's bland, unoriginal, muddled or uninteresting. No matter how competently it's packaged as a submission, a story that doesn't have the power to captivate and excite the editor is not going to snag you an offer.

II. What Makes a Story Powerful?

When we read, we want to experience the following:

1. Emotional Connection: a great story affects us emotionally, and the only way it can do that is to resonate with us on some emotional level. A love story taps into how a reader feels about desire, love, and commitment between two people, just as a science fiction story invokes the reader's sense of adventure as well as their fears and hopes for the future.

2. Enchantment: like a treasure chest, a story should reveal things that dazzle the reader. If you're showing the reader nothing new, they're going to yawn through your story.

3. Entertainment: a story has to compete with the other pleasures in our lives, like sex, food, television, computers, video games and long hot bubble baths. If a story doesn't entertain us at least as much as a good flick, most readers will toss the book aside and turn on the TV.

4. Escape: everyone can use a few hours off from the burdens and stresses in life, and a great story will whisk us away from them.

Why are the readers' desires so important? A story is only as powerful as the reader's reaction to it.

Remember that these days, most dedicated readers are as sophisticated (and often as jaded) as publishing editors are. If every story out there has already been told a thousand times, readers have probably read nine hundred and ninety-nine versions of it. To push past all those mediocre memories, you need to think about how your story will be different from everything they've already read.

III. Delivering the Goods

To crank up the power of your story, keep all four aspects of reader expectation in mind as you create or polish the work:

#1 -- Make the emotional connection with the reader early on in the novel, and use tension and conflict to increase the stakes. Avoid the same-old-same-old with your plot; take the reader on a rollercoaster ride instead.

#2 -- You can't enchant someone without magic, so look at the elements of the fantastic in your story. Are they unique and unexpected, or dull and predictable? What will thrill the reader? What will bore them?

#3 -- Humor always entertains, but so do scandals, risks, thrills, irony, poetic justice and twists of fate. Any of those in your story? Think about your book being made into a movie -- as it stands, would it be a box-office smash, or tank on opening night?

#4 -- If you want to whisk me away from doing the laundry for a couple of hours, you've got to give me the vicarious thrill of being a voyeur. Show me new worlds, exciting people, and provocative situations. Don't show me *more* laundry.

IV. Power Generators

Powerful stories are the ones that start trends, propel their authors to publishing rockstardom, and end up occupying our keeper shelves. Ask Helen Fielding, the perpetrator of chick-lit, or Anne McCaffrey, the grand dame of science fantasy. John Grisham gave us the courtroom thriller; Stephen King has remade horror in his own image. We just lost Kathleen Woodiwiss, whom most of us consider to be the mother of the modern romance.

All of them have the same thing in common: they wrote powerful, original stories that blew away their readers.

It's tough to take risks with your fiction, though, especially when you could be

writing a competent knockoff. We all want to feel safe, especially when we're first starting out, because God forbid we get our foot in the door only to blow it. But I think we have to pour as much power as we can get into our stories, because the readers are so bored that they're finding other things to do, and we're losing more of them with each passing year.

Or maybe I'm wrong, and readers will collectively run to the stores to buy up the two hundred very competently written vampire brotherhood series that will be published in the next year.

We'll see.

Other sources on story power:

Kim Kay's [To Speak or Not to Speak ~ Creating Dazzling Dialogue Part 1](#) and [Part 2](#)

[Lost on the Border at Twilight: Finding -- and Using -- Your Life's Essential Strangeness](#) by Holly Lisle

[Play It Again, Sam - Redundancy in Writing](#) by Tina Morgan

Rob Parnell's [I Can't Put It Down - How to Write Compelling Fiction](#)

FROM COMMENTS:

1. Ayla wrote: *I was wondering, how DO you grip the reader with emotion in the first few pages? I'm told im really good at doing it throught a story, but im never sure how to get that emotion in striaght away. thanks!*

I love to play with hook lines (see post [here](#) for more on that subject) as a

way to instantly draw the reader into the story. They're effective maybe half of the time, but there are some readers who simply aren't that easy to hook. For them, you have to make the first five pages as engrossing as possible.

I don't like set-up prose or weather reports, so I gravitate toward using the conflict catalyst as an opener. In *Blade Dancer*, I start with Jory taking her mother's body out into the desert, and being caught with it by a future version of the INS. The mother's death (and the particulars of her Speaking before her death), combined with Jory's half-alien genes being exposed are the conflict catalyst, which sets the plot into motion.

2. Tempest Knight wrote: *Now, with so many new authors popping every month, most of the trends are covered. It's hard to find one in which you can become a "power generator." So, what can you do to become one? How do you find that special niche that hasn't been cornered yet?*

Being contrary has gotten me into nothing but trouble all my life, except when it comes to writing. I watch what everyone else is doing, and then I deliberately go the other way. Back when I first pitched Darkyn, all the vampire fiction depicted vampires as the monsters, and the humans as the victims (as it has for centuries.) I didn't buy most of vampire mythology anyway, and I have seen more monsters among humanity than you'll ever find in fiction, so it was easy for me to write the humans as the monsters and the vampires as the victims.

Often there are trend gaps that become more obvious as a trend swells into a tsunami, as paranormal romance has done. The classic vampire has been done to death (pardon the pun) so using a vampiric creature who feeds on something other than blood would give you a fresh place to worldbuild from and help your story stand out.

Or you can read some world mythology books and see if you can find a supernatural creature who hasn't yet been written into the ground (Lori Devoti did a great job with this by using men who shapeshift into hellhounds in *Unbound*, btw.)

If you'd rather stick with the basic trend foundation -- the classic vampire -- mix up the mythology and invent your own. We have so many vampires who can't go out during the day because sunlight turns them into ash, right? How about a vampire who can't go out during the night, because moonlight is lethal? Or, what if for some reason a vampire needs humans to drink his blood? That's the kind of myth-flip that makes your vampire fiction fall in with the trend but still stand out in the crowd.

3. Bridget Medora wrote: *Thanks so much for this post, PBW. I do have a question though -- for you, does a story's power come in the plotting stage, or more in the revision/editing stage? Or in other words, I guess, how closely is power related to plot? Or any other story element (world, character, etc.)?*

If the plot is weak, the power won't be there for me, and I won't be interested in writing it. But all of my plots are character-driven, so I think for me it's in how I build the characters in the planning stage.

There are strong influences over the plot, like the novel premise, the main conflict, the story tone and pacing, which can also affect the power of the story. But if you write like I do, and put together cardboard characters, they become the poisoned tree from which everything else grows like tainted fruit.

I think the trick is to determine what drives your story in the planning stages, and make sure that's as powerful as you can make it. Everything should fall into line from there.

4. -by Hameeduddin wrote:*So what would the editor do after reading this first page?...any pointers...?*

Since I'm not a publisher's editor, I can't predict their reaction to your story. But just to offer a writerly opinion, I would try not to use so much narrative, and get into showing the action sooner versus telling the reader so much about it.

7. Rowan wrote: *As a reader, I get hooked in with interesting characters that I can dig into. Second is an interesting story. Even if it's been done before in some form, your unique characters are going to do it their way. Make me care, that's all I ask.*

There you go. Beautifully said, Rowan.

8. cwahm wrote: *My question: If the conflict is as dramatic as this book (woman running away from abusive boyfriend), how do you give that emotional pull? Dialogue? The character's description?*

This is a powerful conflict, so I would put the reader in the character's shoes as much as possible. Skip the narrative, backstory or introspection - hit the reader with action and dialogue that sends them on the run with this character.

9. fionaphoenix wrote: *Speaking of which, how did you decide on romance as the genre for the Darkyn series? It seems like it would have worked as fantasy just as easily. Was it a matter of marketing?*

I wrote the books as dark fantasy, which is how I wanted them published. The way I understand it, the publisher sent the manuscript to one of their senior editors, who decided the novel was a romance. They used that as the reason to market them as romances, I believe. I fought against it because I didn't write them as romances, but it came down to if I wanted them published, I had to accept their decision.

I'd still like to move the series out of romance, but that's not going to happen now. And guess who gets blamed by everyone for the marketing? Me. :)

10. Shannon wrote: *When a book becomes powerful when it takes on a life beyond the words themselves. I start actually seeing what is happening in extreme detail. When I stop reading, I feel like I leave behind another world.*

I think that might be the quintessential definition of story power -- thanks, Shannon.

11. Zoe wrote: *How does a writer start seeing her story from the perspective of her readers? What's the best way to cultivate that viewpoint?*

Good question. Over the years I've developed a couple of different reading modes: reading for pleasure, when I just immerse myself in the story and don't worry about the technical aspects, reading to learn, where I read to spot and understand what the author is doing with the prose to achieve the story effects, and reading for market analysis, when I basically skim through the prose to get the main points of the story.

I try to combine all three modes when I'm reading to edit. I try to see the story on the surface as an enjoyable experience, and I check the technical aspects to make sure I've covered all the nuts and bolts, and I check off the main points to see that I've stayed true to the outline. Sometimes I have to read the daily new material more than once to see it from all three angles, too, so it's not as if you have to do it all in one shot.

Another method is to read the work out loud. If you stumble over reading a sentence, your reader will likely do the same, or get halfway through and skip the rest.

VW#4: Plotting With Purpose

I. Reasoning Plot

I never plot without a purpose in mind, even when I'm just writing something for the blog. You may remember that back when I first introduced [John and Marcia](#), my novel crash test dummies, [I told everyone up front](#) that John, our hero, was half-demon. Considering how honest I was from the very beginning, the fact that [John also turned out to be the diamond-thieving demon](#) shouldn't have been a surprise, but it was.

Nothing happens in a story without a reason, even if that reason is known only by the writer. This is why purpose plays such a huge part in plotting a novel.

II. The Purpose Driven Plot

You want to tell a love story, but you're not sure why. Maybe because romance pays so well, or you don't feel like writing a mystery. You pick an ex-Navy Seal as your protagonist because, well, it worked for Linda Howard and Suzanne Brockman, didn't it? Ex-Navy dude shall rescue a virginal librarian from a Fate Worse than an IRS audit -- not sure what that is, exactly, or why, but those are bridges you'll cross when you get to them. So these two will wander around the story and a lot of stuff you'll think up later will happen, until they fall in love, get married and live happily ever after, because . . . that's what happens.

This is typical plotting without purpose. You have a plot, sort of, and an idea of what to write, kinda. Essentially you're going to make it up as you go along. And while a few pansters out there are fabulous spontaneous plotters, and don't have to worry about planning anything in advance, most of you are likely going to stall at some point and/or have to rewrite significant portions of this story.

Let's try this again, shall we?

You choose to tell a love story because you have something to say about men, women, love and relationships. How love redeems us is the theme you choose to bring to the story. You select an ex-Navy Seal not only because he's single, physically fit, trained to take out terrorists and a hunk, but because he's emotionally damaged by his experiences and finds life after the military empty and lonely. His quest, whether he realizes it or not, is to redeem himself.

Redemption comes in the form of a timid librarian who has buried her life in her books. She is in her own way as damaged by her solitary life experiences as the ex-Seal is by his. They bump into each other repeatedly as the ex-Seal hides out in the library to avoid his well-meaning aunt, who wants to marry him off to any cute single woman she can get him to blind date.

Meanwhile, a rare book collector, who has become obsessed with obtaining a book he needs to complete a set he's been slowly acquiring all his life, discovers that the librarian owns the only known copy of it in the world. At first he approaches her about purchasing the book. As the book is the only thing the librarian has left that belonged to her anti-war protester father, who wrote odd numeric codes in the margins, she refuses to sell it. This refusal unbalances the collector, who proceeds to stalk, harass, burglarize and finally attempts to murder the librarian.

I could outline the rest of the novel, but by now I'm sure you get the idea. This is a plot with purpose: one that clearly maps out the story so you know not only what you're writing, but why.

III. Purpose Points

Every choice I made in outlining the example novel had some point of purpose,

as follows:

A. Main conflict: whatever you choose to make your main conflict, it has to have a purpose and a catalyst, or something to set events into motion that will eventually resolve the conflict.

In the case of my example story, the main conflict centers on the romantic relationship between the ex-Seal and the librarian. Both are going to have to work together and face their past in order to move on with their lives and have a chance at a happier future (which in my book may or may not involve marriage.) This conflict is symbolized by the rare book the librarian owns -- the book in some way symbolically embodies all of the characters' pasts. The conflict catalyst is the attempt by the book collector to purchase it: *As the book is the only thing the librarian has left that belonged to her anti-war protester father, who wrote odd numeric codes in the margins, she refuses to sell it.*

B. Characters: Character choices shouldn't be accidental. I prefer main characters who oppose each other in a definitive way while still sharing some common underlying principal; your mileage may vary.

My obvious choice of heroine for an ex-Seal was the daughter of an anti-war protester. If the main conflict revolves around a book, the story needs someone who wants that book, hence the rare book collector. The ex-Seal's aunt can provide a little comic relief as she tries to fix up her nephew with the ladies in town, and she is also the reason the ex-Seal and the librarian initially come together.

C. Subplots: The ex-Seal's past comes into play as he becomes the librarian's voluntary bodyguard; I'd definitely work a subplot where at some time during his military career he failed to save an innocent. This subplot can tie in with the main conflict, or merely provide a little extra motivation for the ex-Seal.

The same goes for the librarian's relationship with her anti-war protester father -- secretly she resented the time her father spent protesting the war rather than being a better parent to her. Her father's beliefs resulted in her being made into the town outcast, too.

The aunt could have once been in love with the librarian's father, and only ended the relationship because he began protesting the war -- justifying her resentment of the librarian.

As for the rare book collector who snaps when the librarian refuses to sell him her book, I'd probably go for a backstory subplot of what sets him on this greedy, self-destructive path. Obsessional collectors are usually loners who try to make up for childhood deprivations and enforce a sense of superiority to others by collecting rarities. Perhaps our collector grew up poor in wretched circumstances, and had to do terrible things to fight his way out. Despite his wealth, the collector has never felt adequate as a person. His rare book collection makes him important in the way nothing else can. To fail to complete that collection makes it worthless in his eyes, therefore he must have that book.

D. Setting Small town U.S.A. would be the setting I'd pick for this novel, as you have more shared history in that sort of setting versus a big anonymous city, but an old ethnic neighborhood in a city would work as well. The setting you choose should be purposeful and logical, not only to your characters, but to the other elements of the plot. Small towns have smaller police forces, which would not have the manpower to guard the librarian (compelling the ex-Seal to watch over her himself.) A rare book collector might be a long-time resident, or an outsider who has come to town not to become a resident, but to pretend to while he stalks the librarian.

IV. A Readable Feast

Let's move out of the writing space and into the kitchen for a minute.

When I put together a meal, I consider my family's likes and dislikes with food. I read recipes to find one I think they'll enjoy most, prepare and measure my ingredients, set out what tools I need and take the time to figure out when to start cooking every component of the meal, so that it will all be ready at the same time to serve. I also look at my food choices to see that they complement each other. I may taste what I cook as I'm preparing it, to see if it needs a little more spice or something. But I know that if I follow the recipe, use the ingredients it calls for, and time it correctly, I'll end up serving an enjoyable meal.

I could go into the kitchen and just throw whatever appeals to me into a pot and see what happens. The family may or may not like it, but this is all about being a creative cook, not what they like or will eat. I'm not a naturally gifted spontaneous cook, though, and I'll probably end up throwing out two or three batches of glop before I find the right combination of stuff to make an edible dish. Certainly it's more creative and fun to mess around in the kitchen like that, but I'd rather not waste my time or supplies, or risk making something that will make my family go *euwww*.

I know that plotting is a lot of work, and for some people it sucks all the fun out of writing. The main difference between a plotter and the pantsier, however, is that expectation of fun.

From the way it's been described to me, the pantsier is all about the joy of spontaneity and puttering around the novel kitchen. Writing is art, and you can't plan great art -- you have to be free to create and explore and toss out five or six different batches of novel glop before you hit on the right story. Personally I may

not be able to do that, but I do get it.

I know some of you pantsers out there are marvelous spontaneous plotters, too, so don't consider this workshop a criticism of your methods or reasoning. You do get the job done; I just can't figure out how.

I have fun when I write, but I don't write to have fun. I think the main reason to cook is to feed people, and I apply the same philosophy to writing. I write books for people to read them. For me this means turning out a quality product on schedule, without wasting time or resources. Because I know that the hungry family in the next room wants to be fed, and if a satisfying meal doesn't hit the table on a regular basis. they're going to order out for pizza.

Other sources on plotting:

Plotting the Novel: Otherwise Known as The Real Reason Writers are Neurotic
by Lisa Gardner (.pdf file format)

Randy Ingermanson's *How to Write a Novel using the Snowflake Method*

Holly Lisle's two workshops on plot: *Beyond the Basics: Creating the Professional Plot Outline* and *Notecarding: Plotting Under Pressure*

Writing a Novel - Plotting by Joanne Reid

FROM COMMENTS:

1. Laura Elliott wrote: *That didn't sound like a bad plot! I read that book about the Seal and librarian. Aren't you worried that someone will steal that? Ideas aren't copyrighted. I'm not saying I would, I've got enough characters in my head already!*

As you said, ideas can't be copyrighted. I don't worry about other people ripping off my ideas. It's already happened, and there's really nothing you can do about it, except feel sorry for them. Stealing from another writer is beyond pathetic.

Violate my copyright, however, and you'll be talking to my publisher's attorneys.

2. perpetualbeginner wrote: *I've tried plotting a time or two (including the Snowflake Method) and it doesn't seem to work for me at all. It's not that it's not as much fun, it feels like I just blasted my muse with a shotgun; she drops dead.*

You may be one of those marvelous spontaneous plotters for whom everything works out fine in the end.

The only problem with being a pantsier is when you get to the professional level and have to start pitching books on a regular basis before you write them. No editor is going to make an offer for a book about which the writer says "I have no idea, but it'll be really cool, I promise." You may end up having to write every book before you try to sell it.

3. Jason wrote: *Anyway, this may be different and it may be the same, but I just thought I'd ask: you write Sci-fi as well, and since I write fantasy a lot and they're both about big grand adventures and such, how do you keep from getting a soggy middle?*

Subplots that are resolved at different times during the story help me avoid that problem. So do timelines -- I always make sure I have plenty of action

happening in the middle of the book. Then, if all else fails, I throw in an unexpected but resolvable crisis. Blowing up stuff usually works well. :)

I've tried three times within the last two years, and I just can't make it through the middle, I always sink.

This is where plotting in advance helps -- you can plan for that stretch of story where nothing much can happen with the main conflict. One writer told me he writes the middle of the book first, just to make sure he doesn't end up with a dead zone.

4. revalkorn wrote: *I've never been good at coming up with a plot. I think it comes of having one of the most boring lives ever.*

Wait a minute, I thought I held that title. :)

The problem is, even when life gets "exciting", the plots I get are much too autobiographical. No one wants to read about a semi-defrocked pastor.

When I was younger, I used to write what seemed like the same story over and over. I couldn't figure out why they all sounded interchangeable until I tried rewriting Shakespeare, and for the first time was not able to put myself in the protagonist's shoes. I think a lot of us do start out writing veiled autobiographies, and it's not until we deliberately choose a character who does not resemble us in the least nor shares our opinions and habits that we can break out of that mirror trap.

5. Zoe wrote: *I have to disagree with you on plotters and pantsers. I write primarily for my own enjoyment, but I'm definitely a plotter. For me, having outlines to work from makes me enjoy the story more, because I know where I'm going. If I don't have that map to lead me, I get frustrated and*

lost.

I don't think plotters are universally exempt from writing for their own enjoyment, so no disagreement there. About a third of what I write is not for publication, but I plot out everything whether it's going to be in print or not.

VW#5: Seducing vs. Slapping ~ Self-Promotion Styles and Strategies

I. Disorderly Conduct

A friend and I were playing the "What psychological problem does your online behavior reveal?" game, and trying to decide if one chronic offender was displaying a borderline or narcissistic personality disorder. My friend decided the excessive dependency on ego-feeding indicated borderline, but the exaggerated sense of self-importance made me go with narcissistic. We're waiting for a third pal who was a psych major to make the final call.

Yes, this is what we do when we're not playing Amazon.com review poker. We profile jackasses.

It got me to thinking, though, about the psychological aspects of self-promotion. Being the obsessive-compulsive organizer I am, I decided to come up with a classification system. When it comes to self-promotion, writers tend to fall into one of three general categories:

A. Avoidant: for whatever reason, these writers dislike or resent self-promotion intensely, and thus try to avoid it. Like anything, you never know how good you are until you give it a shot. These folks would rather never know (and this would be my category.)

B. Dependent: these writers are submissive types who lack self-confidence and do whatever self-promotion their publisher, writer friends, or writing organization tell them to do. They rely almost entirely on others to make decisions for them. These writer may be good at promoting, but they never think they are, so they follow the herd (the most prevalent category of self-promoting writer.)

C. Obsessive-Compulsive: self-promotion is one of the secret handshakes

these writers believe exist, so they obsess over it, go to extremes, and take on more and more of the responsibility for promoting their books. Like the dependent, they may actually be good self-promoters, but they're never happy with the results, and escalate until they blow up, burn out or give up (this one is always a heartbreaker to watch.)

I think we need a fourth option. One that doesn't require us to be control freaks, herd followers or conscientious objectors. One that permits us to promote intelligently and effectively without feeling shame, dependency or disgust.

And I'm still working on what that option is.

II. Trends

Self-promotion follows as many trends as publishing does. Whenever a few authors start doing a new type of affordable self-promotion, and it looks like it's working for them, every other author online jumps on the bandwagon. When I was blogging back in 2001, I knew maybe a dozen other authors who were doing the same. Now it seems like everyone in the biz has a weblog, and a MySpace.com page (okay, I don't, but I also avoid anything that requires me to learn new HTML.)

This doesn't just happen with the low-cost self-promotion, either. Having a professional book trailer, which can cost thousands of dollars, made for your book became a trend for a while. The quality ranged from excellent to counter-productive. Virtual blog tours, which also have a hefty price tag, were another popular trend.

I keep thinking of that thing our moms used to say: *If all your friends jump off a cliff, that doesn't mean you have to.*

It surprises me, too, because writers have such creative minds and are talented problem-solvers. Our books are all different, we're all different, yet the general strategy being used for self-promotion is to clone what everyone else is doing? That makes no sense to me. There is no safety in numbers, not in publishing.

Look at it this way: if you're a tree, and you want to stand out in the forest, the last thing you try to do is look like all the other trees.

III. Take My Book, Please

I can't tackle all the problems with self-promotion in a single workshop, so let's focus on one issue: tone.

The tone of your self-promotion says a lot about you the writer. If the reader perceives your self-promotion to be strident, demanding, egotistical, phony, tentative, clumsy, etc., they will apply that opinion not only to your work, but to you as a person. We all think SPAM is irritating, impersonal and offensive, and when an author SPAMs us, we think the same about them.

When appropriately presented, well-crafted, genuine and artistic self-promotion has the same effect. A beautiful, thoughtful or sincere presentation says great things about the author, especially if they created it. Personally when I see writers doing innovative things with their self-promotion, I respond to it by buying their books and talking about them here on the blog.

Achieving the right tone is tricky. Even defining it is problematic. It's like Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart's infamous quote about obscenity given in his opinion on *Jacobellis vs. Ohio* -- I know it when I see it. What I do know from my observations is that people largely respond to how they perceive they're being addressed as much as the content of the address. Some examples:

A. Love Me, Love My Book -- authors often objectify themselves in their self-promotion by tossing out lists of awards, professional achievements and other forms of special recognition to portray themselves as successful industry icons. Everyone loves a winner, and this does impress some readers, but it only works on a large scale if the writer actually does have the professional clout to back it up.

B. Buy My Book Before I Starve -- self-promotion that involves the writer confessing their personal or financial straits in relation to their book sales can create reader empathy and a desire to help. This can be dangerous, though, because there are authors who use this approach with every book they promote, and readers get tired of hearing how desperate they are, or perceive them as liars trying to get a mercy read.

C. You're Not Smart Enough to Read My Book -- this is my personal favorite; also known as the Stone Soup approach. Authors who use it actually try to persuade readers to buy their book by convincing them that only extremely intelligent people will be able to understand it. And yes, a few people with low self-esteem fall for it, but I think most readers have a pretty solid sense of how smart they are, so it can backfire on the author.

D. Don't Buy That Idiot's Book, Buy Mine --

The gleeful online trend of *schadenfreude* self-promotion depends on people's need to vent some hostility to generate sales out of comradery, gratitude and support. Most of us do respond to authority figures, especially if they present themselves as judges, but often the author's anger and self-righteousness slips into unreasonable outrage whenever *they* are judged and found wanting, which makes them appear largely hypocritical, and can quickly disperse their following.

IV. Honey and Vinegar

As much as I avoid self-promotion, I have learned a few things from watching it over the years. Readers are book lovers, and they don't want to be ridiculed, kicked, punched and slapped by a potential new flame. They want to be respected, intrigued, involved, appreciated, and seduced.

It's the classic honey vs. vinegar situation. If you want to catch more flies, you don't put out a dish of vinegar.

The fact is that readers seem to respond most to sincerity, humor, honesty and a certain level of enthusiasm. The problem is that all of these things can't be faked, or not for long, anyway. So to find the right tone for your self-promotion, you have to think about how you feel about your readers, and how much of your real self you want to share with them.

Then? Get real.

Other sources on self-promotion:

Astrid Cooper's *Marketing and Self-Promotion*

Self-Promotion Means Always Having to Say You're Somebody by Morris Rosenthal

Self-Promotion by Robert J. Sawyer

Barbar Stahura's *Shameless Self-Promotion*

FROM COMMENTS:

1. laubaineworld wrote: *One quick question - in an industry where the pressure is on to constantly come up with new ways to promote, isn't the tried and true word of mouth still the best way to go? Or is this simple ancient lowtech method getting 'lost' in the shuffle?*

Word of mouth is a powerful thing, and I think it's being overlooked by most authors who dismiss it as not big or flashy enough. Huge mistake.

StarDoc is a prime example. The series never got support from anyone but the readers. I did what I could by putting out some stories on my old web site, but after my publisher basically abandoned the series, word of mouth was the only thing that kept the series alive, and the readership growing.

None of the first five books went out of print because more people kept buying them every year. And not because I got great reviews and lots of awards -- the series has been repeatedly trashed or ignored by the genre trades. The only time I got a mention was when I hit the SF top ten bestseller list, which I did with every book (but now they ignore my BSL rankings, too.)

Ask any SF author how many years on average they can keep a midlist book in print and they'll tell you -- one, tops. *StarDoc* book one alone has been in reprint for seven straight years. And the only people responsible for that are the readers.

2. revalkorn wrote: *Rhetorical question (because I don't know if there really is an answer): Where do you draw the line between sounding earnest/willing and sounding pathetic?*

Very tough question.

To me, humor never sounds pathetic, and it establishes instant rapport

with almost everyone (there are people with no sense of humor, of course.)

If humor isn't appropriate in the situation, then I'd go with a professional approach. Be factual and polite, but don't bring any personal or emotional elements into it at all.

3. Sasha White wrote: *Now I'm tryinhg to figure out where I am in the self promotion game. LOL. I guess sort of between Dependent and Obsessive compulsive. LOL*

Oh, I don't know -- you have a sizzling web site, a lovely personality, and you always come across as warm and friendly. You're actually nice without any hint of that air-kissing phony RWA red-lipsticked B.S. I used to dodge back in the day.

But then, you're Canadian, and all the Canadians I know are very cool people. :)

4. witchofbreithla wrote: *I think I'm going to have to fight to overcome being avoidant. I'm just so shy sometimes that it's really hard.*

I've battled shyness all my life, so I understand the dread. I think most writers are shy to some degree. It's worth finding an avenue like blogging where the shyness won't stop you from communicating with others, sharing information and making friendships.

5. Anonymous wrote: *I have mixed feelings about promotion. On the one hand, I know better than to put too much money and time into it because*

the distribution of my book is extremely limited so I have to think of my ROI (return on investment). On the other hand, I get a kick out of coming up with new ideas to promote myself and my book.

If you're having fun with it, then self-promotion isn't such a chore. You're more likely to come up with creative promo if you feel enthusiastic about it.

Still, it's not like the number of books sold through innovative marketing in my situation is going to do a whole helluva lot for sales. I don't stress about it. I just have fun with my ideas and let it go at that.

My thought would be to find as many low or no-cost ways to promote each book while you start saving some of your income for one big push. That's what I did with the Darkyn books -- I saved my extra pennies for five years, and when I saw I might have a chance to break out with this series, I invested everything I had in it. I learned a lot from promoting this series, too -- if I ever want to do something like that again, I know what works, what the publisher will support, what's a waste of time and money, etc.

6. Jean wrote: *OK. I'll make it easy for you -- I'm borderline narcissistic with a touch of paranoia tossed gently for good measure. 'Cause the full-blown narcissistic paranoid in me just knows it must have been me you were profiling.*

Lol. Not even close, pal.

I'm not big on the overblown self-promotion you described. I DO want to know when someone has a book out. In your case, your latest releases section does a good job of telling that.

That's the type of self-promo I respond to most often -- present but not screaming in my face. I like to see cover art, too, although I try to resist

buying a book based only on the art. Interesting art will catch my attention, though, so I'm just like any reader that way.

Blogs are great ways to make on-line readers aware that something is available. I'm not sure how you reach readers who don't cruise the web looking for their favorite author. In that case, on-line bookseller recommendation pages can help.

The problem with online bookseller recs is that they are usually publisher-purchased space versus honest recs. I don't mind advertising, but I dislike it being represented as something else.

As an example of something that works, I love what Rosina Lippi did recently for the trade release of Tied to the Tracks.

Have to agree with you there. :)

7. Jessica D. Russell wrote: *Oh, I went to a workshop today that had a Plot-stormers worksheet you'd done some time back...it really helped me plotting my next novel. Thank you!*

Wow, that IS a blast from the past -- I did the original Plot Stormers at National back in 2002, I think. It's nice to know my worksheets are still making the rounds after all these years -- thanks for mentioning it, Jessica.

8. Jenyfer Matthews wrote: *I have tried to establish a web presence but I don't want to be one of those hit-and-run promo post people. And lately I've been seeing a lot of discussion in various places about how all the promo stuff like bookmarks and magnets and such don't really influence sales anyway - it mostly boils down to word of mouth.*

So how you manage to not look like a tree is something I have not yet figured out.

You're already ahead of the game, in that you see the value of real blogging versus the phoning-it-in variety, and that widgets are mostly vanity junk.

I think about the tree problem this way: I'd rather pick up my roots and move to a little meadow of my own than be smothered by branches crowding me out for whatever little patch of forest I might be able to occupy. The meadow may not be as impressive as the forest, or visited as often, but I can breathe and grow there.

9. Carrie wrote: *I was at the RWA PRO workshop on Thursday where the speaker asked how many folks (out of about 350) had websites. About 75% raised their hands. How many people have weblogs? Maybe a third. How many people blog daily? Only six.*

Only six? Yikes.

I must hang out with active bloggers, or else pubbed authors get into blogging, but that low low number shocked me. Shows how many people are involved in writing but largely exist outside of online communities.

Given how easy it is to set up a blog and participate in the online publishing community, you'd think it would be the reverse, wouldn't you? Very interesting info, Carrie, thanks for posting it.

10. Romi wrote: *Do you know whether it is much the same in the craft book market?*

I have some friends in my quilting gild who have published how-to craft books, and their side of the industry is much more involved with their trade publications and selling via fabric shops, book clubs and conventions. One fiber artist friend is on the road eight months out of the year on her con circuit, but she handsells her own books while she does demos, and she does quite well.

11. Katrina wrote: *Actually, you know the honey-and-vinegar thing? If it's fruit flies you're hoping to draw, a dish of cider vinegar will draw them like...well, flies.*

Well, that finally explains the hen parties, lol.

VW#6: Career Writing

I. Paperback Writer, the Novel

Once upon a time, in a trailer park far, far, away, a writer wrote her first novel-length manuscript on a second-hand manual typewriter her mother had given her for her birthday. She'd written quite a few short stories and some novellas in longhand on legal pads and notebook paper, but having a typewriter gave her the confidence (and the writing tool) she needed to attempt something far more complex.

She finished that manuscript about a year later, and submitted it to a publisher. She was so excited, and so sure it would be accepted for publication. For she had written a book -- a whole book -- and no one had helped her. For the first time in her life, she knew that she had created something important and beautiful, and she had done it all on her own.

Now all we need is an ending . . .

Ending #1: The publisher stole the brilliant manuscript, and sent a deranged intern to assassinate the writer. A failed literary agent coming off a twelve-step program heard the publisher plotting the writer's demise, and raced to the ghetto to stop the madness. Mayhem ensued, a kindly but disposable sidekick met an untimely end, but the failed agent was able to save the writer and bring the publisher to justice (crime fiction.)

Ending #2: The publisher invited the writer to New York to work with an editor who wore designer jumpsuits and tortured the writer, mainly over her thrift-store wardrobe. After agonizing over never being able to afford the right shoes for BEA or please the boss from hell, the writer fell in love with the illegitimate son of Manolo Blahnik, quit publishing and lived almost happily ever after (chick-lit.)

Ending #3: The publisher invited the writer to New York, where she was bitten by a vampire agent on the subway. After suffering a horrible but non-fatal transformation into a dhampir novelist, the writer discovered publishing was being run by werewolves, some of whom wanted to have wild monkey sex with her, and all of whom were locked in an eternal battle with the fanged literary agents. The writer spent the rest of her immortal life avoiding one tall, dark and furry were-editor, occasionally having wild monkey sex with him, and battling the evil blood sucking agents (dark fantasy.)

Ending #4: The publisher hated the brilliant manuscript, because that's how publishers are, and told the writer to buzz off. The poor writer starved to death in meaningless poverty, misery and sorrow. The manuscript was recovered from the trash by a sensitive but jaded intern, who found a publisher for it. The manuscript became an immediate worldwide bestseller while the writer's ghost watched from heaven. After the dead writer's book received a Pulitzer, the intern died in a pointless car accident and the publisher kept all the royalties but commissioned a nice, cheap little series of artistic suitcase shrines depicting the lives of the intern and the writer using their own hair (literary.)

Ending #5: The publisher loved the brilliant manuscript, made the writer an offer that allowed her to escape the poverty in which she dwelled and meet a hunky, brooding but monogamous ex-editor who protected her from brutal, maniacal reviewers, until she discovered he once wrote reviews. After that horrible black moment, she forgave him, he proposed, they married, and they lived happily ever after. (romance)

Ending #6: The publisher accidentally exposed the manuscript to an experimental print-on-demand machine, which acquired sentience, infiltrated an editor's human form and used the secrets in the manuscript to trigger the singularity, which wiped out 99.9% of human life. The writer, her dog and a

brilliant but surly astrophysicist then battled the POD thing for Earth's dubious future. Not that there was any icky romance whatsoever between the writer or the astrophysicist, you understand (science fiction.)

Ending #7: The thirteen-year-old writer received a very kind rejection letter from the publisher. The editor addressed her as an equal, and let her down gently and politely. The letter ended on a generous note, with an offer by the editor to consider any other novel she might write in the future. The writer never stopped writing after that, grew up and, after about thirteen hundred more rejections, became a career writer (YA.)

Guess which one is the ending to my story, folks?

II. Writing as a Career Choice

As much as we would like to be the heroes to Publishing's villains, choosing to write professionally is generally not the stuff of novels. It's a job.

Actually, it's a couple of jobs. Being a writer and making a career as a writer are two separate but equally frustrating occupations. There is so much involved in the art of writing that it can be considered a full-time, unpaid job on its own. Most writers would like to make a living doing what they love, so they must take on a second job: pursuing publication. Add to that caring for a spouse or partner and family, a part- or full-time day job, a home, a car, a social life, and all the daily requirements of being a functional part of society, and you end up with one very overworked, under-appreciated individual being pulled in five different directions.

This does not get any better after publication, because the writer acquires another full-time job: being an author. This means working with an editor, a copy-editor and possibly an agent and publicist, negotiating contracts, meeting deadlines, assisting in production and otherwise contributing to the final product.

Then there is the ever-increasing pressure to network, mingle with other people in the biz, create and maintain an online presence, make public appearances and promote the final product.

Are you sure you guys want to do this, and not try something easier and less stressful, like disarming landmines?

III. The Writer Vs. the Career Writer

You're still here, so we'll assume the bomb squad will have to go find new recruits somewhere else. Let's discuss a common career situation involving a request from an editor:

Editor: Your title doesn't have the same oomph that the previous books have had nor a hint of the genre you're writing in. Can we discuss some other possibilities?

As a writer, my first reaction to this request is to say no, don't you *dare* touch my title. This is because:

A. I work very hard on coming up with my titles.

B. I don't like anyone else "contributing" to my work. I work alone, thank you.

C. I've already had too many editors stick me with titles for my books, most of which were beyond lame and all of which I still hate, to this day. Not that I'm bitter or anything.

The part of me that is reacting is the writer. She's angry, insulted, fearful and disappointed. She's a bit irrational, too. This is why she is not allowed to talk to the editor. Instead, the part of me that is the career writer steps in to try

persuasion:

Writer: To explain the reasoning behind my title, I went with that to make the connection back to the mythology that I established for this character in an earlier book. I think that continuity is important for the readers. I did have a tough time coming up with it, but as soon as I read the Keats poem, it all came together for me. The parallels to Greek mythology are resonant, and an ideal fit for the protagonist. Obviously I think it's beautiful, poetic and perfect for the novel, and I hope after reading this you will, too.

That's calm, reasonable, and still defends the original title. It's a professional response. It also doesn't work:

Editor: I'm sorry but we need a new title. You've made some good points, but it's just not suitable. We think it sounds too dull.

The writer in me blows a fuse. *Dull? Excuse me? It's from Greek mythology. You know, those guys who invented civilization? Didn't they teach you any of that at the University of Frat Parties? And whose name is going to be on this book, anyway? I'll give you a hint: NOT YOURS.*

God, I loved writing that. But that's not how the career writer responds, of course:

Writer: I'm sorry to hear that no one cared for my choice. I appreciate all you did to support it, and I'll get to work on a list of new ones.

The career writer will get a decent list of alternatives to this editor within twenty-four hours, too. Why? To be helpful and cooperative, which is the career writer attitude, and because the last thing both the writer and the career writer in me want is for the *editor* to think up the titles.

Just a side note: perhaps the single greatest invention of all time for writers pursuing a career has been e-mail. Before e-mail, a writer and an editor or agent had to communicate by meeting in person, talking on the phone or relying on the postal service. E-mail is better than flying up to New York for a meeting, is as fast as a phone call, and whips the postal service on delivery 100% of the time. E-mail also acts as a damper between the writer and everyone trying to mess with their work. E-mail allows your career writer time to think of how to respond (not something you can do in a meeting or on the phone) while the outraged writer can curse and kick the office trash can around the house out of Publishing's beady little eyesight.

Some of you know that anti-perspirant commercial, during which a celebrity says, "Never let them see you sweat." In publishing, never let them see how much they piss you off.

IV. Writing as Chief Biz Navigator

All week we've been talking about how to write books. I've thrown in a little about handling the biz, but I believe writing should be our priority at all times.

Collectively we are not celebrities, publicists, agents or media specialists. We're writers. Writers write.

Publishing isn't as heartless as we might think. There are editors and agents who honestly care about us. Some of them even understand what we go through for the work. Publishing is a business, however, and a business must generate profits or it can't compete with other businesses. When it comes down to being supportive to writers or making a profit, publishing is always going to pick door number 2.

Writing is our talent, and over the length of a career it becomes the only real weapon we have in the battle of the shelves. Some ideas on how writing can help

you get through the long haul:

A. Write to create the best books you can: Writing is your job description, and it's the only thing in your career over which you have significant control. Writing, nothing else, should be your priority.

B. Write to publicize yourself: How many of you have met me in person? How many of you know me from reading one of my books or visiting the blog? What keeps bringing you back, my gorgeous face, my genial personality, my fantastic wardrobe, my shelf of important industry awards, my brilliant advertising all over the Internet, or the writing?

I rest my case.

C. Write to generate interest and opportunities: July's Biz post was about how to find [Supplemental Writing Income](#). It's also free publicity. When you sell an article to a print magazine, you have the chance to interest whoever subscribes to or buys that mag. Some of these people will go out, look for and buy your books. Readers aren't the only ones reading, either -- one article I published in an industry trade resulted in about a dozen job offers.

D. Write to teach and inform: The next generation of writers needs all the help they can get. Investing in them by writing to teach them about the biz and to keep them from getting scammed is simply the right thing to do. This is good for your soul, pays it forward and even helps boost your self-esteem.

E. Write to support your colleagues: I've gotten a lot of flack from the powers that be for the way I support other authors. I'm an idiot; I could be doing for myself what I do for others, and become as self-absorbed as that jackass we were profiling yesterday, and sell a couple more books. Or I can help spread the word about talented writers who deserve a lot more recognition than they get,

maybe nudge some of my colleagues into doing the same, sell a lot of great books, feel great and help the industry. Hard choice.

If that still doesn't convince you, guess whose name and endorsement are on some of the bestselling novels of the last couple of years? Yep. That idiot who doesn't pimp her own books.

I'd like to thank everyone for stopping in this week and joining in the virtual workshops (and I will now go and catch up on answering all the questions in comments.) I'd also like to thank all the writers who so generously answered my call, and gave of their time and wisdom to hold their own virtual workshops: [Joely Sue Burkhart](#), [Gabriele Campell](#), [LJ Cohen](#), [Rosina Lippi](#), [Jordan Summers](#), and [Shiloh Walker](#). Ladies, you are the best.

Other sources on career writing:

[*Create a Successful Career as a Freelance Writer*](#) by Danielle Hollister

[*Writing as a Career*](#) by Kacey

Deborah Lapoint's [*Maximize Your Writing Career*](#)

[*Questions About the Business of Writing*](#), [*Questions About Going Pro*](#), and [*Life Changes Writing: Writing Changes Life*](#) by Holly Lisle

[Courage](#) by PBW

Links to Other Virtual Workshops

I invited a group of other writers to join me this year for the Left Behind & Loving It virtual workshops project, and they all did a terrific job with it. Here are the workshops they held on their weblogs.

Joely Sue Burkhart's [Do You Know the Secret?](#)

Gabriele Campbell's [How to Make a Battle Come Alive on the Page, Part 1](#), [Part 2](#) and [Part 3](#)

LJ Cohen's [Organize your Novel with a WIKI](#)

Rosina Lippi's [Workshop Day 1: The Story Machine](#), [Workshop Day 2: Ask Your Characters](#), [Workshop Day 3: Rev Your Engines](#), and [Workshop Day 4: Mix It Up](#)

Jordan Summers talks about [writing outside the traditional boundaries of romance](#), and her own trials and triumphs as an example of what roads are available and how to avoid some of the potholes

Shiloh Walker's [Heat with Heart Day 1](#), [finding that missing emotion](#), [Exploring that Backstory](#) (where she briefly grills me). She will be continuing the workshop as a series every Wednesday at her blog, so do check in [here](#) to follow along.

***Tied to the Tracks*
by Rosina Lippi**

During the virtual workshops this year I gave away many books, but my favorite among all of them is *Tied to the Tracks* by Rosina Lippi. If you'd like to check out her work, here is Rosina's bibliography:

As Rosina Lippi

Homestead published by Mariner 1999 ISBN# 0395977711

Tied to the Tracks published by Putnam 2006 ISBN#0399153497

Pajama Jones (upcoming)

As Sara Donati

Into the Wilderness published by Bantam 1999 ISBN# 0553578529

Dawn on a Distant Shore published by Bantam 2001 ISBN# 0553578553

Lake in the Clouds published by Bantam 2003 ISBN# 0553582798

Fire Along the Sky published by Dell 2005 ISBN# 0553582771

Queen of Swords (upcoming Oct 2006) published by Bantam ISBN# 055380149X

Rosina also has a terrific weblog, *Storytelling2*, where she shares valuable insight on writing, publishing, and the writer's life:

<http://www.rosinalippi.com/weblog/>.

About the Author



Since 2000, Lynn Viehl has published thirty-seven novels in five genres. On the internet, she hosts [Paperback Writer](#), a popular publishing industry weblog which she updates daily. Lynn's StarDoc science fiction series has been a genre bestseller for nine consecutive years. Lynn's first three novels of the Darkyn, *If Angels Burn*, *Private Demon* and *Dark Need* all made the USA Today bestseller list, and her fourth Darkyn novel, *Night Lost*, debuted in May 2007 at #21 on the New York Times extended bestseller list.

Readers are always welcome to send feedback on this free e-book by e-mail to LynnViehl@aol.com.

Paperback Writer/Lynn Viehl

If you enjoy my work, please let other people know about it – word of mouth is the best advertising a writer can't buy. Also, if you're interested in reading the novels I've written, here's my bibliography:

Science Fiction (*writing as S.L. Viehl*)

StarDoc SF series:

StarDoc January 2000 Roc SF/F ISBN# 0451457730
Beyond Varallan July 2000 Roc SF/F ISBN# 0451457935
Endurance January 2001 Roc SF/F ISBN# 0451458141
Shockball August 2001 Roc SF/F ISBN# 0451458559
Eternity Row September 2002 Roc SF/F ISBN# 0451458915
Rebel Ice January 3, 2006 Roc SF/F ISBN# 0451460626
Plague of Memory January 7, 2007 Roc SF/F ISBN# 9780451461230
Drednoc to be released 2008 Roc SF/F
Crystal Healer to be released 2009 Roc SF/F

Other SF novels:

Blade Dancer August 2003 Roc SF/F ISBN# 0451459261
Ring of Fire (Anthology; short story: A Matter of Consultation)
January 2004 BAEN ISBN# 074347175X
Bio Rescue August 2004 Roc SF/F ISBN# 0451459784
Afterburn August 5, 2005 Roc SF/F ISBN# 0451460294

Romance (*writing as Gena Hale*)

Paradise Island April 2001 ONYX ISBN# 0451409825
Dream Mountain August 2001 ONYX ISBN# 0451410033
Sun Valley June 2002 ONYX ISBN# 0451410394

Romance (*writing as Jessica Hall*)

The Deepest Edge February 2003 ONYX ISBN# 0451207963
The Steel Caress May 2003 ONYX ISBN# 0451208528
The Kissing Blades August 2003 ONYX ISBN# 045120946X
Into the Fire March 2004 ONYX ISBN# 0451411307
Heat of the Moment October 2004 ONYX ISBN# 0451411587

Dark Fantasy (*writing as Lynn Viehl*)

If Angels Burn April 2005 Signet Eclipse ISBN# 0451214773
Private Demon October 2005 Signet Eclipse ISBN# 0451217055
Dark Need June 2006 Signet Eclipse ISBN# 0451218663
Night Lost May 2007 Signet Eclipse ISBN# 0451221025
Evermore to be released 2008 Signet Eclipse
Twilight Fall to be released late 2008 Signet Eclipse

Christian Adult Fiction Series (*writing as Rebecca Kelly*)

Grace Chapel Inn Series/GUIDEPOSTS

Going to the Chapel	Home for the Holidays
Midsummer Melody	Promises to Keep
Portraits of the Past	Life is a Three-Ring Circus

Free E-books to Download Online:

A Diversity of Houses (.pdf format)

Deimos (.pdf format)

Do or Die (.pdf format)

Familiar (online; .pdf format version also available by clicking [here](#))

Illumination (.pdf format)

John and Marcia ~ The Novel Crash Test Dummies (.pdf format)

Midnight Blues (.pdf format)

Night of the Chameleon (.pdf format)

Now or Never (.pdf format)

Red Branch (.pdf format)

Roomies

Sink or Swim (.pdf format)