

Let's get the first big question out of the way...

## **Do you need love scenes at all?**

If you are writing in a romance subgenre (including YA romance) then YES. You need love scenes, but that *may not mean sex* (see next question.) When people pick up a romance, they are expecting love scenes. If you are writing in another genre, then it depends on the story. It's important to know your genre/subgenre so that you know the expectations of it.

For instance, if you're writing a dark suspense, and you think a love/sex scene would serve the story well, put one in there. However, because of your genre, your love scene will be different in tone than if it were in a contemporary romance. The scene may be more ominous, if we're unsure whether one partner is a good person or not. It may be grittier, if that's the overall tone of your book. A sex scene in Gillian Flynn's *Gone Girl* is going to look very different from one in Julia Quinn's *The Duke and I*.

If you're writing women's fiction, and your heroine is having marital problems, the love scene may be one full of disappointment with her partner. If you're writing a horror story, a sex scene will probably have a darker tone (or a fun tone if the horror hasn't started yet. We all know what happens to people who have sex in horror movies, lol.)

We'll delve deeper into this, but this is where reading heavily in your genre/subgenre will serve you well.

## **Okay, so if I'm writing romance and I need love scenes, does that mean I have to have sex scenes in my books?**

No. A **love scene** is the release (whether temporary or permanent) of built-up sexual tension in the story. This can be a kiss or even someone kissing another's hand, depending on the tone of the story you're writing. It doesn't have to be sex.

However, if you're billing your book as steamy or sexy, then you better deliver on that promise with actual sex scenes. Which is why it's important to know what you're trying to write up front because...

## **Love Scenes Start on Page One - Setting the Tone**

Know what kind of story you're writing or figure it out quickly. (We'll cover types/levels of love scenes in the next lecture.) This may seem obvious, but you need to know the tone you're going for upfront so that you set your story up for success.

## **Tone = Language, dialogue, descriptions, visceral reactions**

You can often tell how sexy a book is going to be early on by the way the hero/heroine describes the other in their heads at the first meet.

For example, does the hero/heroine notice the other's body? Do they have dirty thoughts about the other? How visceral is their reaction to each other?

*Setting this tone is making a promise to readers. Do not make a promise you can't keep.*

A graphic sex scene in an otherwise sweet, light story or a closed-door love scene in a sexy, gritty story is going to be jarring to readers. Set up your promise and then deliver.

## **Where should I put a love scene? How many love scenes should I have?**

Follow the **Scene Rule** to answer this question:

**Do NOT put any scene in your novel that doesn't move the story forward and/or change the characters in some way.** *Love scenes are not exempt from this rule.*

## **Reasons to add a love scene:**

Besides the fact that it is moving the story forward and changing the characters, here are some additional reasons...

- You've tortured your readers by building sexual tension, and they will yell at the book if you deny them the pay off.
- Getting naked with someone is a big, huge deal for most. This will show your characters in a different light, reveal vulnerabilities, maybe a hidden soft side, or perhaps reveal issues the reader didn't know were there.
- It's an opportunity to heighten conflict and to make things even more complicated for your characters.

## **A note on the timing of love scenes:**

If you start to look closely, you will notice that love scenes often fall at certain points in a story. In Blake Snyder's screenwriting book *Save the Cat*, he talks about how the midpoint of a movie or novel often has a **false victory** or false defeat. I delve much deeper into this concept of the false victory in my Romance Writing: The Comprehensive Beginner Course, but for our purposes here, I wanted to point out that often a kiss or sex scene *acts as the false victory* of the internal plot at the midpoint of a romance novel. The characters think they've figured things out. (They haven't.) So they give into their desires. But then they realize they've only made things more complicated.

Another common time for the first love scene is 2/3 of the way into a book, especially if it's not a steamy or erotic book. This isn't a formula, but it helps to note where these scenes often show up. They are at pivotal points in the internal journey of the characters.

## **Assignments:**

1. Think about the tone of your novel. Do you know what you're going for--sweet, steamy, erotic? (If you're not sure, don't worry. We go over the types in the next lecture.)
2. Pull out some of your favorite novels that have love scenes or think about your favorite romantic movies. Do they follow the scene rule listed above? Do you notice any patterns? Do you notice if love scenes tend to happen at certain points--like the midpoint or around the 2/3 mark in the examples you've chosen?