

What is a romance?

Before we jump into how to write a romance, it's vital that you understand the definition of romance *in the world of publishing*. This is important because a lot of people mislabel certain kinds of stories as romances when, in fact, they are something very different. Nicholas Sparks does not write romance novels, for instance. So, if you plan on writing a romance, you need to know what romance readers are expecting when they pick up something labeled a romance.

Definition of a romance (according to the Romance Writers of America/RWA):

“Two basic elements comprise every romance novel: a central love story and an emotionally satisfying and optimistic ending.

A Central Love Story: The main plot centers around individuals falling in love and struggling to make the relationship work. A writer can include as many subplots as he/she wants as long as the love story is the main focus of the novel.

An Emotionally Satisfying and Optimistic Ending: In a romance, the lovers who risk and struggle for each other and their relationship are rewarded with emotional justice and unconditional love.

Romance novels may have any tone or style, be set in any place or time, and have varying levels of sensuality—ranging from sweet to extremely hot. These settings and distinctions of plot create specific subgenres within romance fiction.”

What I want you to pay attention to in that definition is that there are very few creative restrictions in romance beyond those two things. Non-romance readers tend to throw out the word “formulaic” when they talk about romance, but romance is no more

formulaic than any other genre novel. Mystery novels have a crime that must be solved by the end. Thrillers have characters racing against a clock or something terrible is going to happen. Women's fiction sends a woman on an emotional journey. Romance requires a love story and a happy ending. That's simply the definition of the genre.

However, you must respect those two requirements of the genre, or you're not writing a romance.

Want to piss off a romance reader? Call something a romance and then kill off the hero or heroine or write an ending where the lovers do not end up together.

If the characters don't end up together or one of them dies, *it's not a romance*. It may be romantic. It may be a "love story." But it's not a romance in the book labeling world. In fact, if you see "A Love Story" on the cover of that book, it almost always means one of the lovers is going to die or something tragic is going to happen to tear the couple apart.

If the woman falls in love, has relationships in the book, but ends up single and happy, it's not a romance. That's women's fiction.

I know that not all of you in this class will necessarily be writing romance, but if you are, I wanted to make sure you were clear on what defines romance before you start putting together your story idea.