



Plotting
Essentials

AWARD-WINNING AUTHOR

WENDY DAVY

Plotting Essentials

Plotting a Romance from
Beginning to End

Wendy Davy

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Plotting Essentials: Plotting a Romance From Beginning to End

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Contact Information: titleadmin@pelicanbookgroup.com

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Section 1: Introduction

Thank you for purchasing my self-guided workshop: *Plotting a Romance from Beginning to End*. My name is Wendy Davy and I'm pleased to share some writing tips that will help you complete the romance novel you've dreamed of writing. I am a multi-published author with several full-length romance novels and short stories contracted with White Rose Publishing.

This workshop covers key elements that comprise a romance novel. Throughout the sections, I refer one of my full-length releases, *Snow Angels*, for examples.

Section 2: Grab the Reader's Attention

Choose a basic theme: Before you start, be sure your story has a purpose.

- In my novel *Snow Angels*, the goal is for my heroine, Izzy, to learn to place her trust in God, not people. Themes can be simple in nature, but still drive the story forward and give you an end goal to strive for.

Start in the middle of the action: In today's face-paced, high-tech world it is a challenge to grab and hold a reader's attention.

- Draw the reader into the story from the first paragraph, or even better, from the first sentence.

For Example: Here are the first paragraphs of *Snow Angels*:

Isabelle Rollins lay flat on her back looking up at the blinding snow falling from the darkened sky. Of all the foolish ways to die, this one was sure to come out on top.

"You had to take one last run before the slopes closed, didn't you, Izzy," she chastised herself. The wind picked up its speed, and snowflakes began to fall at an angle, sticking to her freezing cheeks. She swiped the flakes off her goggles and attempted to

remove a patch of fog drifting over the lenses.

Sheets of ice underneath the snow threatened to suck the remaining heat from her body as she continued to lie on the iceberg they dared to call a ski slope. Frustration and regret slammed her. If she had used her common sense and not gone night skiing alone, she might have lived long enough to earn the respect she had been seeking. Instead, she was going to freeze to death on an unforgiving pile of ice.

- The above passage starts with the heroine in a precarious situation. In beginning my story this way, I hope to draw the reader's attention and make them wonder what motivates Izzy to go night skiing alone, why she feels the need to seek respect from others, and how she is going to get out of the situation she finds herself in.

Establish time and setting:

- Be sure to show the reader what time of year it is and where the story is located from the beginning. By doing this, we ground the story and give the reader a sense of how the environment feels.

Allow hero/heroine to meet as soon as possible:

- Make sure you have the hero and heroine meet as early as possible in the story. Within the first few pages is preferred. Using dialogue and action, allow the reader to learn the hero's

and heroine's goals, motivations and conflicts. Once the reader grows to care for the characters, they'll be hooked and will want to learn what happens and how the hero and heroine's story will unfold.

Avoid back story:

- Back story is telling the reader everything about your characters and their backgrounds. *Don't do this up front.* We all want readers to know our characters as well as we do, but the beginning of the story is not the place to do this. Show who your characters are by their actions and by slowly weaving information into the story. Sprinkle back story in a little at a time, and include only that information which is immediately necessary to the plot.

Tip: Read as many books as you can! Reading books, especially those in the genre you are interested in writing will give you an idea of what editors are looking for and how to craft your own story.

Advice from an editor (Nicola Martinez, Editor-in-Chief of Pelican Book Group): *What are the main elements you look for in the first chapter of a manuscript?*

Hook and conflict are essential for the opening chapter. I need to be sucked into the story immediately, so the hook is important. The way to create a good hook, though, is to clearly show there's conflict in the story. Conflict is the driving force, and so

if I see that immediately, I *want* to know how that conflict will get resolved.

What keeps you turning the pages?

Character development. If I care about the characters, if I'm getting to know them and like them (or don't like them, if they're an antagonist), then I'm going to keep reading to discover what happens to them.

SECTION 2 ASSIGNMENT:

What is the basic theme of your romance story?

Think of a way to begin your story in the middle of an action scene that will draw the reader's attention from the start without using back story.

Think of how and when your hero and heroine will meet. Is it as close to the beginning of the story as possible?

If you feel comfortable, email a copy of the first few paragraphs of your story and we'll discuss it, or allow your critique partners to take a look.

Section 3: Keep the Conflict Going

Conflict

Once you've grabbed the reader's attention, you have to find a way to keep it. Creating engaging, real-life characters with real-life conflicts is essential to keeping the reader turning pages.

Types of Conflicts:

- *External:* Uncontrollable outside forces affecting the hero and heroine.
- *Internal:* Personal conflicts that arise from the character's individual goals or beliefs. With internal conflicts, the character's emotions are involved. Even if an external conflict is resolved, the inner conflicts need to remain a barrier to the relationship until the end of the story.

Example: In *Snow Angels*, the heroine's goal is to become a member of Snowcap Resort's ski patrol. As the director of the ski patrol, the hero's goal is to make sure only qualified candidates are on his team of patrollers. Once the hero is convinced she is qualified, the heroine must still overcome her feelings of self-inadequacy and learn to trust in her abilities before the inner conflicts can be resolved.

Things to remember:

- Don't confuse a simple misunderstanding between the two characters as a true conflict. Something that can be resolved with a conversation is not a convincing conflict; it's simply a misunderstood circumstance.
- Retain conflict up through the very end. If you resolve the conflict too early, there's no reason for readers to finish the book.

Character Bonding:

- Even in a fast-paced page-turner, authors need to give characters some time to take a breather from the action. This is a good time for characters to reveal to each other about their pasts and what their future goals are, and allows them time to fall in love.

Tip: To create a longer romance, subplots and secondary characters can be used. However, be sure each scene and character moves the central story forward.

Advice from an Editor (Nicola Martinez, Editor-in-Chief of Pelican Book Group):

What is the best way to avoid a 'saggy' middle in a romance story?

I find that most saggy middles come from the main conflict fizzling out or from authors including episodic scenes. (Scenes that don't move the plot forward). Each scene must have a purpose—create conflict, increase conflict, resolve conflict, develop character. If none of these things is happening in the scene, then the story falls flat. It's fine for your hero and heroine to eat dinner, but the purpose of the dinner scene isn't so Joe Hero won't be hungry, it's so he will learn something about himself or Jane Heroine. Focus on the relationship development. We don't care if he eats lobster—unless he's allergic and something is going to come of it, or unless she's deathly afraid of shellfish and can't stomach watching someone eat it (if you get my meaning).

So, the best way to avoid the saggies is to make sure each scene has a purpose in moving the plot forward.

SECTION 3 ASSIGNMENT:

What are your character's internal and external conflicts? Are they clearly defined?

Do you plan to weave subplots into the story?

What scenes are you going to use to allow the characters time to bond?

Section 4: Resolution

Intensify Conflict/The Dark Moment:

- Before you allow your characters to have the happy ending they deserve, intensify the conflict to make it seem as if there is no way the hero and heroine can be together. This can be accomplished by using a “dark moment.” This is the moment in a romance where the conflicts intensify to the point where it seems the relationship can’t be salvaged. Be sure to use a lot of emotion in these scenes to solidify the conflict.

Example: In *Snow Angels*, I used circumstances to put the hero in the position of thinking he couldn’t allow the heroine to join his team. Considering they had already fallen for each other, this puts a lot of emotion and conflict into the story and makes it seem they can’t possibly overcome their problems.

Resolving Internal and External Conflicts:

Now that you’ve established the appearance that there is no way the characters can end up together, it’s time to resolve their issues.

- To settle conflicts, one or both characters may need to give up something for the one they

love.

- Characters should develop and mature into better people by the story's end, which will affect how they relate to one another.
- Unexpected, yet plausible changes in circumstances can be helpful to resolve conflict.

Example: To resolve my character's internal conflict in *Snow Angels*, I use an unexpected external circumstance where the heroine has the opportunity to prove to the hero she truly is capable of being on his team of patrollers.

Tie up all loose ends:

- Even if you are planning a sequel, your story must be complete and be able to stand on its own. Don't leave the reader wondering about any issues you've brought up during the book. Make sure each and every one has been addressed and resolved.

Tip:

As you intensify conflict and plan your resolution, be sure your characters' actions remain in line with their personalities.

Advice from an editor (Nicola Martinez, Editor-in-Chief of Pelican Book Group):

What is the biggest mistake authors make with resolving a conflict at the end of a manuscript?

The most common mistakes I see is wrapping it all up too abruptly and/or having the resolution be “convenient.” A secondary character cannot just conveniently show up to relieve the hero or heroine of all his/her fears. Conflict has to resolve gradually, logically. If that’s properly woven throughout the story, the end will resolve without “heroic” measures from the author. The characters will naturally come to the resolution conclusions themselves.

SECTION 4 ASSIGNMENT:

Think of a way to intensify your characters’ conflicts. What kind of “dark moment” can you include in your story to keep the reader turning pages?

How do you plan to resolve your characters’ conflicts and give them the happy ending they deserve?

Section 5: Conclusion

The next time you read a romance novel, look for key elements in the plot. Did the author start out in the middle of an action scene? Did the author establish time/setting? How early did the hero and heroine meet? Identify the characters' internal and external conflicts. Did the author include an emotional "dark moment"? How do the characters overcome their conflicts and end up together?

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Thank you for purchasing my self-guided workshop. I hope I've helped you in reaching your publishing goals.

Wendy Davy
Inspirational Romance Novelist
www.wendydavy.com

Thank you for purchasing this Pelican Book Group Workshop. For other writing instructional aides, please visit our on-line bookstore at www.pelicanbookgroup.com.

For questions or more information, contact us at titleadmin@pelicanbookgroup.com.

May God's glory shine through
this workshop.

AMDG