



FTHRW Online Workshop – January 2009

Know The Market, Know Yourself

Presenter: Tracy Wolff

Course Description:

So you want to write a romance . . . ST or category? Suspense or paranormal? Chick Lit, hen lit or young adult lit? These are only a few of the many sub-genres available in today's romance market. So how do you find the one that's right for you? Join Tracy Wolff, multi-genre romance author, as she guides you through the many exciting and confusing layers of today's romance market and helps you find the genre that best suits you.

About the Instructor:

Tracy Wolff collects books, English degrees and lipsticks and has been known to forget where and sometimes who she is when immersed in a great novel. At six she wrote her first short story something with a rainbow and a prince--and at seven she forayed into the wonderful world of girls lit with her first Judy Blume novel. By ten she'd read everything in the young adult and classics sections of her local bookstore, so in desperation her mom started her on romance novels. And from the first page of the first book, Tracy knew she'd found her life-long love. Now an English professor at her local community college, she writes romances that run the gamut from everlastings to paranormals to eroticas. Her first erotic story, *NO APOLOGIES*, was a February 2008 Spice Brief release and her first novel, *THE TURN FOR HOME*, will be a November 2008 Harlequin Superromance release. Her first two single title novels, *FULL EXPOSURE* and *FADE TO BLACK*, hit the shelves in January and September of 2009. Check out her website at www.tracywolff.com and her blogs at www.sizzlingpens.blogspot.com.

INTRODUCTION (OR LESSON 1)

I hope everyone had a wonderful holiday season--I love this time of year, when it's cold outside (or as cold as it gets here in Texas) and the year is new and filled with possibility. It makes it really easy to be optimistic about the coming months.

Anyway, I'm really excited to be here for the next couple of weeks, talking about a subject very dear to my heart--finding your writing style and understanding where it fits in today's market.

Before we get started, let me tell you a little about myself. I'm a writing and American Literature professor who has been reading (and loving) romances since she was in fifth grade--which is about twenty- three years now. There's something about a story with conflict and angst and trouble that ends with a guaranteed HEA that just makes me, as a reader, happy.

As a reader, I read across the board--from paranormals to romantic comedies to romantic suspense, in both category and ST lines. While this means I'm never bored in my reading choices, it made it extremely difficult for me to decide what I wanted to write when I sat down and began my career as a romance writer two and a half years ago--because I wanted to write everything!

But that's not practical, as you all know, for a lot of different reasons. I wouldn't be able to concentrate on one or two markets, I wouldn't be able to improve my skills in one areas, and if I ended up selling, it meant my fans wouldn't know what to expect from me. So instead of writing a little bit of this and a little bit of that, I concentrated on two areas--contemporary series and hot ST--and I got really lucky. My first romance novel, *A Christmas Wedding*, was published this past November and my first single title, *Full Exposure*, will actually be in stores tomorrow! These will be followed by the short story I have in the *Spice Anthology*, *Naughty Bits*, due out in March, as well as three other books this year. I've also just signed a contract to begin a series of paranormal, dragon shapeshifters for NAL, due out in 2010.

A lot of my friends ask me, though, how did I know what to write? How did I know what kind of books my writing style was suited for? How did I know what would feel most comfortable to me? The answers to those questions will actually take most of the workshop to get to (so it's a good thing we have two weeks) but I'd like to start out with a little overview of what we'll be looking at this week--and what helped make my decision of what to write easier. Some of the questions we'll be tackling in this workshop include:

- What is your voice? · What are your strengths as a writer? Your weaknesses? · Are you a character or plot driven writer? · What kind of heroine do you gravitate to? · What kind of hero? · What level of sensuality are you comfortable with writing? · What kind of conflicts do you like? · What's hot in the market right now? · Where do you fit in?

Okay, this is a super long message, so I'll end it here. But I would like to hear from you about what you write, or are thinking about writing, and any questions you'd like me to answer as I go through the workshop.

I'll be back later this morning, after I get the kids off to school and we'll start talking about voice.

FINDING YOUR VOICE

The first thing I want to talk about is voice--that thing that makes your writing instantly recognizable to your reader. For example, after reading all 100 and some Nora Roberts's novels, her voice is incredibly distinct to me--I don't need anyone to point out that I'm reading one of Nora's books. I could figure it out if someone was reading one to me while I was blindfolded. The same can be said of writers like Linda Howard or Christine Feehan or Susan Elizabeth Phillips or Janet Evanovich--no matter what they are writing, their voice shines through.

Now, a lot of people have a tendency to confuse voice with the narrator's attitude--sweet, sassy, hard-ass. But it's really not that simple. Voice is made up of a huge number of things, all of which work together to bring the author's attitude, belief system and characteristics to the reader.

Some things that contribute to voice are: use of figurative language and type, allusions, repetition, symbolism, syntax, irony, setting and the nature of the conflicts the author likes to use.

All of these things work together to reveal the narrator, author and characters to the reader. For example, the type of figurative language you choose to use. By figurative language, I mean similes, metaphors, hyperboles, assonance, consonance, that type of thing. One of my favorite literary writers, Sandra Cisneros, uses really soft metaphors in her fiction, but very hard ones in her poetry ("eyes like green apples" vs. "You bring out the colonizer in me, the holocaust of desire in me"). But then her fiction is often written from the POV of young, Hispanic girls or women while her poetry is more fiery and passionate. Yet either way, the way she arranges words and the pictures she draws marks her writing instantly for me--I would know a Cisneros poem, or novel, from three blocks away. You probably feel the same way about your favorite authors.

Developing that recognizable of a voice, whether it is hard, soft, sweet, bitter, peaceful, edgy, happy sorrowful, dark, upbeat, desperate, terrifying, comical or eerie (just to name a few) should be the goal of most good writers. Why, you ask? Because more than your characters or your plots, your love scenes or your conflicts, readers fall in love with THE WAY A WRITER TELLS A STORY. They come back, again and again, to the voice that speaks to them--whether it's kick-ass and sarcastic or serious and intense or light and humorous.

So, how do you develop your voice? That's different for everyone. But one of the things you can do, is to **look at what comes naturally to you**. How do you write when you're not trying to fit into anyone else's parameters.

My voice tends to be dark--very dark. So dark that when I was writing poetry as a teenager my dear, long-time teacher and principal mother freaked out and thought I needed to see a psychologist. I didn't--in my real life I'm a very happy, relatively well-balanced individual. But my writing voice, when given free-reign, goes to dark as quickly as possible. Because of this, I tend to put my characters through the emotional wringer--they suffer and they suffer big. But I tend to think that that just makes the HEA so much sweeter...

Now, what does this mean in terms of what I write? I know, you're all thinking "You write Superromances, how dark can you be?" Check out the two coming out next year and you'll see just how dark a Super can get. But that's one of the great things about that line--it's open to pretty much any voice, as long as the story falls within the parameters of the line.

Now, once you have a handle on your voice, that's when it comes time to apply it to the market and deciding what you should write. Dark voices tend to go to romantic suspense or dark paranormals (I write both) where there are life and death issues on the line. Lighter, more humorous voices tend to write contemporary or family-oriented or comedic romance.

Now this isn't to say that those are the only avenues open to you--you can write whatever you want, obviously. Gena Showalter is a perfect example of someone who writes kick-ass comedy and dark paranormals--but then, even her comedy is very, very edgy. Just keep in mind that some roads, depending on your natural voice, are harder than others.

An example from my own life--I've been writing a romantic comedy for nearly two years now. Everyone I've shown it to, including my agent, really like it and think it will sell. But it's taking me forever to get it on paper (or laptop screen, I guess I should say). I can usually write a book in three to five weeks, so just imagine how long two years is for me. Every time I write a chapter, I have to rework it a few different times, because the light, comedic voice just does not come naturally to me. Whereas I can write my erotic suspenses pretty easily--the words and tone just flow to the rate of 4-7K words a day. But with comedy, I write half as much with twice the work. And yet I keep doing it, because I love reading romantic comedies and really want to see what one of mine will end up looking like. Will I ever publish it? Who knows, but probably not.

So, I guess what I'm saying is that when you start trying to find your niche (something we'll talk more about in the second half of the workshop) **it pays off to really know your natural writing style**. Imposing artificial constricts on your voice--just to get it to fit into the market--is usually frustrating and often counter-productive.

Well, now that I've started talking about the importance of voice, it stands to reason that I'll give you a couple of ways to help you discover yours. Please remember, though, that a writer's voice is unique to her, which means that most of us come to find our voice in our own way, in our own time.

But **one of the best ways to find your voice is to write and to write often**, without imposing any expectations on yourself. A journal is a good place to do this, or a daily writing exercise. Other tips include:

- * Studying writers who have strong voices or voices you particularly like. What is it about these writers that speaks to you?
- * Try different tones and voices to discover which one feels most natural to you.
- * Read your writing aloud--see if it sounds like something you would say.
- * Omit clichés from your writing. Choose words that seem to fit you--that are strong and describe what you are seeing or feeling precisely.

SOME FUN VOICE WORK

I've got a series of excerpts here from famous--and not so famous--romance novels. I'd love for you to take a few minutes to read them and make a list of what kind of romance/women's fiction novel you think the excerpt comes from. Then, if you're brave, you can even hazard a guess as to the author. Feel free to post your guesses here or to keep them to yourself. I'll be back tomorrow with the answers and some other, more personal exercises to find your voice. Have fun!

#1.

It wasn't every day a guy saw a headless beaver marching down the side of a road, not even in Dean Robillard's larger than life world. "Son of a"" Dean slammed on the brakes of his brand new Aston Martin Vanquish and pulled over in front of her.

The beaver marched right past, her big flat tail bouncing in the gravel, and her small, sharp nose stuck up in the air. Way up. The beaver looked highly pissed.

She was definitely a girl beaver because her beaver head was missing, revealing sweaty, dark hair pulled into a scraggly ponytail. He'd been praying for a little distraction from his own depressing company, so he threw open the door and stepped out onto the shoulder of the Colorado road. His newest pair of Dolce & Gabbana boots emerged first, followed by the rest of him, all six feet three inches of steely muscle, razor-sharp reflexes, and unsurpassed gorgeousness"or at least that's what his press agent liked to say.

Still, it was pretty much true, although Dean didn't have nearly as much personal vanity as he let people believe. Even as a kid, he'd figured out that looks didn't take you far, but emphasizing the superficial was a good way to keep people from getting any closer than he wanted them to be.

"Uh, ma'am" You need some help?"

Her paws didn't break rhythm. "You got a gun?"

"Not with me."

"Then I've got no use for you."

On she marched.

He grinned and set off after her. Between his extra long legs and her shorter, furry ones, it took just a few steps to catch up. "Nice day," he said. "A little warmer than I'm used to for May, but I'm not complaining."

She hit him with a pair of grape lollipop eyes, one of the few curvy things about her. Most of the rest of her came to sharp angles and delicate points, from a set of fragile bladed cheekbones, to a petite, arrow tipped nose, to a chin keen enough to cut glass. But after that, things got dicey. A razor-edged bow marked the center of a wide and startlingly plump top lip. Her bottom lip was even fuller, giving him the disconcerting feeling that she'd somehow escaped from an X-rated nursery rhyme.

"An actor," she said with the trace of a sneer. "Just my luck."

"What makes you think I'm an actor?"

"You're prettier than my girl friends."

"It's a curse."

"You're not even embarrassed?"

"Some things you have to accept about yourself."

#2.

"Talin, breathe."

She spun around, gasped at the sight of him. His eyes were night-glow, an eerie green/silver that was completely cat. "You can see in the dark!"

"Of course I can." He said it like it was the most normal thing in the world. "Panel's five inches to your left. Middle pad."

She tried to pretend calm as she found it, then pressed the central pad. Light poured out from a ceiling fixture. "You don't have voice activation."

He grunted. "Does this look like a palace?" A pause. "I'll get one of the techs to put it in tomorrow."

"No, you don't have--"

"I said I'll get it done." His tone told her he was just itching for a fight.

She decided for grace instead. "Thank you."

A dark scowl as he began to unbutton his shirt.

Her barely steady heartbeat took another jagged leap. "What are you doing?"

"Not attacking you." He turned to throw the shirt on one of the large cushions that acted as his sofas. "I'm going for a run. I prefer that my clothes not disintegrate when I shift."

"Oh." She couldn't take her eyes off the shifting muscles of his back. Clay had always been strong, but now...now he could break her like a twig. And yet even as she thought that, she couldn't get past his beauty. Her fingertips tingled, her thighs clenched. She wanted to reach out and trace that tattoo high on his left shoulder, wanted to taste--

"Scat." His hands went to the snap of his jeans.

She jumped, heart racing for a completely new reason. "We need to talk."

"You need to sleep." He stalked toward her, revealing a chest thick with muscle. Dark curls of hair stroked over that luscious, glowing skin, arrowing down in a viscerally male fashion. "Get upstairs." His jaw was tight, his eyes anger bright.

Her jaw dropped. "You're still mad at me. God, you're stubborn!"

"I'm a hell of a lot more than mad." Turning, he kicked off his shoes and began to undo his jeans. "I'm through talking. Leave unless you want a peep show."

She could feel her cheeks flaming. "I don't like you very much right this second."

"Good. The feeling's mutual." He went as if to push down the jeans.

#3.

Celie got off the phone and wrote a check to Shanghai Garden. On her way to the door, she glanced in the bathroom mirror to make sure she looked halfway decent. She didn't. Her dark-blond hair was dusted with flame retardant, and globs of batter decorated her pajama top. Plus she wasn't wearing a bra. She grabbed a denim jacket off the hook in the foyer and shrugged into it just as a knock sounded at the door.

Out of habit, she patted her pocket to make sure she had her pepper spray handy before going to work on her numerous locks. As she flipped the first latch, she peered through the peephole, expecting to see a stranger in the hallway holding a carton of Chinese food. But the man who stood there looked all too familiar.

Celie's hands froze. She backed away from the door and darted a frantic glance around the apartment. Where had she put the phone? He knocked again, and then the doorknob rattled. God, was it possible he had a key? She took out her Mace.

"I hear you in there, Celie. Open up, okay? I just want to talk."

Yeah, right. Did he think she was crazy? She held her Mace in a death-grip as she bit her lip and tried to decide what to do.

"Celie, please?" The familiar voice made her chest tighten. Guilt, anger, regret--the emotions battled inside her.

"I just need to talk to you," he repeated.

Guilt won out. Instead of locating her phone and calling the police, she moved toward the door. Methodically, she undid all the locks until only one deadbolt remained. She waited a beat, giving herself one last chance to heed the warnings blaring in her head. Then she turned the key and pulled open the door.

Her ex-husband stood before her holding a drooping bouquet of flowers and a baseball cap. He wore a tattered UT windbreaker, sneakers, and wet jeans that clung to his gaunt frame. He desperately needed a haircut.

Not to mention a methadone fix.

"Hello, Robert," she said. "Rumor has it you're dead."

#4.

I had two husbands—Paolo and Salvatore. Salvatore and I were married for thirty-two years. I still live in the house he bought for us; I still sleep in our bed. All around me are the signs of our life together. My bedroom window looks out over the garden he planted.

In the middle of the city, he coaxed tomatoes, peppers, zucchini--even grapes for his wine--out of the ground. On the weekends, he used to drive up to his cousin's farm in Waterbury and bring back manure. In the winter, he wrapped the peach tree and the fig tree with rags and black rubber hoses against the cold, his massive, coarse hands gentling those trees as

if they were his fragile-skinned babies. My neighbor, Dominic Grazza, does that for me now. My boys have no time for the garden.

In the front of the house, Salvatore planted roses. The roses I take care of myself. They are giant, cream-colored, fragrant. In the afternoons, I like to sit out on the couch on the porch with my coffee, protected from the din and eyes of the neighborhood by that curtain of flowers.

I am surrounded by the things Salvatore gave me, or did for me. But, God forgive me, as I lie alone now in my bed, it is Paolo I remember.

Paolo left me nothing. Nothing, that is, that my family, especially my sisters, thought had any value. No house. No diamonds. Not even a photograph.

But after he was gone, and I could catch my breath from the pain, I knew that I still had something. In the middle of the night, I sat alone and held them in my hands, reading the words over and over until I heard his voice in my head. I had Paolo's letters.

#5.

Before she realized what she was doing, Serena had wrapped her arms around his waist and pressed herself, full-body, against him. She rested her cheek on his chest, inhaled his musky, male scent and felt a small bit of peace creep into her heart. Not enough to make her forget the look on Damien LaFleur's face when his parole was announced. Not enough to make her forget her sister's mutilated body. But enough to make the next hour seem worth living. Just enough to make her believe that tomorrow would be a little better than today.

Refusing to give herself time to think, Serena pressed an open-mouthed kiss to Kevin's chest. She reveled in his muscles, in the careless strength that he took for granted. Her hands stroked softly over his strong back, delighting in the shiver of response she felt move through him.

She pressed closer, pushing her breasts even more firmly against him. He drew in a breath audibly and she grinned for the first time in a long time. Maybe this wasn't the wisest move on her part, or the best-timed one, but she wanted Kevin. She wanted to lose herself in his arms for a few blissful hours, wanted to forget the pain that waited for her with nearly every breath she took.

Her mouth skimmed, again, across his chest. She longed to touch his naked skin, to sink her teeth into the resilient flesh that beckoned to her with each rise and fall of his chest. The steady rhythm of his heart increased, and she placed a hand over it, relishing the power and life that flowed through him with every heartbeat. Her thumb lightly skimmed his nipple and she felt his in-drawn breath.

Kevin pulled away from her, his beautiful blue eyes wary.

She could still see traces of rage in them and his response warmed her. He cared. He really cared about what had happened to Sandra, about what had nearly happened to her. That, more than anything else, made what was about to happen seem right.

Even though she told herself it was simply recreational sex, something to take her mind off the trials of the day, she knew better. Sex with Kevin would be a lot of things—hot, mind-

blowing, explosive. But it would never be something as bland as recreational, as mild as simple feel-good sex often was. Sex with Kevin would be intense, messy and everything she'd always dreamed making love could be. Not to mention everything that had ever frightened her about the act as well.

"What are you doing?" His voice was rusty when he spoke, dark and sensual despite his desire to keep things on an even-keel.

"I thought that would be obvious." Serena's voice held a teasing note that she almost didn't recognize. She trailed her fingers lightly down his arms to his hands. Grasping his left hand, she brought it to her mouth and bit him in the exact place he had bitten her four days before.

His eyes darkened and his mouth twisted with desire. "Not now, Serena. We can't do this now."

"Why not? I can't think of a better time." Her tongue licked one finger and then another, slowly, like she was savoring a particularly wonderful treat.

"You're not thinking straight." His voice was desperate, his eyes nearly black.

"I am thinking straight. Maybe for the first time in a long time." She pressed a hot, open-mouthed kiss to his wrist, even as her lower body bumped sensuously against him.

Kevin picked her up, set her a few feet away from him, backed up even more. She was killing him, with her cat-and-the-cream grin and her mind-blowingly hot body. He could still feel every inch of her pressed against him, though almost half the room now separated them.

"I don't take advantage of women in pain," he said aloud, though he didn't know if he was talking to her or himself.

Her eyes narrowed and her mouth twisted into something that looked remarkably like a pout. "I'm not asking you to take advantage of me. Just to take me."

#6.

I have died and gone to Mooreville, Mississippi.

I knew things were bad when that peroxided, collagen enhanced, nubile nymph stole my role as the reigning TV goddess in "Love in the Fast Lane," but I didn't know I'd be killed off for real and sent to the backside of nowhere. Good lord, just because a woman turns forty-five shouldn't mean she gets tossed out and consigned to life without long-stemmed roses and Godiva chocolates.

Trying to make sense of things, I close my eyes, but when I open them again I'm staring at the same wide expanse of cloudy sky slashed with a sign that says, Welcome to Mooreville. Plus, I have a lump on my head the size of California.

"Is anybody here?"

Expecting Saint Peter to answer, I ease up on my elbow and spot my powder blue Ferrari Spyder. Or what remains of it. They don't let you take cars to the hereafter, no matter which way you go, so this means I'm not dead.

To some people that would come as a relief, but the mood I'm in, it just makes me mad.....

#7.

In retrospect people said it was a Cinderella story.

Notably missing was the personage of the Fairy Godmother. But other than that, the narrative seemed to contain all the elements of the fairy tale.

There was something of a modern prince. He had no royal blood, but he was a powerful man—London's foremost barrister, Mr. Gladstone's right hand—a man who would very likely one day occupy 10 Downing Street.

There was a woman who spent much of her life in the kitchen. In the eyes of many, she was a nobody. To others, she was one of the greatest cooks of her generation, her food said to be so divine that old men dined with the gusto of adolescent boys, and so seductive that lovers forsook each other as long as a single crumb remained on the table.

There was a ball; not the usual sort of ball that made it into fairy tales or even ordinary tales, but a ball nevertheless. There was the requisite Evil-ish Female Relative. And mostly importantly for connoisseurs of fairy tales, there was footgear left behind in a hurry—nothing so frivolous or fancy as glass slippers, yet carefully kept and cherished, with a flickering flame of hope, for years upon years.

A Cinderella story, indeed.

Or was it?

It all began—or resumed, depending on how one looked at it—the day Bertie Somerset died.

#8.

Having your own pool is a lot of responsibility, it turns out. I mean, every morning you have to check the filters and make sure they aren't all jammed up with leaves or dead moles. There's almost always a frog or two in ours. Usually, if I get out there early enough, they're still alive. So then I have to conduct a frog rescue expedition.

The only way you can rescue the frogs is to reach down into the water to pull the filter basket out, so I've ended up touching all sorts of really gross stuff that floats in there, like dead beetles and newts and, a few times, drowned mice. Once there was a snake. It was still alive. I pretty much draw the line at touching anything that is capable of sending paralyzing streams of poison into my veins, so I yelled to my parents that there was a snake in the filter basket.

My dad is the one who yelled back, "So? What do you want me to do about it?"

"Get it out," I said.

"No way," my dad said. "I'm not touching any snake."

My parents aren't like other parents. For one thing, other people's parents actually leave the house to go to work. Some of them are gone for as many as forty-five hours a week, I've heard.

Not mine. Mine are home all the time. They never leave! They're always in their at-home offices, writing or reading. Practically the only time they come out of their offices is to watch Jeopardy! and then they yell out the answers at each other.

No one else's parents know all the answers to Jeopardy! or yell them out if they do. I know, I've been to Nancy's house and seen the evidence for myself. Her parents watch Entertainment Tonight after dinner, like normal people.

I don't know any of the answers on Jeopardy! That's why I sort of hate that show.

My dad grew up in the Bronx, where there aren't any snakes. He completely hates nature. He totally ignores our cat, Tig. Which of course means that Tig is crazy about him.

And if my dad sees a spider, he screams like a girl. Then my mom, who grew up on a ranch in Montana and has no patience for spiders or my dad's screaming, will come in and kill it, even though I've told her a million times that spiders are extremely beneficial to the environment.

Of course, I knew better than to tell my mom about the snake in the pool filter, because she'd probably have come out and snapped its head clean off right in front of me. In the end, I found a forked branch, and pulled it out that way. I let it go in the woody area behind the house we're renting. Even though the snake didn't turn out to be that scary once I finally got the guts to save it, I kind of hope it doesn't come back.

AND THE ANSWERS ARE:

1. Susan Elizabeth Phillip's Natural Born Charmer (romantic comedy).
2. Nalini Singh's Mine to Possess (paranormal shapeshifter)
3. Laura Griffin's One Wrong Step (Romantic Suspense)
4. Linda Cardillo's Dancing on Sunday Afternoons (Launch book for Everlasting Love)
5. Tracy Wolff's Full Exposure (erotic suspense)
6. Peggy Webb's The Secret Goddess Code (Hen Lit)
7. Sherry Thomas's Delicious (Historical Romance)
8. Meg Cabot's Avalon High (YA)

Looking over the answers some of you posted to the excerpt question, I realized that the one everyone missed was Sherry Thomas's DELICIOUS--no one marked that as a historical. I'm not a huge historical reader myself, but I read delicious for two reasons--one, Sherry is a dear friend of mine and two, her first book, PRIVATE ARRANGEMENTS, kicked serious butt. Both have been nominated, respectively, by Publisher's Weekly and Library Journal as one of the top five books of the year. And yet none of us knew it was a historical romance, because--to be honest--I probably wouldn't have called it a historical if I hadn't known either. So why not?

My best guess--Sherry's personal voice is very strong and comes through in her writing, to the point that I can actually hear her voice in my head when I read one of her books. Her writing is wry, erudite and just a little sarcastic--which is not what we're used to when we pick up a historical novel. It makes us step outside the box of our expectations. Which is great--if it works.

With two best books of the year under her belt, including her debut novel, it obviously worked for Sherry. But for a lot of people, it doesn't work. So what's the difference? For some, good writing, obviously, but for more it's a true commitment, or lack thereof, to the writer's personal voice--and an ability to stay true to it. So many times I've picked up a book, either when judging contests or even when reading published novels, and gotten a kick out of the voice in the opening chapters. But by chapter six, the voice has changed and the novel sounds as if it's been written by someone else.

BEING CONSISTENT WITH YOUR VOICE IS AS IMPORTANT AS BEING FRESH AND ORIGINAL

More than anything else, your voice is the thing that trademarks you. The thing that a reader can count on from one book to the next. When you mess with it, when you put on an artificial voice, when you don't know exactly what your voice is--your readers will pick up on it. As will the critics, your editor, your agent, etc.

Let me give you an example from my own life--I'm blessed to have an agent and editors who really like my voice, who think it's original and yet commercial, etc. etc. Yet, does this make me happy? No, of course not. I always want to try something new, something better. So, the story goes . . .

As I was waiting for my first book to hit the shelves, I wrote a paranormal based on the mythology of Ancient Egypt. At the time, I didn't have an agent yet and I hadn't sold my Single Title, so I had very little guidance from anyone. I wrote the first three chapters, polished them, and sent them

off to Silhouette Nocturne. Then went about writing the rest of the book, just in case they decided to request it. They did request it (in the meantime I landed an agent and two more editors). And I waited and waited to hear back from Sean Mackiewicz, who was with Nocturne at the time. When we finally heard back, Sean said he really liked the book but that he felt there was more story there. He thought I should dig deeper and turn it single title. I was all for that, so I gave it a shot.

Except--and here's the kicker--I'd been reading a ton of paranormals in the meantime and realized my voice was unlike anything out there. That made me nervous, so when I turned it ST, I changed a lot of the book in an effort to make it more commercial. And when my agent got it, she was more than a little perplexed by it. She had me change some things, but still she wasn't overly happy about it, but decided to send it on to my editor at my insistence. Who came back with a "I love the idea, but this just isn't you, Tracy. What happened?"

Needless to say, the book didn't get bought and is currently sitting on my computer waiting to be revised, AGAIN, when I find some time for it. Moral of the story--**there's nothing wrong with experimenting, but you have to stay true to who you are as a writer.** Find your voice and learn it well--use it to help shape the kinds of books you write. And maybe one day you will be called "the most powerfully original voice writing in historical (or insert the type) romance today" by Lisa Kleypas. It happened to Sherry Thomas . . .

ASSIGNMENT 1

All right--some of you say you have your voice. Others say you're trying to find it and Katie, it seems, might have too much of it--LOL! How does voice fit in to the type of story you write? How does it help you find your place? Well, we're about to find out.

Assignment #1: Pick a place--either real or fictional. Describe it to the best of your ability, paying strong attention to the five senses as you do so. What time of day is it? What's the weather like? Where is it located? Why is it important?

After your done, look it over. What mood do you sense when you read it? What feeling do you get from it?

I'd love it if you posted your paragraphs so we can discuss them a little, but if you just want to follow along, I completely understand. I'll start us off a little later with a description I'm working on and we'll go from there.

SOME MORE THOUGHTS ON VOICE

To finish off our voice discussion, I thought I'd spend just a couple minutes going back to the excerpts you looked at last night.

Susan Elizabeth Phillips has such an interesting voice--it too, is very wry. Her humor is right on and rarely over done--everything falls so neatly into place. But what makes the humor/voice works so well is the characters she creates--another author with her kind of humor would fall flat without the richness of her personas.

Meg Cabot has the uncanny ability to think like a thirteen year old girl. She strikes such an incredible balance between her characters' family lives and the lives they want to elad for themselves that it creates an instant source of tension and conflict that is perfect for YA.

Linda Cardillo's voice is marked by such beautiful prose, that I recognize her work anywhere. Her word usage/sentences are flawless.

Peggy Webb's voice fits hen lit so well because her sense of humor is really that of a woman whose been kicked a few times. Youth takes itself so seriously, but Peggy showcases how a more mature woman learns to take the bad with the good without losing her cool.

Laura Griffin is new to romantic suspense, but her writing always has such a sense of anticipation to it--it keeps the reader on edge, waiting for the next big thing to happen. It's a natural voice for romantic suspense.

Nalini Singh, who is one of my favorite authors, has a great voice for paranormal. Rich and dark, she doesn't shy away from the tough stuff, but handles it with grace and aplomb.

I'll wrap up our two days on voice with those comments, but if you have any questions, please jump right on in with them. Your second assignment is coming soon . . .

NOTE TO ASSIGNMENT 1

Now, how does voice fit in with finding your place in the market? Nothing is written in stone--remember that, if you remember nothing else from this class. But dark voices tend to work best in romantic suspense and paranormal--the genres call for them. Comedic voices are fabulous in chick and hen lit, romantic comedy, and some YA. Serious voices work well for

contemporaries and historicals. Light voices do well in contemporaries as well.

One of you mentioned that you heard that you should write what you love-- which is absolutely true. But you should also write what you're good at and what your voice is most comfortable with.

ASSIGNMENT #2

We're moving into character next, so I'd love it if you guys spend a few minutes thinking of some of your favorite characters from romance novels-- heroes and heroines. What makes you like them so much? Are you attracted to a certain type or are you more random?

HEROES, SWEET (AND SPICY) HEROES

All right--it's time to jump into character, and I wanted to start a discussion of character by looking at some of my favorite heroes in romantic fiction, and some of yours. And while alpha/beta heroes are all over the different genres of romance, I still believe that alphas work better in some genres and betas work better in others. So, with no further ado, my list of heroes:

1. Ranger, from the Plum series by Janet Evanovich: Among Janet's fans, there's lots of arguing over who's better--Morelli or Ranger, and I am a Ranger girl all the way. Dark, sexy, and mysterious, oh my. What's not to love?
2. Roarke, from the In Death Series by J.D. Robb: Well, duh. I mean, I don't know many J.D. Robb fans who don't love this guy. He's like the perfect man. Gorgeous, rich, supportive, willing to take a back seat when necessary and more than capable of kicking all the ass Eve needs him to kick. Yum.
3. Gator, from Night Game by Christine Feehan: Can I just say, OMG. There is nothing sexier to me than a dark, gorgeous man with an accent who isn't afraid to get his hands dirty. And who is pretty damn lethal in the bargain...
4. Vane, from Night Play by Sherrilyn Kenyon: Half wolf, half man, with a heart of pure gold and a toughness that can be seen a mile away, Vane, too is pretty darn awesome. Handsome, rich, and willing to tear the world about for his woman, he's my favorite Kenyon hero.
5. And saving the very best for last, Zsadist from JR Ward. There are no words...

Okay--are you noticing a pattern here? I'm all about the really dark, gorgeous, alpha in the extreme guys. No regular alpha male for me--I like them super-hot, super-aggressive and super-mysterious. Is it any wonder, then, that I write dark erotic suspense and dark paranormals? Even my Superromances have heroes who are darker and more tortured than the norm ;)

So tell me, ladies, who's on your list of favorite heroes?

Now, my next question is--why do you like these guys? What about them makes them appeal to you? What makes them memorable?

CHARACTER and ASSIGNMENT #3

I want to spend a little bit of time talking about being a character driven or a plot driven writer. Then we'll get back to more specifics about characters.

I think most of you are familiar with these terms, but in case you aren't--these basically mean **what is causing the action to happen in your book?** Are your characters driving the action and moving the plot where they need to take it or is your plot driving the action and moving your characters where they need to go?

Both types of writing are represented by some of the best and brightest names in the romance genre: Character driven writers include: Susan Elizabeth Phillips, Nora Roberts, Nalini Singh, JR Ward, Lisa Kleypas, Julie Garwood, Janet Evanovich, Carla Neggers, Gena Showalter

Plot driven writers include: Jane Porter, Susan Mallery, Linda Lael Miller, Diana Palmer, Christine Feehan, Linda Howard, Tami Hoag, Elizabeth Lowell, Debbie Macomber

Now, what does this mean for you as you try to find your place in the market? Since there are a number of category authors here, let's look at Harlequin for a minute--just as an example. If you look at the different lines, they are pretty evenly split into character and plot driven lines, though of course there is some overlap.

Examples of character driven lines: Superromance, Special Edition, Nocturne, Blaze Kimani Arabesque and Sepia, Historicals

Examples of Plot driven lines: Presents, Desire, Romantic Suspense, Intrigue, American Romance, NASCAR, Kimani Romance

I like to discuss voice before I deal with character and plot driven writing, because voice also plays into this. Although, as evinced by the list I gave above, every sub-genre has writers who are either plot or character driven. Yet Paranormal writers are often (not always) character driven, while romantic suspense writers are often (once again, not always) plot driven. The requirements of the sub-genre tend to dictate this to a certain extent because believable paranormals often need strong, larger than life characters while romantic suspense, by definition, needs to be plot heavy.

Where do you think you fit? What is most important in your novels--the story or the characters? Of course, both are important, but what really stands out? What comes easiest for you? What's harder? What do you like most about your favorite author's writing? Who are your favorite authors and what kind of writers are they?

Your assignment for today is to answer the above questions. If you've written a couple novels or short stories, or even started some, spend a few minutes looking at them/thinking about them. If you're just starting out and are in the plotting stage, look at what you're emphasizing in your planning.

WHAT KIND OF CHARACTERS DO YOU LIKE TO WRITE?

Okay, the next step--after determining what kind of characters you like to read, is determining what kind of characters you like to write. These are not always the same--just like Nia, who is plot-driven, but admires character-driven writers, you can like certain character types but write other ones.

For example, Nora Roberts' heroes are great, yet in general, they are beta males. Yet I love Nora's books--and her characters, though I wouldn't know how to begin to write one.

So, here's the question--to alpha, beta, or gamma?

Now, we've already discussed our favorite heroes and why we like them. Now, which hero works best for which type of book--this is a question you have to ask yourself because certain types of books cry out for alpha heroes, while others demand betas. And readers are, of course, the same way.

Some love alphas and can't get enough of them, others much prefer betas.

Now, as I've mentioned, I'm an alpha girl all the way--in what I write. There's just something about creating a strong, gorgeous, sexy hero who is emotionally closed off (until he falls for the heroine) that gets me all tingly. Plus, I write really, really strong female characters and they need someone as tough as they are to stand up to them.

And that's the kicker, ladies. **You're H/h must complement each other, and work together.** There must be chemistry, obviously, but their personalities must also mesh. So if you write really strong, kick-ass women, you probably don't want to put them with a complete Beta, because the conflict won't be very interesting. But put them with a major alpha and watch the sparks fly. The same thing with really timid/reserved female characters--give them a really alpha hero and he'll stomp them into the ground quickly enough and you'll be left with no conflict.

So, where does character choice fit into the market?

Let's focus first on alpha--and remember none of these rules are absolute!

Writers who tend toward alpha male characters: Sherrilyn Kenyon, Christine Feehan, Lora Leigh, Linda Howard, Gena Showalter, Janet Evanovich, Diana Palmer

Harlequin lines that tend toward alpha males: Presents, Desire, Nocturne, NASCAR, Intrigue, Romantic Suspense (See a similarity between the authors and lines--lots of paranormal and Romantic suspense and what Harlequin calls the "fantasy" lines) Characteristics of alpha males: Strong-willed, successful, persistent, confident, hot-tempered, powerful, self-reliant, persuasive, adventurous, domineering

Beta males are often just as appealing, but in a different way. These guys are strong, but feel less of a need to "beat their chests" to show off their strength. They also have a tendency to be less domineering and better at being "partners."

Authors who tend toward beta male characters: Nora Roberts, SEP, Brenda Novak, Debbie Macomber, Susan Mallery, Jane Porter (non- Presents stuff)

Harlequin lines that tend toward beta male characters: Superromance, American Romance, Special Edition, Blaze--goes half and half, Medical

Characteristics of beta males: practical, loyal, balanced, intuitive, optimistic, realistic, adaptable, tolerant, confident.

Now, once again, none of this is written in stone--Nora Roberts has written more than few alpha males, particularly in the first half of her career, for example. Also, you can see alpha and beta males move between lines--once again, I write pretty strong alpha male characters for my Superromances while my friend, Lori Borrill, writes great beta male characters for her Blazes. So things can, do and should shift.

But these are some general guidelines to help you gear yourself towards the market.

STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

I wanted to start today by talking about strengths and weaknesses. Every writer has them--from the most famous NYTimes bestsellers to the newest beginner. And it is important--more important than I can say--that you know what your strengths and weaknesses are.

Why, you ask? Because as I mentioned in my last post--**you need to play to your strengths!** And you need to compensate for your weaknesses.

Areas of strength and weakness include, but are not limited to: characterization, plot, sub-plots, conflict, voice, resolution, figurative language, use of details, craftsmanship, etc.

So how do you find out which of these areas are your strengths and which are your weaknesses? Submit to an editor--they'll let you know very fast what you're good at and what you aren't--LOL! But seriously, this is where you need to open up and let other people look at your stuff. Often, we're too close to our writing (especially at the beginning) to know what is really good and what is really bad about it. That's where a trust friend or CP or family member (who knows what they're talking about) can come in.

Once you know what you're good at--and what you're bad at--you'll notice that it's easier to play to your strengths and compensate for your weaknesses. For most of my life, I've considered conflict my weakness as a writer. My conflicts just weren't real enough, deep enough, compelling enough to sustain a book. So I concentrate on conflict as I write, layering it in one level at a time. What this has done for me--when I finally sold to Supers, Spice and NAL, all three of my editors told me conflicts were a strength of mine and that mine were so strong and so believable that

working them out by the end of the book became the challenge. My response was "What?" You think I have strong conflicts?"

Who would have thought it???? For a woman who has made "More conflict, stronger conflict" her writing mantra, it was quite a shock.

But my CPs and agent have hit on another weakness of mine, one I didn't even know I had: beginnings. I like to start slow and build up to the action. Which isn't necessarily a bad thing--unless you're building your career on erotic or romantic suspense and paranormals--LOL! Then it becomes hugely important to start with a bang.

So go do Assignment #4 now: spend a few minutes thinking about what your strengths are. What are they? What are your weaknesses? These, too, will help direct you to the correct line or sub-genre because each area of romance has parts that are stressed and parts that are not as important. You don't have to post your lists if you don't want to, but as always, feel free to discuss them here. Or, if you feel more comfortable, feel free to e-mail me personally. The goal here is to help you identify your strengths and weaknesses and see if we can get a little closer to finding the right spot for you.

ASSIGNMENT #4

I'd like you to make a list of your strengths and weaknesses as a writer--according to you AND according to your CP/chapter mate/friend/relative. The reason I ask this of you, is that sometimes we see something as a strength, or as a weakness, but those who read our work don't necessarily agree.

So spend a little while making a list of what you think you do really well and what you think you need to work on or really suck at. Then ask one of the above mentioned people who have read your work to do the same. It's always very interesting to see how others view us and pair that up with how we view ourselves.

OTHER WEAKNESSES

I noticed a bunch of you mentioned strong, sustainable conflicts as one of your weaknesses--join the club! The interesting thing about writers is that most of us have problems with one or the other--characters or conflict

(interesting enough, this goes back to character-driven or plot-driven writer--see how it all cycles around).

If you don't have trouble with characters but your conflict is often not strong enough or sustainable through the entire novel, more than likely you're a character-driven writer. And vice-versa. Just one more example of how knowing your strengths and weaknesses helps you find your place in the market.

ASSIGNMENT #5

Which leads me to assignment #5! We'll talk more about plot and conflict and how to sustain those tomorrow, but for now, I'd like everyone to take a look at one of your own plots. Now, I know the last time you did this was probably in junior high or high school, but I'm a big believer in the old-fashioned plot triangle. So that's what I'm going to have you do for me.

On a sheet of paper, draw a large triangle. Label the bottom corner 1. Going up the left side of the triangle, at spaced intervals number 2, 3, 4 and 5. Label the pinnacle 6 and then going down the right side, in equal intervals label 7, 8, 9 and 10. The bottom corner of the triangle is 11.

Now, time to fill in the numbers--either on the triangle or on another sheet of paper with corresponding numbers, fill in the blanks.

#1. Introduction--What is the setting? Who are the major players.

#6. What is the crisis going (the major conflict at the point where the reader is sure it can't be fixed).

#2-5: Important steps that lead up to that crisis.

11. The resolution--how is that major crisis solved for the HEA

7-10. What leads up to that conflict being solved.

#12--a line extending straight out to the right from the bottom corner of the triangle. This is called denouement and it basically means what happens after the resolution takes place. So what action are you including after the hero gets the heroine, if any?

Now, I know this isn't a plotting class, so I'm not going to go into all the finer points about conflict/plot, but the old-fashioned plot triangle is one of

the best ways to solve your plotting/conflict weakness, because it really makes you think about it before hand--and makes you fill in all the blanks.

Once again, if you have no problem doing this, conflict/plot is probably a strength for you. if you struggle around points 4/5 and 9/10, then maybe it's a weakness. But this will help in layering and keeping the action high and the pressure on your characters.

We'll talk a little more tomorrow about conflict and where it puts you in the market, so be thinking about what kind of conflicts you like.

I'm taking the kids to the King Tut exhibit here in Dallas before heading back to Austin later, so I'll check in tonight to answer any questions, etc.

MORE ABOUT THE PLOTTING TRIANGLE

Okay, you asked...

I basically look at plot as a series of building blocks for your H/h to climb--until they are balanced at the top of a pyramid shaped skyscraper with no way down. That's the crisis point (the pinnacle of the triangle. But if they are to survive up there--and find a way down--each of the blocks beneath them needs to be completely solid (and fleshed out) or the skyscraper will sway like it's in the middle of a massive earthquake.

The bottom brick is the foundation of the conflict so it **MUST** be the strongest. It's got to last through three hundred pages, remember, and continue to be a problem. If it's not strong, it dies halfway through and you're left with your H/h dangling on a ledge two inches above a kiddie pool. Not nearly as exciting as Faye Ray and King Kong--LOL.

Each subsequent brick must also be strong--but each one is a little smaller. Why--because you start out broad and narrow, narrow, narrow, until you're at the crisis point--which is just what it says--a point on the vast plain of your story. Each building block that gets us there tells us a little more of the story, but they are all working toward that flash point when you, your reader, your H and your h all say "oh shit! what do we do now?????" Please excuse my language, but that's basically how I see it.

So every brick you lay on top of the foundation (the major conflict between the H/h) must somehow affect that conflict. It must lead up to crisis moment somehow, in some way.

CONFLICT AND THE MARKET

Now, on to plot/conflict and how it helps you find your spot in the market. Once again, conflict is one of the seven things fiction writers the world over use to craft their stories and it is one of the lynchpins your story rotates around.

So--what kind of conflicts do you like? Life and death ones? Regular, every day ones? Somewhere in between? The kinds of conflicts you're drawn to will really focus where your work goes. Life and death conflicts? The end of the world? Really big problems that affect all of mankind--you're talking paranormal, fantasy, science fiction and suspense, to a certain extent.

Smaller, but no less powerful conflicts, lend themselves more to contemporaries, romantic comedies, and historicals. The conflicts are no less integral to the characters, but they aren't as important to everyone else on Earth (or wherever the story is taking place).

This isn't to say that no contemporary, etc. has ever had a life and death plot--because, obviously, that's not true. But in general the conflict is on a smaller scale than the life and death ones you see in paranormals (good vs. evil, for example.) It works great in contemporaries and in paranormals, but there are totally different things at stake.

ASSIGNMENT #6

Okay--so here's the easiest assignment of the workshop. Get out a love scene that you've written recently--anything from the first kiss to a full out sex scene (whichever you prefer) and rate it on a scale of 1-10 for levels of hotness, emotion, and kinkiness. 1 is pretty much non-existent while 10 is there in spades. Then pick out 2 or 3 favorite authors and rate their love scenes as well--remember this is totally subjective--kinky to one person might be normal to another ;) And as always, feel free to post or not as the mood strikes you.

LOVE SCENES

So, let's talk about love scenes for a little bit today. How hot, or not, are the love scenes you write? If you did yesterday's assignment, you should have a general idea of where you fall on the following scale: · No Sex · Sweet Sex · Hot Sex · Dirty Sex

Now, these categories are really broad and leave out some things, like what my friend likes to call "naughty sex," which falls somewhere between hot sex and dirty sex. But at the same time, I think they give a broad overview of what the different genres are looking for-- and keep in mind, the market is wide open on this. Romances today run the gamut on this from the Love Inspired type to Erotica. Even within genres you see variations--light paranormals tend to have much sweeter sex than the dark paranormals and contemporaries range from closing the bedroom door to one or two pages to the whole enchilada--LOL!

Determining the kind of love scenes you're good at writing is important, because to a certain extent they will dictate your plot and the type of book you write. And they might not always be the kind you like to write. For example, I love Nora Roberts' love scenes, which in the grand scheme of things, aren't very explicit at all. Yet the way she always writes the fast, urgent one and the slow, tender one works so well for me. But I can't write love scenes like that, no matter how hard I try. My love scenes are hotter and darker--one more reason I write the kinds of books I write.

And, of course, even within the hot books, there's a difference. My good friend Lori Borrill writes for Blaze and she does some really spicy love scenes. I write for Spice, because mine are usually even hotter. Another good friend of mine, Jane Myers Perrine does a beautiful job writing warm, loving romance novels for Love Inspired, where sex is a definite no-no. There are no rules in this--it's whatever you feel comfortable with and whatever you write well.

But just be aware, depending on where you fall on this may influence your success in the genre. Like I said above, dark paranormals tend to have hot sex, whereas light paranormals may only have sweet sex or even just hint at sex. Erotica is a given, but romantic suspense is not. In general, romantic suspense tends to go with sweet sex, but then Lora Leigh is burning up the pages with her series for St. Martin's and Linda Howard's sex scenes, though brief, tend to go past sweet into the realms of hot as well. Of course, those are more the exception than the rule. Contemporaries run the gamut, as do romantic comedies, but once again, most tend to hover somewhere on either side of the sweet line.

So, how comfortable are you with writing sex? Does the hot and sexy stuff flow easily or is it like pulling teeth once you get them into the bedroom (or on floor or kitchen counter or the back seat of the car ;)

LANGUAGE

The next topic I'd like to look at, after love scenes, is Language. What types of words you use, how you phrase things, what types of symbolism, irony, and figurative language you put in your writing. We touched on this subject as we discussed voice, but I think language is important enough to deserve it's own section--particularly as it contributes so heavily to voice.

Your next assignment is to go through a chapter that you've written that you are particularly proud of. I want you to comb that chapter for words (besides the obvious/necessary ones) that you use again and again. Images that keep popping up. Turns of phrase that you use a lot, because you like them and because they are comfortable to you. Also, if you know you have a preoccupation with one or two things throughout your writing, throw it on in there.

I, for example, have a thing about eyes. My characters are always staring, glaring, looking, raising an eyebrow, their eyes are darkening, etc. My harlequin editor is constantly on me about that, trying to get me to tone it down some/ cut the repetition. But for me, when I look at a person, I look in their eyes and how they use them is always fascinating to me--so that translates to my characters as well.

And then try to peg your use of language using one or two words. Someone I know just referred to Maria Snyder's writing as "Lyrical, emotional" and I thought-- of course. That's exactly what it is. How do you characterize your own writing-- the actual words on the page, I mean. How do you want others to characterize it?

So, as we talk about language and how it places us in the market, I think it is important to note just exactly what language is (besides the obvious, I mean). When we're looking at it from an academic, writing standpoint, language encompasses:

--**diction** (your choice of words): for example, clothing vs. apparel, fancy duds vs. formal attire. What words come most naturally to you? What phrases?

-- **imagery**: how do you describe things/places/people? Very romantically or pragmatically? Short and sweet or long and flowing? And this is a big one-- literally or figuratively? Is every description in your book completely literal, or do you drift off into flights of figurative fancy (say that three times fast-- LOL).

--**Figurative language**, particularly similes, metaphors, assonance, consonance, hyperbole, etc. Is your writing filled with the figures of speech or is it much more cut and dried, efficient, straightforward? Which type of writing are you most comfortable? Which sounds best to your ear?

--**Repetition**: both of objects/ideas throughout your book or in your own sentence structure for emphasis. How often to you repeat yourself? In one multiple? For example, I might right, "She did it for herself. She did it for him. She did it because she couldn't not do it." Okay, that was pathetic and extremely amateurish, but it's late and I wanted an example quickly without having to think. Sorry :)

--**dialogue**: This is a huge one and one of the places so many writers get sunk. Is your dialogue natural, does it flow freely? Or is it more stilted, difficult to get through? Some sub-genres actually lend themselves to choppy dialogue (romantic suspense, for example) where others really require lyrical, flowing dialogue (historicals).

-- **Use or lack of use of Irony**: Irony is one of those things that characterizes a writer--and various sub-genres. Whether it is dramatic, verbal or situational, irony really sets a writer apart. Obviously situational irony is at its best in romantic comedies, and contemporaries, but dramatic irony works beautifully in everything from Romantic Suspense to historicals to erotica. It's just a matter of how much irony you use and how well you use it.

As detailed in the previous assignment, try and think about where you and your writing fall in the landscape of language. What comes easiest/ most naturally for you? What is hardest for you? Why?

TYING IT ALL TOGETHER

I want to spend a few minutes tying everything together.

As you examine how your characters, settings, love scenes, language, conflicts, voice, plots, etc. effect your writing, there's a few things you need to keep in mind.

1. Nothing is set in stone--**write what you want to write.**

2. **Write what you love.** Life is too short to spend your time on a project you aren't excited about--I'm in the middle of writing a book right now that I just don't love and it is a million times harder than writing a book that I'm excited about.

3. Pay attention to all the different parts that make up who you are as a writer--above all else, writing a book is a balancing act between all of the things I listed above. Everything needs to work together to produce a marketable product--in other words, if you're writing a romantic comedy, make sure the voice, characters, plot, etc. all work towards that goal. Identify the weaknesses that take away from it and then get rid of them. Make sure everything lines up.

4. Have fun! Never forget why you got into this to begin with--because writing is fun and you enjoy it. Try not to lose that in the ups and downs of trying--and succeeding--to get published.

The market is an ever-changing thing--I think as readers, and as writers, we know this. What's hot now might not be as hot in three years. In five years, the hip thing very well might be something we've never heard of. But **if you want to sell a manuscript, you must be aware of the market.** I don't say write to the market, because you need to be true to yourselves, but if your goal is selling your book, be aware that it is very rare for editors to step very far outside their comfort zones.

Not that it doesn't ever happen--it just happened, actually, for a friend of mine. Berkley bought her book, and a second book that she is currently working on, because they loved her writing/idea. But three months after they've bought it, they still don't know what to do with it--romance, sci fi, literature--all scenarios are being examined. It's a kickass book and one that I absolutely loved to read--the editors obviously felt the same way or they wouldn't have stepped out of their comfort zones and bought it. But she is the exception that proves the rule. Don't count on the same thing happening to you and your manuscript--it might, but it's a longshot.

And finally, as you write, **keep in mind who you are writing for.** Because you can write the best book in the world and it won't matter if you don't get it to the right agent or the right editor. That is everything. We've all heard of the seven editors that passed up Harry Potter and the many, many agents who passed on Twilight, but that happens to regular books as often as it happens to blockbusters. Don't let yours be one of them.

Thanks, ladies, for following along. I've had a really good time and it's been a pleasure to meet all of you!

You can visit Tracey Wolff on the web at: <http://www.tracywolff.com/>