

From Conflict to Love
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When you write a romantic fiction, your hero and heroine must have three main ingredients in order to carry the storyline:

1. Firm goals;
2. Incentive to achieve those goals;
3. Conflict preventing them from achieving their goals.

The nuts and bolts of a good romance novel begin with a goal, which is driven by incentive. This goal should be extremely difficult to obtain because of a conflict preventing achievement. Together, these three things drive your plot and allow your hero and heroine to grow as they move from conflict, respect, trust, and finally unconditional love. The process of how your hero and heroine achieve this is what drives your plot. You must **SHOW** this process, not tell it. This is what enthralls your reader to keep them turning the pages. So, you can see how serious the goal, incentive, and conflict must be. Simple incentive and conflict will lose your reader's interest. Be sure to have your goals, incentive and conflict as realistic as possible. Remember, real life is often unbelievable. Fiction, must be believable in order to lend credibility to your story and keep your reader happy! With this in mind, let's take a look at each of the three main ingredients:

GOAL:

Your hero and heroine must want something desperately because he/she has great incentive to achieve it, but conflict prevents him/her from achieving what they so badly want. If the stakes are not high enough, the goal will not be strong enough. Ratchet the tension as high as you can get it, and remember:

1. There should be terrible consequences if the goal is not achieved.
2. There must be urgency in obtaining the goal.
3. Goals should feel crucial and add tension.
4. Urgency should push the character(s) forward. A decision to act quickly is a must.
5. The goals should be obtained by the end of the story for a 'satisfying' ending for your reader.
6. Choices (action) made by the character(s) are what escalates the tension in your story.

A series of smaller goals is often necessary before the primary goal can be met. Perhaps the heroine must hire an airplane pilot and fly to Tibet and then take a boat down a river with white rapids before she can obtain the rare jewel for the villain. The process of doing all of this is the story and should 'show' the growth relationship between your hero and heroine as it moves them from conflict to respect to trust and finally to love. Don't skip over these scenes. Let your reader cross those white rapids right alongside your hero and heroine. Let your reader feel the water sloshing in their shoes!

INCENTIVE:

Incentive should not be ordinary. It has to be real and believable and bigger than life:

1. Keep the incentive simple but serious.
2. Keep it strong enough to drive the goal even if there is danger.
3. Keep the incentive focused on achieving the goal.
4. Answer why the character(s) do what they do? This provides the reader insight into the character(s) psyche.
5. Answer why the character(s) make certain choices?
6. Do not allow the character(s) a chance to escape the challenges they face to obtain their goal. Make them cross the white water rapids.

The urgency of achieving the goal pushes the plot to a fast pace, but keep it believable.

Internal Incentive: This creates emotions in your characters. The internal incentive needs to make sense and be strong.

You cannot touch, see, or hear internal incentive. It evolves into a 'life lesson' or 'growth'. Dealing with deep point of view drags out the most emotion and makes for a more satisfying story for your reader. Ask these questions:

1. Is the goal very important to the character(s)?
2. Is the incentive urgent?
3. Is the goal remotely possible to achieve? (Any good writer can find a way.)
4. Does the character(s) have skills and flaws that make this story unique to him/her?
5. Can you use this Goal/Incentive/Conflict to help the reader understand the characters and what makes them 'tick'?

Once you have established the goals, you will then want to up the stakes. Have compelling incentive. There must be good reason for the heroine to put herself in danger. Incentive, not coincidence, is what drives a believable plot. Coincidence is contrived and your reader will see right through it and put your book down!

A problem, or challenge, is a call to action. Heroes and Heroines 'choose' to act, which is believable. The reader begins to care about what happens to the hero/heroine, to cheer them on, to feel their pain and joy.

Multiple goals should crash into each other. As one incentive is weakened, the other incentives can and should be strengthened. Giving your hero and heroine conflicting goals is a marvelous way to add conflict.

External Incentive: You can certainly use external incentive but remember that it does not make as powerful a plot as internal incentive. Readers identify with emotions, which are created from 'internal incentive.'

CONFLICT:

Conflict is the ‘Why Not’ of your story? It is the reason the character(s) cannot have what they want, i.e. why they cannot meet their goal. Conflict is the obstacle the characters must face in order to achieve their goal. Conflict is **REQUIRED** in commercial fiction! No conflict, no story, because it is boring!

You want the reader to care about the characters or else the reader will not care about the outcome of the conflict. To get the reader to care about the characters, the reader needs to ‘walk a mile’ in the character’s shoes. So, it is important to master point of view. Then, **SHOW** the character’s struggles so the reader will come to sympathize and care. Don’t gloss over these struggles...take the reader through them. This is the plot and it heightens the impact of conflict to make the reader care.

Definitions of Conflict:

1. Conflict is a struggle against someone or something in which the outcome is in doubt.
2. Conflict is bad things happening to good people.
3. Conflict is bad things happening to bad people.
4. Conflict is friction, tension, and opposition.

Conflict equals disruption. Readers anticipate disruption and it keeps them turning the pages. Conflict is a must!

Knowing the conflict helps you to throw out the scenes that do not advance the plot. It also helps you convey the characters’ emotions better as setbacks occur. You can create tense scenes because you know exactly what is at stake for your characters.

Each ‘scene’ must do at least one of the following:

1. Dramatically illustrate a character’s progress toward the goal or provide an experience that changes the character’s goal.
2. Bring a character into conflict with opposing forces.
3. Provide a character with an experience that strengthens his incentive or changes his incentive.

Each scene you create needs to have a minimum of three reasons to exist:

1. Progress the Goal, Incentive, or Conflict from the list above. If each scene doesn’t have one of these reasons, take it out.
2. Two other reasons, such as introducing sexual tension, introducing a new character, foreshadowing, revealing secrets, picking up the pacing, comic relief after a dramatic scene, etc.

Note that out of #2 above, the sexual tension should reflect on the goal, incentive, or conflict. Introducing a clue should do the same.

A success for one character may be a setback for another character. Remember that Goal/Incentive/Conflict of your hero and heroine should collide. This creates tension between your hero and heroine and a good read. Eventually, the goals must intersect or else your hero or heroine must compromise for a satisfying ending. i.e. your hero can realize his goal has changed because he loves the heroine more than he loves his goal. He has ‘grown’ and his goal changed because of this growth. Likewise, your heroine can grow and ‘evolve’ and her goal can change.

The conflict can be a person (villain) or a situation. You can have multiple conflicts. Opposition enables a character to dig deep inside himself and rise to the challenge, grow, and become heroic. It prepares them for the Big Black Moment when they are willing to make the ultimate sacrifice for the man or woman they have fallen deeply in love with. This sacrifice must be of serious importance to the hero/heroine.

Internal conflict is emotional conflict. It is often a secret fear within the character(s). Others may or may not know of this emotional ‘secret’. The character himself may not know of this ‘secret’ either. This is a journey of self-discovery. It causes a struggle against others and within the character. It makes a character multi-layered. The strength of a story is the internal and external conflict. Conflict should be layered throughout the book. If your conflict is flimsy, unrealistic, not strong enough, the story will be weak and unbelievable and the reader will put your book down.

Defining Moment:

This is also called the Big Black Moment. It is the moment when all is the darkest and seems hopelessly lost, yet the character(s) must make a choice. They must act!

1. Bickering is not conflict. It is also annoying to readers.
2. Misunderstandings are not conflict. They are mild conflict but cannot be the ‘strength’ of a story.

Again, to build to the Big Black Moment, the reader must know and understand what is at stake. Do not be mysterious about this. The conflict and incentive must build to the Big Black Moment. Everything has been boiling up to this pivotal moment.

The outer conflict usually reveals or causes the Big Black Moment, but it is the character’s internal Goal, Incentive, and Conflict, which will be the key to resolving the Big Black Moment. This is the character growth. When the character realizes that their original ‘goal’ is no longer the most important thing to them, they have arrived at the stage of deep love. A hero will sacrifice everything for the heroine he loves and the heroine feels likewise toward the hero.

So, a few rules:

1. Reveal the crisis to your reader. Don't keep this a secret.
2. Make the character choose what to do, forcing them to take action.
3. Action drives the plot and makes for a great read.

The choices ultimately resolve the Big Black Moment and choices help alleviate a contrived plot.

In a romance novel, there is also a Romantic Big Black Moment, which can occur simultaneously with the regular Big Black Moment, or separately. It's up to you. This is usually when the hero and heroine confess their undying love, realizing they do not want to live without the other. Neither crisis can be resolved until character growth has been accomplished. In order to resolve the crisis, compromise and sacrifice must be made. Again, it must be a big or important compromise or sacrifice, not just a simple inconsequential one. And this in turn provides the reader with a satisfactory ending to your story. In a romance novel, the resolution must end happily with undying love.