

The Steps to Love
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A good romance novel is not boring. If you want to hold your reader's interest, your story must have conflict, and lots of it. Conflict is what drives the plot. A good romance novel shows the process of the hero and heroine learning respect and trust for one another so that they may finally arrive at the point where they are deeply in love. Does it sound simple? Well, it is. And, then again, it isn't. Hopefully the following steps will assist you in understanding the process:

The steps to love are:

1. Conflict
2. Respect
3. Trust
4. Love

Conflict:

This is a clashing and meshing. There are two things that keep the hero and heroine from each other:

1. Internal Conflict – this is a romantic clashing from within the hero/heroine
2. External Conflict – this is a non-romantic conflict from without

You need believable motivation behind both internal and external conflict! The stakes need to be high. Make it serious to the point that love seems absolutely impossible under the circumstances. Also, love should be the last thing on your hero and heroine's minds as they embark on their quest to complete their goal. In the beginning, love is a nuisance. Your hero and heroine are too busy trying to obtain their goal to want to focus on falling in love. But it happens to them regardless. In the end, love becomes an unexpected surprise your hero and heroine cannot resist.

Respect:

This is acceptance, recognition, and appreciation the heroine has for the hero's qualities, and vice-versa. Respect occurs when the hero and heroine start to 'see' the good side of each other. You want to 'show' your reader this process of respect growth. NOTE: They don't have to respect each other at the same time. Spread this throughout your book. This gives more scenes to progress your story and helps build to love.

Trust:

This is the opening up of self to deeper emotions. (Deep, dark secrets that haven't been told to others and possibly not even admitted to self.) The hero and heroine have to open up to betrayal by exposing themselves to each other.

The hero and heroine need to **SHOW** their trust, not tell it!

NOTE: Spend a lot of time developing this trust over many scenes. This progresses the plot/story line. (Great plot builders!) Trust is the ultimate risk. Only a person capable of trust is capable of love. Trust shows that the hero and heroine are now **ABLE** to move on to love.

Backsliding is allowed. This shows growth, then digression, then trust building again. This is what turning points and black moments are for.

Love:

The hero and heroine must first acknowledge their love to themselves individually. Then, they have to demonstrate this love through sacrifice. What do they give up or what are they 'willing' to give up? **SHOW** this sacrifice, don't tell it. (Maybe they don't actually end up giving it up, but they are clearly prepared to do so. Example: A hero is willing to trade his life for the heroine.) This is the **Big Black Moment** in your story, and it has to be serious. Giving up a ham and cheese sandwich is not going to cut it. The hero/heroine must be willing to give up whatever is most important to them because they have changed, grown, evolved, and finally realize their love is more important than anything else in the world.

Usually what is given up is a way of thinking, which opens a new view of the world to the person who has changed...remember 'growth'. The hero and heroine give up whatever kept them each from loving. This makes for a great ending to your story.

Again, the journey to love should be uncomfortable for your hero and heroine. It should be all about growth and self-discovery where your protagonists discover they can change. Where they learn to love someone else more than themselves, which truly is unconditional love.