



# Write ON!

QUARTERLY MAGAZINE OF THE  
WOMEN'S FICTION WRITERS ASSOCIATION

*Spring 2018*

## THE EMOTIONAL IMPACT OF SETTING

*Plus*

**GUIDING SCRIBE - BUILD A WORLD, HOOK  
A READER**

**HOT ON THE TRAIL**

**SETTING CLUES**

**TIME, CIRCUMSTANCE, AND SETTING**

**WHEN SETTING IS EVERYTHING:  
BREAKING DOWN THE GREAT ALONE BY  
KRISTIN HANNAH**

**WRITING HURTS...OUR BUMS, OUR LEGS,  
OUR BACKS**

**GRAMMAR LIGHT- SINGULAR OR PLURAL?**

**THE NOT-SO-LONELY REJECT**





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## *President's Note*

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I've been completely consumed lately by the topic of settings. Not just how to build a world in our stories, which is challenging enough, but how to make that world more than a backdrop. I've read craft books that tell us setting could and should serve as an additional character in a story. But I never really *got it* until this week, when I realized the emotional impact my own world settings have on me.

When I went to bed after a day filled with difficult conversations and stressful emotions, my thoughts continued to whirl. As I mulled and struggled, a strange noise came from outside my window. It was a trill, almost like a bird, that turned out to be a grey tree frog. The trilling went on for a few minutes and, as I continued to listen, I noticed something. Between the trills, there was silence. No barking dogs. No sirens. No voices or horns or traffic or any of the things a city inhabitant would likely hear outside her window. When I focused on the silence instead of the noise inside my head, I was able to relax and, finally, sleep.

Today, the weather is warm and sunny. The flowers in my garden are blooming. I stepped outside and smiled before reaching the end of my deck. In my mind, I drifted back to the windy, bitter winter days of walking my dogs. Icy sleet falling. The dark, cloudy gloom of early morning. Layers and layers of clothing and still, the chill always managed to reach my bones. In winter, my neck and back always hurt. My shoulders are always tense. I'm cranky and teary and struggle to write.

Sights. Sounds. Surroundings. The setting of a story, not just the location but what that place *creates* by its very nature—silence or noise, bustle or calm, balmy or bitter weather—is more than a backdrop when we let those creations impact our characters. Putting Carrie Bradshaw into Meryton would be as stressful to her as dropping Elizabeth Bennett into modern day Manhattan. Carrie would wither, beside herself with boredom. Elizabeth would crouch in fear and frustration from the claustrophobic atmosphere, the crowds, the noise. Settings that go against the very grain of characters' beings can either destroy them, or cause them to summon unknown inner strength and find a way to survive.

Vladimir Nabokov famously said, "The writer's job is to get the main character up a tree, and then once they are up there, throw rocks at them." We need to stress our characters out. Once we know who they are and what rattles them, making them uncomfortable isn't just important, it's necessary. Use setting—it's a great rock. Put characters into situations that make them bristle. Push their buttons. Make them defensive or fearful and force them to deal with that discomfort. Then, and only then, will they be forced to change. And only through change will they grow.

Write On!

*Christine Adler*  
WFWA PRESIDENT





# Editors

## MANAGING AND COLUMNS EDITOR

Stephanie Knipper is the author of *The Peculiar Miracles of Antoinette Martin*. She lives in Kentucky with her husband and six children, where she is currently at work on her second novel.

## FEATURES EDITOR

Cara Sue Achterberg is a novelist, blogger, creative writing teacher, and rescue dog foster mom who lives on a hillside farm in New Freedom, Pennsylvania with her family and far too many animals. She is the author of *I'm Not Her*, *Girls' Weekend*, and *Practicing Normal*. Her memoir, *Another Good Dog: one family and fifty foster dogs*, will be released August 7, 2018 from Pegasus Press. For more information, blog links, and plenty of puppy pictures, visit [www.CaraWrites.com](http://www.CaraWrites.com).

## CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

Patricia Friedrich is Professor of English at Arizona State University. She is the author/editor of six nonfiction books including *The Sociolinguistics of Digital Englishes* (Routledge, 2016), the award-winning *The Literary and Linguistic Construction of Obsessive-compulsive Disorder* (Palgrave, 2015), and several published short stories. She is currently working on revisions to her first novel-length manuscript, *Artful Women*.

## COPY EDITOR

Sara Dahmen is a metalsmith of vintage and modern cookware and manufactures pure metal kitchenware in tin, copper, and iron. Her debut novel, *Widow 1881*, inspired her company, House Copper & Cookware. The cookware is manufactured entirely in America, with most of the copperware made by Sara in her garage in Port Washington. She has published over 100 articles as a contributing editor, has written for *Edible* and *Root + Bone*, among others, and spoke at TEDx Rapid City. When not sewing authentic clothing for 1830's reenactments, she can be found hitting tin and copper at her apprenticeship with a master smith, reading the Economist and reference books, brainstorming with her husband, or playing with her three young children.

## LAYOUT EDITOR

K.L. Romo writes about life on the fringe: teetering dangerously on the edge is more interesting than standing safely in the middle. She is passionate about women's issues, loves noisy clocks and fuzzy blankets, but HATES the word normal. Her historical novel, *Life Before*, is about two women separated by a century who discover they've shared a soul. Web: [KLRomo.com](http://KLRomo.com) or @klromo.

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## ABOUT THE WFWA

We began this organization in 2013 with the idea to create a safe, nurturing place for male and female writers of women's fiction. The publishing industry is morphing—with new opportunities and, as yet, unknown futures. The founders of the Women's Fiction Writers Association wanted somewhere to amass and disseminate information to and about our chosen genre.

Defining Women's Fiction has proven as subjective as the types of books we prefer. For that reason, our guiding statement is broad and comprehensive:

Stories that are driven by the main character's emotional journey.

Our stories may have romance. Or they may not. They could be contemporary. Or historical. But what binds us together is the focus on a main character's emotional journey.

*Write on!*



Join the closed WFWA Facebook group by sending an email to:

[membership@womensfictionwriters.org](mailto:membership@womensfictionwriters.org)

## READER LETTERS

Like what you've read in *Write ON!*? Send us a letter! We'd love to hear your feedback and reactions on the stories and features. Email them to [writeon@womensfictionwriters.org](mailto:writeon@womensfictionwriters.org). Submitted letters are considered for publication and may be edited for clarity or space.

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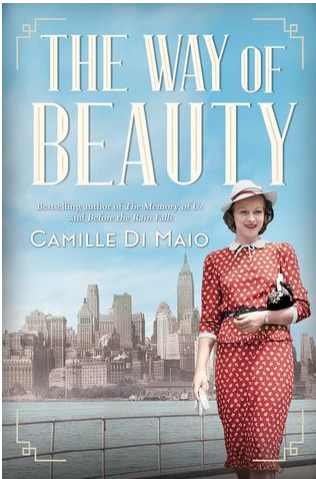
# MEMBER Releases



**Loretta Nyhan**  
**Digging In**  
4/1/18

Paige Moresco found her true love in eighth grade—and lost him two years ago. Since his death, she’s been sleepwalking through life, barely holding on for the sake of her teenage son. Her house is a wreck, the grass is overrun with weeds, and she’s at risk of losing her job. As Paige stares at her neglected lawn, she knows she’s hit rock bottom. So she does something entirely unexpected: she begins to dig.

As the hole gets bigger, Paige decides to turn her entire yard into a vegetable garden. The neighbors in her tidy gated community are more than a little alarmed. Paige knows nothing about gardening, and she’s boldly flouting neighborhood-association bylaws. But with the help of new friends, a charming local cop, and the transformative power of the soil, Paige starts to see potential in the chaos of her life. Something big is beginning to take root—both in her garden and in herself.

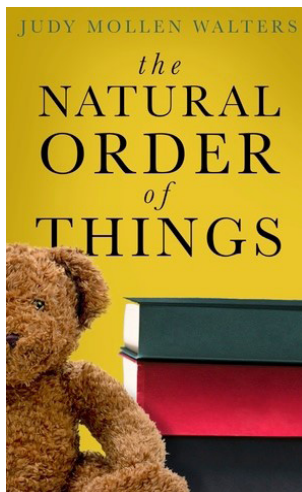


**Camille Di Maio**  
**The Way of Beauty**  
**4/1/18**

Vera Keller, the daughter of German immigrants in turn-of-the-century New York City, finds her life upended when the man she loves becomes engaged to another woman. But Angelo Bellavia has also inadvertently opened up Vera's life to unexpected possibilities. Angelo's new wife, Pearl, the wealthy daughter of a clothing manufacturer, has defied her family's expectations by devoting herself to the suffrage movement. In Pearl, Vera finds an unexpected dear friend...and a stirring new cause of her own. But when Pearl's selfless work pulls her farther from Angelo and their son, the life Vera craved is suddenly within her reach—if her conscience will allow her to take it.

Her choice will define not only her future but also that of her daughter, Alice.

Vera and Alice—a generation and a world apart—are bound by the same passionate drive to fulfill their dreams. As first mother and then daughter come of age in a city that is changing as rapidly as its skyline, they'll each discover that love is the only constant.

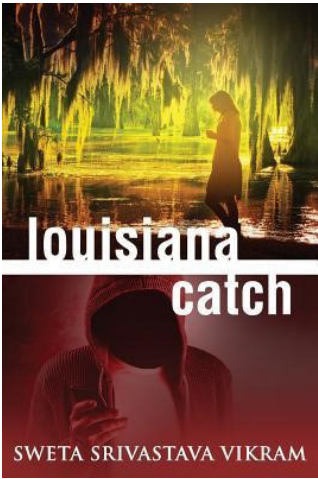


**Judy Walters**  
**The Natural Order of Things**  
**4/10/18**

When 22-year-old Elizabeth Brenner lands in New Jersey with her 15-month-old daughter, Lotty, she doesn't know a soul. And she prefers it that way. She's struggling with her own demons—her family in Utah, who essentially threw her out, her ex-boyfriend Evan and father of her baby, and just enough money so that she won't have to work for a little while. Three-and-a-half years later Elizabeth is running out of money and needs a job. But what can she do without an education or any real work experience?

When a job opening for a Bookmobile driver at her local library appears, she applies and gets the job. Now she begins to make friends: Estelle, a 95-year-old woman with a 70-year-old secret, Harper, a 16-year-old high school drop-out who isn't homeless but might as well be, and Sabrina, a pregnant mother whose secret is so big that she won't even tell her husband. As Elizabeth juggles all of her new friends' needs, she meets her neighbor Jeff, and then she finds herself doing something she swore she would never do again...





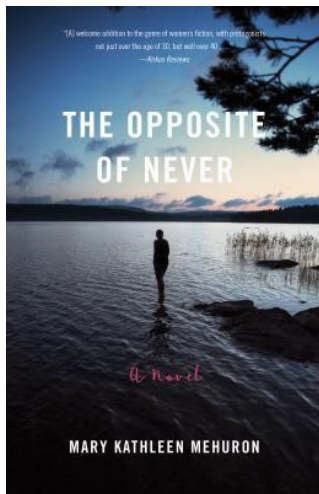
## Sweta Srivastava Vikram

### Louisiana Catch

4/10/18

Ahana, a wealthy thirty-three-year-old New Delhi woman, flees the pain of her mother's death, and her dark past, by accepting a huge project in New Orleans, where she'll coordinate an annual conference to raise awareness of violence against women. Her half-Indian, half-Irish colleague and public relations guru, Rohan Brady, who helps Ahana develop her online presence, offends her prim sensibilities with his raunchy humor. She is convinced that he's a womanizer.

Meanwhile, she seeks relief from her pain in an online support group, where she makes a good friend: the mercurial Jay Dubois, who is also grieving the loss of his mother. Louisiana Catch is an emotionally immersive novel about identity, shame, and who we project ourselves to be in the world. It's a book about Ahana's unreliable instincts and her ongoing battle to determine whom to place her trust in as she, Rohan, and Jay shed layers of their identities.

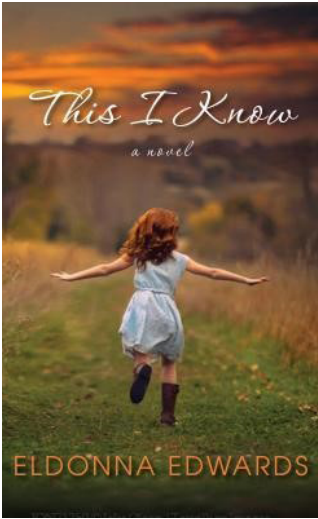


## Mary Kathleen Mehuron

### The Opposite of Never

4/24/18

Devastated when they lose their spouses, both Kenny Simmons and Georgia Best carry on for the sake of their children, although they are certain that the best part of their lives is long over. Then Georgia and her lifelong companions, Linda and Yvonne, meet Kenny while walking down a dusty Vermont country road, and the four of them hit it off. Soon, Kenny becomes a regular part of their hiking group, and he and Georgia grow more than fond of each other. Kenny's stepdaughter, Zelda, and Yvonne's teenage son, Spencer, also fall in love—at first sight. Through surprisingly relatable circumstances, they are drawn into opiate use, shocking everyone, and the two of them struggle through the torment of addiction together. In an impulsive and daring attempt to create a grand finale out of difficult times, Kenny takes Georgia off to vacation in Cuba just as it is opening up to Americans—and what they discover in the golden light of Old Havana is another startling surprise.



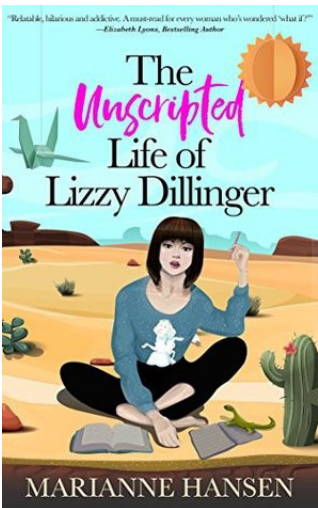
## **Eldonna Edwards**

### **This I Know**

**4/24/18**

Eleven-year-old Grace Carter has a talent for hiding things. She's had plenty of practice, burying thoughts and feelings that might anger her strict Evangelical pastor father, and concealing the deep intuition she carries inside. The Knowing, as Grace calls it, offers glimpses of people's pasts and futures. It enables her to see into the depth of her mother's sadness, and even allows Grace to talk to Isaac, her twin brother who died at birth. To her wise, loving Aunt Pearl, the Knowing is a family gift; to her daddy, it's close to witchcraft.

Grace can't see into someone's thoughts without their permission. But it doesn't take her special talent to know that her small community is harboring its share of secrets. A young girl has gone missing. Within Grace's own family too, the cracks are widening, as her sisters Hope, Joy, and Chastity enjoy the normal life that eludes Grace. It's Grace's kinship with other outsiders that keeps her afloat--Lyle, a gentle, homeless man, and Lola, a free-spirited new girl at school. But when her mother lapses into deep depression after bringing home a new baby, Grace will face a life-changing choice--ignore her gift and become the obedient daughter her father demands, or find the courage to make herself heard, even if it means standing apart.



## **Marianne Hansen**

### **The Unscripted Life of Lizzy Dillinger**

**4/26/18**

Stay-at-home mom Lizzy Dillinger escapes the monotony of her humdrum marriage by writing down her daydreams. When her producer friend contracts her story for a movie and invites her on set, she jumps at the chance to leave the suburbs until the film's in the can. But Lizzy's big break gets even better when she learns the hunky character who starred in her daydreams will be played by her Hollywood crush, Ben Winters.

On location in Arizona, the desert gets even hotter when Lizzy and Ben strike up a flirtatious friendship. But her hopes of a celebrity fling shatter when a family visit brings her fantasy crashing into reality. Against the dazzling lights and the glamorous movie sets, her cookie-cutter life back home seems painfully bland. Torn between the man of her dreams and the family who helped define her, Lizzy must search her heart to find where her true passion lies.



**Wendy Teller**  
**Becoming Mia**

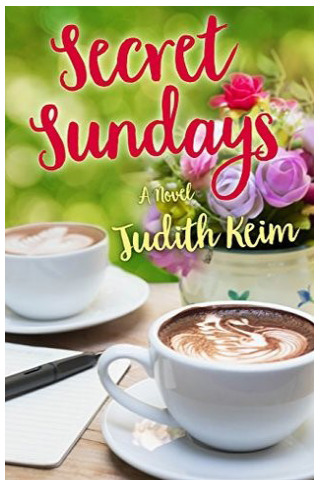
**5/1/18**

1964 to 1970 were turbulent years in the United States. The Vietnam War was ramping up, as were the protests against it. Both became more violent as the sixties wore on.

In the fall of 1964 Mia Brower left her hometown of Berkeley, California, to begin her freshman year at Harvard University, determined to become an outstanding architect.

But her freshman year is a disaster.

Her dreams shattered, her confidence destroyed, can Mia find within herself the determination and strength to succeed on her own terms, even as the culture tears itself apart around her and puts both her friends and her family in danger?



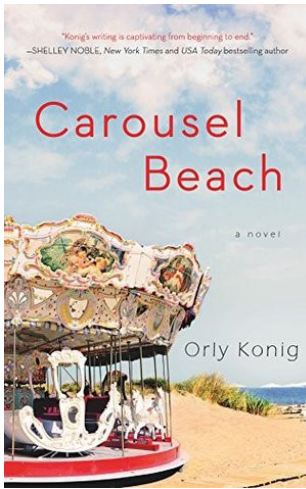
**Judith Keim**  
**Secret Sundays**

**5/7/18**

The women in the Fat Fridays group continue to come together for their Friday lunches—no calories counted—and to help each other deal with life’s complications. With her unexpected pregnancy and the support of the women in the group, Carol Ann breaks free from her dismal life with her parents. Left on her own with no support from the father of her child, she decides to start an interior decorating business on the side. She begins by secretly helping Ed Pritchard, her boss at MacTel, decorate his condo for Christmas.

One Secret Sunday leads to others. Carol Ann and Ed are planning a future together when Lee, a tall, thin, beautiful young woman sent from MacTel’s California headquarters to “fix” their office, disrupts their world. Then, when Ed is diagnosed with a serious illness, he decides it’s only fair to break off his engagement to Carol Ann. Devastated, Carol Ann wonders how she can continue. But all their Secret Sundays bring about a new beginning when he joins her for the birth of the baby he wants to help raise. The women in the Fat Fridays group celebrate in style as they welcome another little one into their midst.





**Orly Konig**  
**Carousel Beach**  
**5/8/18**

A cryptic letter on her grandmother's grave and a mysterious inscription on a carousel horse leads artist Maya Brice to Hank Hauser, the ninety-year-old carver of the beloved carousel she has been hired to restore in time for its Fourth of July reopening in her Delaware beach town. Hank suffers from Alzheimer's, but on his "better" days, Maya is enthralled by the stories of his career. On his "off" days, he mistakes her for her grandmother--his secret first love.

While stripping chipped layers of paint from the old horse and peeling layers of fragmented memories from the old man, Maya untangles the intertwined secrets of love, heartbreak, and misunderstandings between three generations of strong-willed women.

If you have a Women's Fiction novel being published in the next quarter (July, August, and September) and would like *Write On!* to feature it, please [fill out the submission form here](#).

## Build a World

# Hook a Reader

by Heather Webb

One of the most compelling elements of any novel is the setting in which it takes place. If a reader can smell the burning sugarcane in the hazy Caribbean heat or feel the scratchy mittens that ward off the chill of Irish winter, the author has done their job. But how does an author create a setting pulsing with life? There's more to it than meets the eye. First and foremost:

***Is your narrative set firmly in place and time?***

Sometimes, writers make the mistake of waiting for several pages or even several chapters before constructing a world a reader can really fall into. We get caught up thinking it's more important to introduce the character(s) or their backstory, or we even get tangled in the inciting incident. But we need all of those things *and* a strong sense of place and time *immediately*. It can be irritating as well as jarring for a reader to believe they are reading one genre of book only to discover the book veers in a different direction entirely.

For example, recently, I was reading a contemporary novel that turned out to have magical realism elements about a third of the way into the story, and even a bit of an alternate world as well. Because there had been no groundwork laid from the get-go, no clues or foreshadowing or a sense that not all is as it seems below the surface, I found it unbelievable and I put the



book down. We *must* establish place and time—and any sort of funky, different, magical, far-away, historical elements—on page one.

***Location, Location, Location!***

Researching locations far from our homes is so much easier these days with Google and its giant database of resources and maps. That said, it is not the same thing, at all, as spending time in a location. There is an essence to a place—its smells, its heartbeat, its soul—that cannot be found on the internet. When you can, travel to the location you plan to inhabit in your mind for the next year(s) while working on your manuscript. It's expensive, but you will bring

an authenticity to the page that can't be faked. Consider the following questions:

- Is the location real or imagined, and what is the probability that the story could take place here? Does it fit the character and his/her journey? Consider choosing a location that will give your protagonist the largest number of obstacles. We want to challenge her and force her to face difficulty in order to change.
- Who owns the location or space in which the protagonist will be moving—the narrator, someone else, an organization—and what insight does it give us into that character/characters? Are they poor or wealthy? Proud or ashamed? Fashionable or dowdy?
- What is unique about the location? Remember to note any items or details of importance to the character or the plot, always offering those details through your narrator's lens.

After you've chosen your location, next do a language check.

**Language check!** Be sure the language you have used is indicative of the era and location. I will add a note of caution here, however. Keep in mind that adding dialect (or historical speak, foreign languages, fantasy-speak) is like adding a seasoning to a dish. The right amount of salt makes the dish delicious. Too much makes it inedible, so handle with care. Language goes hand-in-hand with culture so guess what's next?

**Be true to the culture of the character.** A woman from Zimbabwe will not say, do, or eat the same things as a woman from San Francisco, and will likely have an entirely different view of the world. Be sure you have researched any culture you are portraying thoroughly so as to avoid landmines that come with *writing what you don't know*.

**Description paints a vivid picture, but then again, how much description is enough?** I tend to believe that less is more; make description short but impactful. That said, I'm a lean writer so of course I would say this. However, I do adore the slow burn of a novel with lush descriptions as well.



Know your style and own it, but keep this very important key factor in mind: description is never filler. It serves a purpose and should do one of two things: 1) it should advance the plot, or 2) reveal something pertinent about the character's inner life. If the description does neither of these things, and is long passages of telling us what Texas bluebonnets look like and where they grow and how they grow and how beautiful they make the countryside, it should be cut. If Texas bluebonnets are your protagonist's favorite flower and they gain a real sense of being home and at peace in walking through fields of bluebonnets, they stay in, but only within the context of your character moving through this descriptive scene somehow. Or perhaps your character is triggered by the smell of bluebonnets and they elicit some sort of emotional memory. Action, sensory cues, and description all go hand-in-hand. That's a big part of balanced pacing and visceral, life-like world-building.

**Set the tone and the mood from page one.**

Just to clarify the difference between the two terms, the *tone* is the author's attitude toward the subject, and *mood* is the emotion the reader derives from the story. These elements are absolutely key to world-building. Tone and mood are clues, or indicators as to how the reader should feel about the character(s), as well as what they should expect from the story. Is it humorous? Feel-good? Sensual? Dark? Is there an impending sense of doom?

Creating a believable and engaging story-world is bigger than location, mood, descrip-



tion, language, and culture. (I know! There's so much involved!) It's about digging deeply into our characters' hearts and minds. Every piece of this story and this world we're creating should revolve around our protagonist. Even if you're writing with a distant third person narrator, the world you build should be a means to illuminate your characters inner lives.

### ***Construct a setting as seen through the eyes of your narrator.***

The most important aspect of world-building is to think about the way the setting affects your protagonist as well as *how they react to it*. A setting is lifeless and is just a bunch of extraneous details without your narrator's emotional lens in place. For example, no location is the same for everyone. Take two people and place them in the same setting at the same time and then ask them to talk about it. A socialite and a pauper walk into a banquet. How would the socialite describe the setting? What would she notice? Perhaps who was there, what they were wearing, the music playing. A pauper would be hit with the smell of roast and crab cakes and cream sauces, and groan at the pitiful gnawing in their stomach. They would be feeling gauche and ashamed of their appearance, or maybe they would be furious these people have an embarrassment of riches while he sleeps on dirty straw in a barn outside of town every night. If the two sets of impressions from very different characters are similar or have the same emotional tenor, we have a problem.



A single paragraph depicting your narrator's emotional reaction to the room, and the few individual things he or she notices, will tell us infinitely more about your character than cataloging the inventory. It will give the reader tremendous insight into who this character is, as well as the owner of the space they've entered.

Other ways to incorporate a character's unique view through world-building:

- **Focus on the narrator's hobbies or interests.** The way my protagonist Camille Claudel, a sculptor, would both view and interact with a space would be through her hands. She learns by touching, molding, creating. She also sees beauty in ordinary objects. Kind of like the way a writer sees a story in everything, down to a simple forgotten polka-dotted umbrella on a moving train.
- **Incorporate a narrator's mannerisms and personality into your descriptions.** Is your character an introvert or an extrovert? Does the room overwhelm and overstimulate them? Does it bore them?



- **Use the protagonist's mood or emotional state for effective world-building.** How does their mood affect what they see? If they are already frightened and pensive, then a dark, spooky castle will seem more menacing. If they have just lost someone they love, a bright blue, spring sky could be a mocking sky. Again, this goes back to utilizing the character's emotional lens.

We want to capture our reader's imagination, sweep them away to a world that isn't their own.

To do this, we must make our world-building count! Incorporate your unique brand of metaphors, sensory details, and writerly style to make the fictional world as vibrant as if you were Jane Q. Protagonist. And above all, delve deeply into her emotional lens. This, my friends, is how we win hearts and our readers become fans.



**Heather Webb** is the author of historical novels *Becoming Josephine* and *Rodin's Lover*, which have sold in six countries and have been featured in *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *Cosmopolitan*, *Elle*, *France Magazine*, and more, as well as received national starred reviews. *Rodin's Lover* was a Goodreads Pick of the month in 2015. *Last Christmas in Paris*, an epistolary love story set during WWI, was released October 15, 2017, from HarperCollins. Heather is also a professional freelance editor with more than two dozen clients placed with agents and publishers, an amateur foodie, and a travel fiend. Find out more at her website, [www.heatherwebb.net](http://www.heatherwebb.net), and on Twitter @msheatherwebb.



# Hot on the Trail

by Monica Cardoza

Whether you're trying to capture a particular time and place, or just starting to imagine when and where to set your novel, history hikes offer writers the opportunity to stretch their legs outside. Taking a history hike with a knowledgeable guide frees you up to take notes and photos, ask questions, and see, feel, and hear the subtle details of a setting that will give your writing depth.

Check out these sources for history hikes near you:

***State, county, and city park commissions offer inexpensive and oftentimes free history hikes, including private hikes for a nominal fee.***

I took a free hike to the New Jersey Palisades cliffs organized by the Palisades Interstate Park Commission, which manages more than 100,000 acres of parkland in New Jersey and New York. My hike included the Depression and New Deal-era history of thriving beaches and campgrounds along the banks of the Hudson River. The guide read newspaper articles and passed around photos from that period.

Next on my bucket list? Millionaire's Row, a five-mile hike along estate foundations where artists, captains of industry, and eccentrics built mansions on the cliffs. In the 1930s, John D. Rockefeller bought and razed the homes to open up views to the public.

***Hiking clubs may not offer history-specific hikes, but they often explore areas with rich pasts.***

I recently joined my club for a hike of an overgrown hamlet settled in 1760 called Doodletown at New York's Bear Mountain State Park. The trails were dotted with helpful signage installed by park employees detailing the community's families and architecture.

***Historical societies offer easy treks in towns and cities eager to promote their pasts.***

While vacationing in Vermont, I joined a free hike to a marble quarry sponsored by the Dorset Historical Society. I hadn't planned on taking a hike. But I'd passed a handmade sign on the Society's lawn and decided to go. I learned that it was one of several quarries in the area, and the marble





was used in the New York Public Library and mansions on New York City's 5th Avenue. Since that first trek, I've hiked to another quarry alone. Who knows? Maybe descriptions of polished Dorset marble with its green and bluish tints and streaks will work their way into my writing.



***Chambers of Commerce are often a long-shot when it comes to history hike offerings, but worth checking out nevertheless.***

The Nantucket Island Chamber of Commerce offers natural history hikes along its shores, and the Truckee Chamber of Commerce organizes the annual Donner Party Hike, a weekend-long event featuring historians retracing the steps of the pioneers heading to California in 1846.

***If you're feeling adventurous and are willing to strike out on your own or with a friend, try state and regional tourism offices for self-guided hikes.***

These groups will often hand you a trail map and send you on your way. I found a hike of a 200-year-old farm in my home state of New Jersey, and some quick searches turned up The Chocolate Tour in Santa Fe, vineyards tours in California, and a mineral springs tour in Colorado. If you don't find the history hike you're looking for, ask for the name of a local historian willing to take you on a hike for a fee.

The only problem with the plethora of history hikes is that it won't be a matter of how to describe your setting, but choosing just one.



Monica Cardoza is a former editor for The New York Times Syndicate, and author of three traditionally published nonfiction books, covering martial arts, writing, and parenting. Her recently completed novel takes place on New Jersey's Palisades cliffs high above the Hudson River where she still takes the occasional hike. [www.moniacardoza.com](http://www.moniacardoza.com); @probablyoutside



# Setting Clues

by Kathy Nickerson

Settings are tricky. They can sneak into a manuscript through minor details when you aren't looking. An editor once told me she was surprised to learn my protagonist came from Chicago. "For some reason," she said. "I had imagined New York."

She imagined it because my protagonist did come from New York in an early draft of the book. I moved her to Chicago and changed the pertinent information. Evidently, I left some New York clues. It took some digging in the manuscript to find them, because they were subtle. Here are three places an author can place subtle clues to create setting.

## Character Clues

A character's dialogue, habits, relationships, or quirks can help create setting. Take Atticus Finch out of the full story and just let him speak that line about it being a sin *To Kill a Mockingbird*. When he says you can shoot all the blue jays you want, no one is going to assume we are in New York City. Or when Scarlett *fiddle-dee-dees* her way into all the hearts at the barbecue, I suspect you would imagine a Southern plantation even if you had never seen the movie.

I had given my protagonist a literary agent who spoke of mahogany walls in publishing houses. Although lots of agents live and work in other cities, this relationship evoked a sense of the publishing world in New York City.

## Cultural Clues

Some things are so ingrained in our culture, they automatically refer the reader to a specific setting. If your narrator describes the new guy in town as having "a good fortune," we expect this novel will be set in the time and space of Jane Austen. If your star-crossed lovers "hurry to the barricades," we are in the French Revolution. Put your female detective on a cable car, and the murder happened in the hills of San Francisco.

We have to drop those details in with care so they don't become cliché. Simply "hailing a taxi" added to the sense of New York in my novel.

## Context Clues

Sometimes the language itself hints at the setting. The stormy love story of Heathcliff and Cathy in *Wuthering Heights* takes place in the windy, rocky moors. We are anchored in that setting by phrases such as, "My love for Heathcliff resembles the eternal rocks beneath."





When Kathryn Stockett opens *The Help* with Aibileen describing the way she “done raised seventeen kids” in her lifetime, we can almost feel the heat of the deep South in 1962. Bridge club, separate bathrooms, and the DAR newsletter at Skeeter’s house bring such rich context that the author barely needs to mention Mississippi.

My protagonist went to brunch with her mother and only got a driver’s license so she could have an ID. Those things could be true in any city, of course, but since I’d already dropped hints of New York, the context carried through.



These setting clues may seem as if they happened in the story almost by accident. But, we know better. A good writer works hard to craft the characters, the culture, and the context of a story. If we keep in mind the clues to our setting, we can add another rich layer to the reader’s experience.

As for my protagonist, I moved her back to New York City. Obviously, she lived there.



Kathy Nickerson is an author, speaker, and eternal optimist who has been happily married to her country doctor husband for more than forty years. They are the parents of four children, who grew up to become their best friends, and who have given them fourteen grandchildren, so far.

Kathy has written for several magazines through the years and some of her stories have appeared in collected works by Bethany House and Guideposts Books. Her novels include *Thirty Days to Glory*, *Rose Hill Cottage*, and *The Secret of Serendipity*. *The Marvel House* is due for release in the fall of 2018.

You can learn more about Kathy’s writing and her reputation as an Eternal Optimist at her website. Sign up for her mailing list and get a copy of her essay, *Three Secrets to a Happy Life* at [www.kathynick.com](http://www.kathynick.com).





# Time, Circumstance, and *Setting*

by Caden St. Claire

With Stephen Hawking's recent passing, I was reminded of his *Genius* series on a PBS station regarding the possibilities of time travel. Three people were shown numbers that constituted an invitation to a party. The numbers represented the intersection of 46th Street and 11th Street, and a 15-story building. But when the people arrived, the party had long been over; they walked dejectedly among the half-inflated balloons, empty cups, and food remains. Hawking had given them the where of the party, but had neglected to give them the when. As writers, we need to find that deeper connection between time, circumstance, and setting!

In Mary Buckham's book, *A Writer's Guide to Active Setting*, she explains how setting can add depth to your character, as illustrated in Harper Lee's *To Kill A Mockingbird*:

"Maycomb was a tired old town, even in 1932 when I first knew it. Somehow, it was hotter then. Men's stiff collars wilted by nine in the morning. Ladies bathed before noon, after their three-o'clock naps, and by nightfall were like soft teacakes with frostings of sweat and sweet talcum. The day was twenty-four hours long, but it seemed longer. There was no hurry, for there was nowhere to go, nothing to buy and no money to buy it with..."

Like millions of other readers, Harper Lee's use of time and circumstance immediately drew me into her story. She didn't just tell me the

where (Deep South) and the when (1932), but she used ordinary details to show how people reacted to their circumstances at a specific time in history. This is the deeper connection that makes writing real. She wove the setting in such a way that it brought depth to her characters, revealed a different place and time, and created a remarkable paragraph.

Of course, someone who grew up north of the Mason-Dixon Line might not be aware of the heap of difference between the Republic of Texas and the Deep South—not just in speech, but in mindset. Or that in the pre-Civil War Deep South, things moved so slowly it was even said that "time stood still." So how relevant is time to circumstance, and how do they relate to setting?



Sometimes, the addition of a sentence or two can explain both. Buckham demonstrated this with the following two examples:

“The day I left Paris, I knew I would be returning as soon as possible.”

“Paris had dressed in her best to see us off. A warm spring sun peeked through the pearl-grey skirts of early morning fog. And a light breeze stirred the new leaves on the Champs-Elysees as if waving farewell.”  
–Deanna Raybourn’s *A Spear of Summer Grass*.

The first sentence tells us where (Paris), but doesn’t really explain how the character feels about leaving. The expanded paragraph tells us not only the when (spring) and the where (Paris), but takes us deeper into the character’s circumstance of being forced to leave a city she’s grown to love, and it’s all done with setting. The reader feels the hesitant warmth of a spring sun and the light breeze caressing her hair, the season of hope and new growth adding a buoyancy to the very air. Buckham goes on to include a negative, rainy-day reaction when the setting changes, again using the senses to underline the mood of the moment.

We all look at things differently. How we filter what we see depends on who we are and where we come from—our *character*. How that character reacts over time can change as well, from child to adult to a senior citizen. The longer we survive, the more “back-in-the-days” we accumulate. Indeed, time can refer to the time of day, year, month, or century as easily as it can a person’s time in life.

According to Buckham, setting also uses time to create conflict (future) or show backstory (past). Setting can evoke positive as well as negative reactions, depending on time and circumstance. Buckham reminds us that a backstory matters only if it is relevant to current choices, decisions, or events in your story. She gives an example of using setting and circumstance to trigger a memory that serves to contrast what the character is seeing and thinking. She incorporates sensory details as well:

“A watery sun was shining on it [the house]. There was a faint breeze and the smell of woodsmoke in the air and a kind of intense cold-afternoon quiet all around us. It was the kind of place you would have wanted your grandparents to live...it reminded me of the places in the picture books they gave me in Manila and Guam.”

This is a vast improvement over:

“I had been a child who had grown up on military bases around the world, who had never had what I saw as a traditional American home.”



The first paragraph is more powerful because we’re placed in the moment instead of being told about it. We’re breathing in the wood smoke. We’re feeling the quiet. And we all have images of what grandma’s house should look like, smell like, feel like. Don’t just say it was another place and time—prove it. Draw the reader deeper into the character’s point of view (POV) by triggering a memory that causes the reader to care. Simple things—the aroma of an apple pie cooling on the window sill while a summer breeze teases the kitchen curtains, the smell of Pine Sol on a freshly mopped linoleum floor, a lingering haze of incense and Patchouli—can define a decade in one or two well-placed sentences. If place and time form an integral part of your story, take extra pains with it early on to anchor it in the reader’s mind.

In Agatha Christie’s *Sleeping Murder*, the opening sentence not only sets the stage as to where (England) and who (Gwenda), but opens the door to the mystery itself (Why/What happens?), and she does it all with setting:



“Gwenda Reed stood, shivering a little, on the quayside.

The docks and the custom sheds and all of England that she could see, were gently waving up and down.

And it was in that moment that she made her decision—the decision that was to lead to such very momentous events.

She wouldn’t go by the boat train to London as she had planned.”

Gwenda’s decision leads to a road trip. On the spur of the moment, she buys a house she passes while driving down a country lane. She doesn’t know why, or why she thinks a door should be where it isn’t, or why she begins having flashbacks of a murder that occurred there. By page four, and all through the story, the house has become an active participant, vital to the plot.



When is setting too much setting? When it takes away from the story. Take your character into the setting—and use that setting to take the reader deeper into the character. Or, use the setting to advance the plot and, at the same time, clue the reader in on the time frame of the story. In Ernest Cline’s *Ready Player One*, Wade’s avatar enters a house and describes the interior, which places his character in the setting. Simple props, sayings, and common references are all targeted at millennials, but Cline gives the props double duty. We follow Wade’s avatar as he goes through the kitchen cupboard:

“One entire cupboard was crammed with boxes of vintage breakfast cereals, most of which had been discontinued before I’d been born. Froot Loops, Honeycombs, Lucky Charms, Count Chocula, Quisp, Frosted Flakes. And hidden way at the back was a lone box of Cap’n Crunch. Printed clearly on the front of it were the words FREE TOY WHISTLE INSIDE!”

*Voila.* The setting has become part of the plot! While *Ready Player One* is all about escaping reality, Suzanne Collins’ *Hunger Games* is all too real, and the prize is life or death. Yet, they both immerse the reader into a specific *time and circumstance*, and use *setting* to delight the senses and get the adrenaline going.

In Frank Herbert’s *Dune* series, the story is so woven into the setting (Arrakis) that the two are inseparable. The culture itself has been fashioned by the circumstance and the setting. While stories set in the future demand an active imagination as well as an active setting, novels set in the past will require research if they are to appear genuine through a *sprinkling of authenticity*—no info dumps. Think Han Solo and his admonition to *fly casual*.



If your story moves the reader through the 18th, 19th, or 20th centuries, you need your facts at hand. When your main character walks into the speakeasy to seduce the detective, what song is playing in the background? Are they called a detective or a copper? Does the language match the setting? When your heroine bends down to pick up the murder weapon, is the movement made difficult by the corset she’s wearing,



or her Michael Kors high heels she bought in New York? Will the couple get into a carriage, a hansom, or a pickup truck? Did his Balmoras leave muddy shoeprints on the parlor rug? If your story takes place in the desert, the mountains, the Lake District, or Alaska, how does that setting affect your characters and/or the plot? An excellent example is Deanna Raybourn, who uses time, place, and circumstance seamlessly in *Silent In the Sanctuary*, the second book in her *Lady Julia Grey Mystery* series:

“The long windows of the drawing room overlooked Lake Como, although the heavy velvet draperies had long since been drawn against the gathering dark.”

In one sentence, Raybourn weaves time and setting together. Her mention of Lake Como places the story in Italy, while “drawing room” and “heavy velvet draperies” put the story in the late 1800’s. She uses “against the gathering dark” as possible foreboding to set the mood of the scene. Nora Roberts calls her writing “compelling” and lauds her “richly detailed world.” Your writing can be just as compelling. Both setting and circumstance dictate what your characters say, what they wear, what they do, how they comport themselves, where and how they travel, and what is or is not permitted in the world around them. Allow your setting to be an active, integral part of your story. Let your characters not only dictate the circumstances, but also react to them.

And don’t forget that elusive dimension of time, so nobody misses the party.



## So, how can we use time, circumstance, and setting?

- To add depth to characters by showing who they are in relation to the setting via descriptions of clothing or actions—especially significant in historical novels.
- To denote feelings mirrored in or caused by the weather or by time (dawn, sunset, day and night all evoke different feelings, as does rain, fog, or sunshine).
- To show conflict and/or further the plot (when the setting becomes an active player in the story).
- To take the reader into the past (names, dress, manner of speech, and ordinary objects), present (the same), or future (using believable characters, places and cultures, even if they are surreal).



**Caden St. Claire** (a *nom de plume* for C. J. Sweet) graduated *cum laude* from the University of Houston with a degree in Communication (Radio/TV). She worked in the legal field for many years and taught English as a Second Language at the secondary level. Her credits include: *Night Vision*, which won First Place in the 2015 *Writer's Digest* Fiction Contest, Thriller Category; *The Organ Chaser*, published in 2016 in “*Denizens of the Dark*,” an anthology by The Final Twist; and *White Rabbit*, which won Honorable Mention in the *Saturday Evening Post's* 2017 Great American Fiction Contest and was included in their online anthology of winners. She recently completed a historical romantic suspense novel and a mainstream romantic suspense novel, and is hard at work on a sequel, a novella, and a collection of short stories.



# When Setting is Everything

## *Breaking Down The Great Alone* by Kristin Hannah

by Laura Drake

**Alaska.** Just the name conjures pictures of loners and mountain men. The Last Frontier. Man vs. Nature wrapped in a Jack London-scented memory. Right? The time period played a big role as well: the 60's and 70's, a time of upheaval and change in America, when everything seemed possible and impossible, all at the same time.

I'd heard so many great things about *The Great Alone* that I bought it and listened to the audiobook on a road trip a month ago. I ended up listening as I fell asleep every night. It became the background to my days. In my opinion, it earned every accolade. It's one that's hung with me ever since.

When I am captivated by a book as a reader, I want to analyze it as a writer, to try to understand how the author did it, so I can apply the lessons to improve my own writing. There's a wealth of gold to mine here. Plot, character, pace, social and societal backdrop . . . but what elevates this book is the setting.

You've heard of setting as character. That's where the book began, but Ms. Hannah took it to another level. The setting is both a protagonist *and* an antagonist. Her descriptions are evoca-

tive and lilting:

"It was otherworldly somehow, magical in its vast expanse, an incomparable landscape of soaring, glacier filled white mountains that ran the length of the horizon, knife tip points pressed high into a cloudless cornflower-blue sky. Kachemak Bay was a sheet of hammered sterling in the sunlight."



The book is peppered with so many gorgeous descriptions like the above that I worry this book will do to Alaska what John Denver did to Colorado. You can't help but fall in love with this



beautiful protagonist: the setting.

In case you haven't read the book yet (you have to!), here's the blurb:

**Alaska, 1974.**

**Unpredictable. Unforgiving. Untamed.  
For a family in crisis, the ultimate test of survival.**

*Ernt Allbright, a former POW, comes home from the Vietnam war a changed and volatile man. When he loses yet another job, he makes an impulsive decision: he will move his family north, to Alaska, where they will live off the grid in America's last true frontier.*

*Thirteen-year-old Leni, a girl coming of age in a tumultuous time, caught in the riptide of her parents' passionate, stormy relationship, dares to hope that a new land will lead to a better future for her family. She is desperate for a place to belong. Her mother, Cora, will do anything and go anywhere for the man she loves, even if it means following him into the unknown.*



*At first, Alaska seems to be the answer to their prayers. In a wild, remote corner of the state, they find a fiercely independent community of strong men and even stronger women. The long, sunlit days and the generosity of the locals make up for the Allbrights' lack of preparation and dwindling resources.*

*But as winter approaches and darkness descends on Alaska, Ernt's fragile mental state deteriorates and the family begins to fracture. Soon the perils outside pale in comparison to*

*threats from within. In their small cabin, covered in snow, blanketed in eighteen hours of night, Leni and her mother learn the terrible truth: they are on their own. In the wild, there is no one to save them but themselves.*

*In this unforgettable portrait of human frailty and resilience, Kristin Hannah reveals the indomitable character of the modern American pioneer and the spirit of a vanishing Alaska—a place of incomparable beauty and danger. The Great Alone is a daring, beautiful, stay-up-all-night story about love and loss, the fight for survival, and the wildness that lives in both man and nature.*

The setting is a siren to the characters—a beautiful, undeniable temptress, enchanting them even as it leads them to their . . . well, no spoilers here. Suffice it to say that the setting is a lot like Ernst, the father. Unpredictable. Knock-your-eyes-out-beautiful morphs quickly to simply knock-your-eyes-out. The setting and the characters seem to move in a complicated dance, ebbing and flowing, switching from loving protagonist to cold antagonist in a heartbeat.

I have no doubt that Kristin Hannah orchestrated the dance—that she knew exactly what she was doing the whole time.

I remember once, in a dissection of *Gone with the Wind*, someone explaining what made the story so much more dramatic was the tumultuous backdrop of the Civil War. Kristen Hannah saw Mitchell's societal tumult and raised it with her treatment of the setting.

Alaska is more than just an aspect of the story. It is the net that supports it; the underpinning of the entire, beautiful novel.

Okay, enough gushing about the book. What you want to know is how Hannah DID that, right? Here are some tips on how to make your setting a character:

- Senses! It almost goes without saying, but use all 5 senses puts the reader into the environment.
- Fresh=different. We may never have been to Alaska, but we all know cold. To elevate

your description, write it fresh in a way the reader won't have seen before, and yet understands.

- Then go deeper. Close your eyes and think about your happy place: the beach, the mountains, the country, a city hot-spot. This has meaning for you on a deep level. Why? Memories? That's backstory! Backstory for your characters weaves the setting into the fabric of your character's life. Mine it!
- Settings that matter change a person. Alaska in this book certainly did. And to make it matter more, show the good changes AND the bad. After all, things that matter most to us are all a double-edged sword, are they not? Show the dichotomy, and how it effects the characters.



- The setting can have backstory, too! Delve into it, and I'll bet you'll find something you can use to deepen your character's experience in the now.
- What secrets does your setting hold? Characters have secrets, so your setting should, as well. If you can weave that thread into your story, it makes the setting even more important.

The world your characters walk on is much more important than the short shrift we usually give it. If you spend the time and effort to dig deep into the setting and make it an integral part of your story, I promise it won't be time wasted.



Laura Drake is a New York published author of Women's Fiction and Romance.

Her romance series, *Sweet on a Cowboy*, is set in the world of professional bull riding. Her debut, *The Sweet Spot*, won the 2014 Romance Writers of America® RITA® award. Her women's fiction, *Days Made of Glass*, released January 2016, and *The Last True Cowboy*, first in her Chestnut Creek series will release in December.

Laura is a city girl who never grew out of her tomboy ways, or a serious cowboy crush. In 2014, Laura realized a lifelong dream of becoming a Texan and is currently working on her accent. She gave up the corporate CFO gig to write full time. She's a wife, grandmother, and motorcycle chick in the remaining waking hours.



# Writing Hurts...

## *Our Bums, Our Legs, Our Backs*

by Elaine Gallant

Is it possible to sustain a writing injury?

If while in the midst of creating a wonderful tale, you've ever felt numbness in your tail, tingling in your back, or aches in your shoulders, necks, or elbows, chances are the answer to that question is a resounding, *yes!*

### ***Writing can and does hurt.***

So how can we combat these inflictions as our protagonist sails aboard a luxury liner destined for exotic ports of call? At the minimum, we can stand every hour on the hour as if addressing the ship's Captain.

Real time passes quickly, though, and the *bing* of a timer is disruptive when we're ensconced in the rise of climactic plot twists. Heck, three hours could glide past without notice. And why? Because our main character's sudden death grip on the vessel's handrail indicates a forward pitch of the bow into frigid waters. I mean, c'mon! Who'd remember to stand up with all that going on? Decisions must be made...right this minute...especially since we've a heaving ship and a death grip to grapple. So what to do?

Fortunately, today's market offers many choices, from the separate side table to the

installed uplift or desktop riser, or even the lightweight, aluminum laptop cooling stand.



I use a locked-into-place cooling stand that becomes a light-as-a-feather keyboard and mouse station to put atop my miniscule desk so that I can stand for several minutes...or several hours... or until my legs are cold and achy and my ankles are swollen to the size of miniature pontoons. Which means it's time for me to sit again by returning to the scene of the crime. You know the one—that bastion of comfort that caused my legs to hurt in the first place. Meantime, my character's frozen fingers have yet to be pried from the balustrade of that damned ship now plunging deeper into a deadly slap-switching arctic churn.



## ***Minor ailments sometimes become major problems.***

As a freelance writer, I went from an active, but eventual-arthritic-kneed athlete, to a fulltime novelist. Consequently, I worry a bit about deep vein thrombosis, i.e. blood clots that can develop anywhere in the body, but usually in the legs, and are often asymptomatic.

Should I ever develop one of those clots, it could break loose and lodge in my lungs to cause blood flow blockage, a.k.a...a pulmonary embolism. That's pretty scary, but then so are all the other conditions the [Mayo Clinic](#) warns long sitters about.



“...obesity and metabolic syndrome—a cluster of conditions that includes increased blood pressure, high blood sugar, excess body fat around the waist and abnormal cholesterol levels. Too much sitting also seems to increase the risk of death from cardiovascular disease and cancer.

One study compared adults who spent less than two hours a day in front of the TV or other screen-based entertainment with those who logged more than four hours a day of recreational screen time. Those with greater screen time had:

- A nearly 50 percent increased risk of death from any cause
- About a 125 percent increased risk of events associated with cardiovascular disease, such as chest pain (angina) or heart attack

The increased risk was separate from other traditional risk factors for cardiovascular

disease, such as smoking or high blood pressure.”

My goodness, these incentives should be plenty to make you stand up, move from chair to chair, or exercise while seated. If it isn't, then expect to be dragged down as if tethered to your protagonist while that towering ship slips into the depths of that icy sea...because sitting long hours does no “body” good.

## ***Exercise while seated.***

One such way to approach the perilous activity of writing is to incorporate exercises:

- Begin with a warm up. Before sitting, stretch every part of your body. Reach up, out, and down. Rotate your shoulders and shake your limbs. Prepare to flex-ercise your fingers by palming a pair of tennis balls, beanbags, or small hacky sacks and squeeze. Get your character's heady blood rush by bending over into downward dog and then rising to stretch your body some more.
- Declare laundry day as writing day. The buzzer's alert will do your body good and perhaps even help shape that scene of passengers scurrying around in mass panic at the Captain's blast of the mighty horn.
- Adjust your chair to allow room for a hard, deep-tissue roller under your feet. Then row, row, row forward and back. This will elevate the heart and get your circulation pumping.

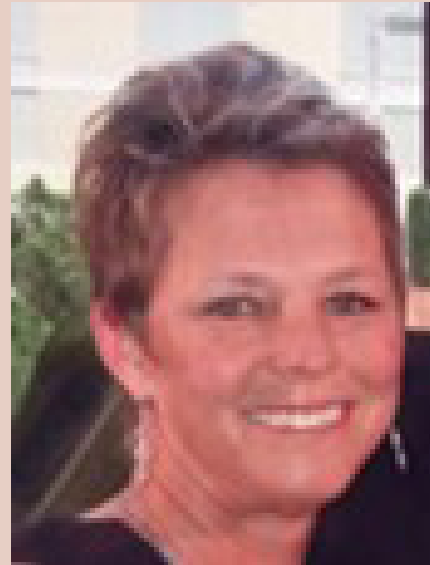


- Use a lumbar pillow, gel or buckwheat husk cushion. Or better yet, an electronic massage pad for instant relief.
- Consider keeping hand weights within reach for a quick 20 rep. No weights? Run to the pantry (hey, another exercise) and steal some canned goods. You know...the very kind your fearful adventurer might need for a day's survival in a life raft. Use those canned goods in place of weights
- Switch seats by moving from your cushy office chair to smaller dining chair to giant yoga ball and put some bounce into your tail. (Or is it tale?)



- Grab a blowup beach ball or anything squeezable. Pull out that old Suzanne Summers's Thigh Master hiding in your closet and work out your tension. Your thighs, hamstrings, and knees will thank you. Do isometric stomach crunches by repeatedly pulling them in and holding them for a few seconds.
- If you snack while writing, eat healthy ones. If you drink, drink sugar free.
- Wear tinted computer-screen glasses to protect your eyes. Enlarge your "working" page to 150-200% or more. Also exercise your eyes after you close up work by looking out a window in search of any hospitable land on the far horizon.
- And whenever you stop, be it during or at the end of your day, make it a habit to stretch again. Work those kinks out before joining the rest of your crew.

Implementing these daily practices will help you fare far better than your panic-stricken characters, especially since you've decided to pummel them with waves crashing over the ship's bridge on the eleventh deck.



Elaine Gallant travels the world armed with a Journalism degree, a member of Women Fiction Writers Association, a founding member of Maui Writers Ink, and founder of West Maui Book Club. Her freelance work appears in numerous print and online publications. With the launch of her debut thriller *The 5th C: A CIA Novel* (available on Amazon), this Maui girl now treks within the more complicated world of fiction. Follow Elaine at: [www.WestMauiBookClub.com](http://www.WestMauiBookClub.com) and [ElaineGallantBlog.wordpress.com](http://ElaineGallantBlog.wordpress.com).



## Grammar Light

# Singular or Plural?

by Patricia Friedrich

Recently, while in a meeting, I heard the following utterance. “This is [woman’s name]. She is an alumni.”



Unfortunately, this is not correct. Several terms in English that are original loanwords from Greek, Latin, or Romance languages have irregular plurals (conforming to the plural rules of the original language) and often create a bit of confusion. Some are also irregular given their original Old-English origins (a topic for another lesson). Here are some common cases:

### **Alumnus/Alumni**

She is an alumnus (or alum) of my school.

I became a member of the alumni association.

### **Bacterium/Bacteria**

The infection is caused by the bacterium *streptococcus*.

Bacteria can survive in this kind of environment.

### **Datum/Data**

Originally, “data” is the plural of “datum.” Popular use, especially outside scientific speech communities, has made “data” acceptable as a singular form. Therefore,

The datum was transmitted electronically.  
(Rare usage)

The data was transmitted electronically.  
(Most common, data behaves like “information” here)

The data were transmitted electronically.  
(Second most common and, prescriptively speaking, the most correct)

### **Focus/Foci**

The image is out of focus.

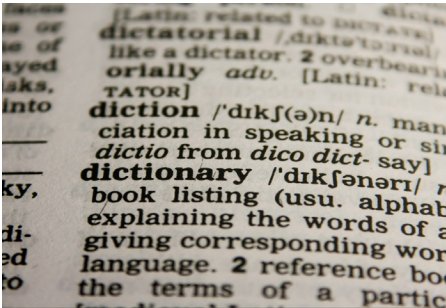
The foci of the lesson were grammar and teaching methods.



## ***Paparazzo/Paparazzi***

There was a paparazzo outside the restaurant.

Paparazzi are freelance photographers who follow celebrities.



## ***Cactus/Cacti***

As I live in the desert, I had to add this one.

The cactus is growing faster than I could imagine.

Cacti are resilient plants.



**Patricia Friedrich** is Professor of English at Arizona State University. She is the author/editor of six nonfiction books including *The Sociolinguistics of Digital Englishes* (Routledge, 2016), the award-winning *The Literary and Linguistic Construction of Obsessive-compulsive Disorder* (Palgrave, 2015), and several published short stories. She is currently working on revisions to her first novel-length manuscript, *Artful Women*.



# The Not-So-Lonely Reject

## HOW TO MASTER THE *Art of Rejection*

by K. L. ROMO

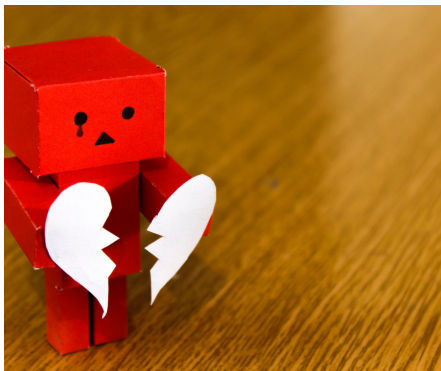
Are there levels of rejection?

Yes, I think there are.

Recently, after pitching a book review to several major outlets, I told my son with a *you go girl* smile that I was getting better. Why? *This* time, instead of receiving no reply, the rejection I received said, “Sorry, we’ll pass.”

*How could this be getting better?* He looked at me like I was crazy.

But even though that email contained only a terse three-word rejection, the editor had at least taken time to respond. For me, being ignored is much worse than receiving a brief “no-thanks” email. Instead of feeling like a nobody who didn’t deserve a response, I felt happy to at least be acknowledged.



*Pathetic*, you might be thinking?

No, I don’t think so. A good portion of my queries never receive any reply. I understand why agents and editors don’t have time to reply to every email they receive. I. GET. IT.

But even though my brain understands, my heartstrings get all knotted-up when I think about how often my queries do not warrant a response. Feeling unnoticed is the worst. As far as I’m concerned, receiving a reply, even a rejection, is at least a step up from invisibility. And if the rejection also includes some kind words, be they encouragement or critique, be happy your query at least garnered a personal reply.

So don’t worry. If you receive a ton of rejections or just crickets instead of replies, keep going. Mathematically speaking, the more rejections you receive means the more queries you’re sending out, and your chances of receiving a positive reply increase.

Discouraging? Frequently.

A waste of time? Absolutely not.

Although it might sound cliché, it’s true: each rejection is one step closer to being the published author you want to be.



Take a break if you need to. Refresh yourself. But DON'T. GIVE. UP.

Please send me a line at [klromo@klromo.com](mailto:klromo@klromo.com). We can share our misery (I mean, our big learning curve) together.

And remember – you are definitely not alone!



### ***Brag Your Brush-Off***

This edition includes one of the rejection stories (yes, she's had more than one) from author Barbara Claypole White, who has just published her fifth novel, [The Promise Between Us](#), with Lake Union Publishing. Thanks for sharing Barbara!

My best rejection story is also the reason I earn a living as a novelist.

Right after I handed in my third novel, my publisher cancelled my contract. It was a horrible shock, but I had faith that it would work out because I trust my agent. Even before she'd called with the news, she'd shared the manuscript with Jodi Warshaw at Lake Union Publishing. Two weeks later, I signed a contract with Lake Union, and my manuscript

would get a new title (THE PERFECT SON), a cover I adore, and a fabulous editor who would work with me on two more novels: Clete Barrett Smith. THE PERFECT SON went on to be selected for Amazon's Kindle First Program and was a Goodreads Choice Awards Semifinalist for Best Fiction 2015, a category that Harper Lee won. Not bad for a novel that got dumped, right?

Rejection stings. Vent in private, eat chocolate, drink gin—or is that just me?— and keep moving forward. Whatever you do, don't burn bridges. I'm still in contact with my old editors and forever grateful for the role my first publisher played in my career. I'm also aware of the fact that moving to Lake Union was the second-best decision I've made in this business. The first, obviously, was signing with Nalini Akolekar of Spencerhill Associates—after several years of rejections.

- Barbara Claypole White



K.L. Romo writes about life on the fringe: teetering dangerously on the edge is more interesting than standing safely in the middle. She is passionate about women's issues, loves noisy clocks and fuzzy blankets, but HATES the word normal. Her historical novel, *Life Before*, is about two women separated by a century who discover they've shared a soul. Web: [KLRomo.com](http://KLRomo.com) or @klromo.





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