



INTENSIVE GENRE WORKSHOPS

BUILD A ROMANCE

This exercise with our Story Magic Cards is to help you understand and APPLY what it takes to write a romance! (Hint: It's all about your characters' baggage.)

DRAW:

- 2 Stock Character Cards and 2 Baggage Cards. Your romance may include more than two love interests, but for practice let's stick with two. Decide which character has which baggage. How has that changed their perception of the world and their lives? What might trigger them? Bonus points if your other character triggers their baggage on the regular ;) What lies might they believe about themselves? **What is the WORST thing your characters would have to face together?** Be mean, be creative. Don't go for the obvious!
- Now pick 2 conflicts. You're only going to use one. If neither seems to fit their baggage consider: *what is the WORST thing your characters would have to face together?* Think about a conflict that would trigger both characters' baggage. Why just one conflict? Because romance is a 2+ player game, and your characters must spend time together. Again, don't go for the obvious.
- We're ready for the meet-cute. Pick an awkward situation. How will this trigger their baggage? Sketch out some ideas about how this scene might play out?
- Your love interests will be perfect for each other and the only person who can help the other learn that they are lovable. What in the conflict and baggage can you use to make that work out? Avoid fated mates unless you're writing werewolves. They need a reason to fall in love and want to grow to be a better person.
- Take three trope cards. Bonus points if you can use all three! Which tropes appeal to you? *Which ones would be the WORST thing your characters would have to face together?* Are you sensing a theme?

We are at the doorway moment where something happens and your characters' make a decision to do something because of the conflict. How do the tropes fit? Do they provide a setting? A situation? Look at their baggage and the conflict. What would motivate them to fix the conflict? Fixing the conflict is their goal. Why they want to fix it is their motivation. And if they don't fix it, they face some kind of death—personal, emotional, financial, physical, etc. Check out Maslow's hierarchy for ideas.

This is where pantsers should get started writing! If you're writing a story, consider what cards you drew for your characters? What clichéd character do they represent? What's their baggage? What's their conflict? What do they have to lose if they don't attain their goal? Things get worse for them, and they face their villains and lies three times...and they typically fail at least once.

Things will get worse for your characters before they get better. We want tension to grow throughout the story, both for the plot and the romance. At its heart, a romance shows the love interests growing emotionally, healing their baggage, and learning they are worthy of love. Our characters will transform to be the best people possible to earn their love!

There are some romance guidelines on the next page, but don't be afraid to just write if you are so inclined. For those of us who prefer more structure before they begin...turn the page!



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****THESE ARE GUIDELINES NOT RULES****

Story has a beginning, a middle, and an end, often referred to as the 3-Act structure. To confuse matters, the middle bit is 50% of the story, and the beginning and end are 25% each. Here are some guidelines of things that typically occur in each act. Readers expect them, but you don't have to hit the percentages and it will NOT make your story cliché. This is structure...you're adding all the fun surprises! But without structure, your story may collapse. Remember, we want our characters to transform through the story, heal their baggage, and find they happy-ever-after.

ACT ONE

Our characters meet! Usually there's some kind of meet cute. Often we see the character and discover the lie they've been telling themselves based on their baggage.

- Readers will assume that the characters that are meeting (or stuck together) first are the love interests. So, avoid adding too many characters. Sometimes Act 1 ends with a good reason why the love interests would never work out. Like, she's his boss...

ACT TWO

Their lie is challenged, and the characters are resistant to change. Use the conflict between the characters to force them to face and disprove their lie.

- Despite common sense, they are falling in love. There are hints of how perfect they could be together, and they grow closer. At the midpoint everything is wonderful in the relationship, they are on that in-love high.

Something happens that creates doubt between the love interests. They might try to work through it, but they retreat to the people they were at the beginning. The lies that they've told themselves seem to be proven. Hit the baggage hard!

ACT THREE

Things aren't looking good for our love interests. They revert back to the people they were at the beginning, believing in the lie. But then, a friend/mentor/situation causes them to realize their an idiot and they have to plan something huge to win back their love interest's hearts and trust! We end with an image of them happily together with a promise of a future together.

Things to consider when writing romance: Please, create a world you want to live in. Make it diverse. Make sure your characters aren't so damaged that they aren't capable of having a healthy relationship. By that I mean, consider Maslow's Hierarchy...they need to have safety and physiological needs taken care of, otherwise the power differential is too great.

** Add in your subgenres, like suspense or paranormal. Have those subplots increase the tension and conflict.*

