



June 2010

HeRA Writers Journal

Perfect Pitch - Advice from an Agent

by Linda Joyce Clements



Perfect pitch- it's not just for American Idol contestants. It applies to all writers when pitching to literary agents. And here's the inside scoop on making your pitch perfect along with a recipe on how to be the perfect client.

Suzie Townsend with FinePrint Literary Management and I chatted on Sunday, April 18th, after the Missouri Writers' Guild conference. She's building her client base and is seeking manuscripts in

children's fiction, adult fiction, speculative fiction, fantasy, urban fantasy, science fiction, romance, and paranormal romance. She offers an inside look into what agents look for in a pitch session with a writer. Following her recommendations will give you a perfect pitch and then you may become the perfect client.

***Don't be nervous** – agents come to conferences to find new writers, they're there to listen. They're not unapproachable creatures on a pedestal. They need to find un-agented writers the same as the writers want to find an agent.

***Be respectful.** Introduce yourself. Sometimes writers rush to talk about their manuscripts and forget to say their name.

***Be friendly.** It doesn't hurt to smile.

***Be prepared.** Know what you're going to say in advance.

***Pace your pitch-** not too fast and not too soft.

***Sound excited and passionate.** A pitch session is an opportunity that doesn't happen with querying. It's far easier to convey in person the excitement you have for your work. Show your enthusiasm- it will be contagious.

***If you read your pitch, bring a copy for the agent to follow along.** This makes it more engaging for the agent.

Lastly, remember that agents need writers, but it's a two-way street. "Writers need to be interviewing agents in the pitch session and at the conference," Suzie said.

And how do you find information about agents before meeting them for your part of the interview? The agency website is a great place to start. Social networking like Twitter and agent's blogs are a few new tools used to obtain information.

What to do when you get THE phone call- an agent loves your work and offers you representation? Suzie believes to be a Dream Client the writing is the primary key, however, other factors do apply.

~Agent and Writer share the same vision for the book

~Writer needs to trust the agent, especially on things like working on revisions.

~Be upfront and unafraid to discuss issues about the manuscript or the process.

~Remember that writing may be a passion, however, the relationship between agent and client is a professional one.

"And I will listen to my writers vent. I don't want them going off on editors." Then she grinned, "I'll even talk you off the ledge if needed."

Newsletter Committee: Linda Joyce Clements, Cheri Thomas-Lightner and Denise Swank	HeRA is a chapter of Romance Writers of America
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2010 "Readers for Life" Literacy Autographing

The "Readers for Life" Literacy Autographing has become one of the most popular events at RWA's annual conference. More than 500 romance authors participate in this two-hour autographing event, and each year we raise thousands of dollars, which are donated to ProLiteracy Worldwide. Since 1990, RWA has donated more than \$600,000 to literacy charities.

The 2010 "Readers for Life" Literacy Autographing takes place on **Wednesday, July 28, from 5:30-7:30 p.m.** at the Walt Disney World® Dolphin Resort in Orlando, Florida. This event is open to the public; there is no admittance charge. Since the proceeds from this event are donated to charity, we ask that you *purchase books at the event* instead of bringing your own books. (RWA accepts cash, check, or credit/debit cards for book purchases at the event.) If you do bring books, please limit yourself to one or two books and consider making a cash donation to the cause.

News from Shannon Butcher

1. I won the Romantic Times Reviewers' Choice Award for best Paranormal Action Adventure book for 2009!
2. RUNNING SCARED is now out.
3. THE MAMMOTH BOOK OF SPECIAL OPS ROMANCE anthology comes out this month.
4. DARK AND STORMY KNIGHTS anthology comes out in July.
5. LIVING NIGHTMARE comes out in November.
6. Both BURNING ALIVE and FINDING THE LOST are finalists in the 2010 Readers' Crown competition. I find out in July if I've won.

Point Of View Made Easy

by Jamie Denton NEORWA member

I've become a stickler when it comes to view-point. I've become one of those annoying purists who rarely switches POV within a scene.

This could be because way back in the day when I first started writing, I made a mess of POV and was determined to master this elusive component in crafting a novel.

I went beyond your average Head Hopping Syndrome and stormed right into so ridiculous it wasn't funny. With a little help from my friends, and by studying how other authors handled POV in their stories, I learned. But first, I had to understand exactly what was POV.

There are different types of point of view; omniscient viewpoint, sometimes referred to as authorial intrusion. There is first person point of view (POV/1), otherwise known as the "I" perspective. And finally, third person point of view (POV/3), which is most commonly used in genre fiction, romance in particular. We live our lives in only one viewpoint, so this should be simple, right? It's looking at the sunset, or listening to Mozart (or Nickelback), maybe enjoying a banana split on a Saturday afternoon, or inhaling the sweet fragrance of a dew-kissed rose. Let's not forget the swelling of our heart when we look at a newborn child. Hard to believe that we experience this all through only one perception, isn't it?

Now let's transfer this to our characters.

One of the most important things to remember is if your hero or heroine can't see it, hear it, taste it, smell it, or feel it, neither can your reader. In other words, the heroine can gaze at the hero, but she can't gaze at him with desire burning in her gaze if we're in her point of view. Why? Because your heroine can't see this.



Another example would be if you are in the steward's point of view in your most recent historical work in progress (WIP) and he calls out to the priest walking toward him.

The steward can't know that the priest still hasn't forgiven the steward for insulting him unless the priest has told the steward this previously. If the steward hasn't heard this (or witnessed the priest's reaction in an earlier scene that tells him in no uncertain terms that this is true) then he cannot possibly know it.

Confused? Try this...

If your hero is observing your heroine from across a crowded room, your heroine can't know that the hero is lusting after her unless she sees some sign of his lust. Now, if your heroine is standing next to your hero, and she can see that "his gaze burned hot" or some such, your reader can know it as well. Why? Because we know your heroine saw this from her own viewpoint.

That all sounds much simpler, doesn't it? But, the question remains, how do you convey the non-viewpoint character's emotions without jumping into their head? Easy – emotion through action.

Here's an example of emotion through action from my first romantic suspense novel, *THE MATCHMAKER* (Kensington Brava, 2006), with the heroine, Greer, observing the hero, Ash:

She looked into his eyes and her pulse took off like a rocket. Desire burned within the intense depths of his gaze and whatever protest she'd been searching for vanished. Instead of pushing away from him like she knew she should, she reached up to cup his jaw in her palm.

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And then she kissed him.

Within Greer's viewpoint I establish not only Ash's emotions (desire), but also Greer's emotions, which we see through her actions and her thoughts. We know that she still desires Ash (who is her estranged husband), as well, but also how she still feels about him, which we see through the tenderness of her touch. All of this information is given to us through Greer's point of view. No head hopping necessary.

Now that we have a better idea of what point of view is, how do you decide who should be the viewpoint character?

In romance, most likely it will be your hero or your heroine. So ask yourself these four simple

The answer is simple

1. Who will be the center of the action?
2. Who will have the most at risk?
3. Whose struggle toward their goal is the fuel of the scene?
4. And finally, who will be moved or changed by the outcome?

questions for any given scene whenever you're unsure which character is the viewpoint character. Once you've answered these questions, the appropriate point of view character should no longer be a mystery.

For example, let's say Hannah heroine has just announced to Hank Hero she's pregnant (and yes, it's Hank's baby). First of all, in the previous scene, we've already established Hannah's angst over being pregnant. She needs to know Hank's reaction to the news because it affects her. She's the one at risk. Therefore, the scene belongs to Hannah.

Hannah has just told Hank she's pregnant, but you need to know Hank's reaction. Why? Because you know from the story that Hank has something at stake as well. He was planning on leaving town in the morning to take a long awaited promotion he's been longing for on the opposite coast.

You DO NOT have to wait until the end of the scene before getting into Hank's head to know what he's feeling. We can use the ol' point of view switch <insert shocked gasp here> within a scene to find out what Hank is thinking.

I'm willing to bet that you haven't read a romance in years that didn't have multiple points of view, unless of course the book is written in first person (POV/1). While secondary characters are occasionally used, point of view usually comes from the hero and heroine's perspective. It is possible to use more than one point of view within a chapter, or even with a scene, and not have it labeled as head hopping.

However, there are certain rules (and I despise that term, but couldn't think of a better word to use) to follow when switching point of view within a scene. Take a look at this example of a rather smooth, if I say so myself, point of view switch from *THE SEDUCTION OF SYDNEY*, an old, 1999 release of mine from Harlequin Temptation:

[DEREK'S POV] . . . Restraint and nobility fled. A groan rose from deep in his chest. He grabbed hold of her hips, pulling her tight against him. Her lips sought his in hot, opened mouthed demand.

[SYDNEY'S POV] Sydney's skin warmed and she went all dizzy as his hands skimmed her hips, inching the material of her sundress higher. She wanted him. It was that simple. She couldn't explain what made her forget the warnings that she was playing with fire, and she didn't think she wanted to know.

Writers Write, Right?

by Gwen Hernandez

I had another epiphany recently about how much legitimate competition there is in the publishing industry.

I'm amazed by the number of writers who don't write. What? You read me.

After reading numerous blogs, perusing my many writing loop and online course emails, and attending meetings with other writers, I've come to the conclusion that there's not as much writing competition out there as you might think. At a recent meeting, when asked how many pages they'd written in the last three months, the majority of the writers hadn't completed more than 5-10 pages. In **THREE** months!

At that rate it will take them at least ten years to write a 300-page book.

Don't get me wrong. There are legitimate reasons why people don't produce. Work, family, illness, vacations, and all of the things that make up life chip away at writing time. I get that. But in the end, if you want to write a book, you have to sit down and **WRITE IT**.

If you're putting in the time to finish a book, query it to agents, and improve your craft, you're ahead of most of the other writers out there.

Some stats to note: Of the approximately 10,000 RWA members, about 19% are published (in book-length fiction) and 22% have PRO status

(completed a manuscript and are actively submitting to agents/editors).

That 41% is the real competition in the romance industry.

If you read enough agent blogs, you'll also realize that many of the queries they get can be dismissed out of hand for things like lack of personalization, querying for a genre the agent doesn't represent, telling the agent you're the next big thing, or not following submission guidelines. If you remove those uneducated submissions, the pool of viable competition shrinks drastically.

I'm not trying to imply that getting published is easy. But I was cheered to realize that the playing field isn't as big as I thought. If you really want to get published, first you have to be in the game. Make sure you're part of that 22% who've made PRO, and your chances will go up dramatically. Make that your goal this year. If you're already PRO, start and finish another book this year. And query it.

Write on!

Gwen Hernandez is a 2009 Heart-to-Heart winner, and member of Southern Magic, Kiss of Death, and From the Heart Romance Writers. When she's not working on her goal of 1000 words per day, you can find her at www.gwenhernandez.com and romancemagicians.blogspot.com.

The following article was first published in the May issue of Magic Moments, newsletter of Southern Magic, Birmingham, AL. Permission granted to use with credit to author and chapter.



Lessons Learned from the Contest Judging Front

By Bonnie Staring

Some writers have a love/hate relationship with contests. They love the opportunities they provide, but hate having the judge who doesn't "get" their voice or who deducts points for pesky things ranging from your entry having no clear plot, your hero possessing the allure of tapioca pudding, or your margins being too narrow.



We've all been there. And I'll be the first to admit I didn't fully understand the role of a contest judge when I first boarded the contest judge bus. While I don't think any of my

early efforts created heinous results, there are a few things I wish I'd known then and try to use now.

Know the goal

If it's provided, be sure to take the judging training no matter how long you've been judging. This will help you focus on how this particular contest rates the elements of each entry—from mechanics to plot to characters—and what is expected from a judge, such as comments on the entry itself, providing resources for an entrant to refer to, etc.

Think forest vs. trees

I used to think that doing a line edit of a contest entry was helpful. Not only was it time consuming, but by focusing on the "trees" I failed to see the larger issues in an entry, such as plot holes, uneventful scenes, or dialogue that didn't ring true. You know—the stuff we all need to look

out for in our own work. And I've yet to receive a thank-you note stating that those commas I added helped an entrant land an agent or a book deal.

Choose a genre that works for you

There are many contest entrants out there who have paid good money to receive feedback from judges who shouldn't be judging a particular genre in the first place. Don't think zombies can be the good guys? Stay away from paranormals. Don't understand why a teen wouldn't go to her parents for help? Get out of the young adult pool.

Of course, situations arise when you may be called upon to judge an entry in a category in which you're not familiar. In that case, judge it on the basis of story, character, and plot. If something seems odd—such as the heroine with the iPod in a historical, or the devil-worshipping protagonist in an inspirational—mention it without stripping away all the available points.

Don't assume

No one wants to read "obviously you're a beginner," even if a writer is new to the novel-writing world. That goes up there with comments such as "don't give up your day job" and "no one will buy this." And please don't assume that English isn't a writer's first language—I didn't know how to spell segue until 2003. It still kind of scares me.

Give meaningful feedback

Rating something 5/10 with the comment "needs more work" offers little to a contest entrant. Take the time to provide something concrete, such as advising an entrant to reveal more about a character's motivation or to read dialogue out loud to understand how a character "sounds" on the page.

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Lessons Learned from the Contest Judging Front

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Put on the entrant's shoes

Imagine that you only have three minutes with a writer you admire to get feedback on your work. What advice would be most helpful? That you don't use ellipses correctly or that your heroine's goal doesn't seem strong enough? That your opening scene starts too early or that you should always use a single space after a period?

If there is something an entrant does beautifully, point it out. And if there's something a writer needs to work on, don't go ALL CAPS about it and highlight every instance of the offending word choice, grammatical error or the ever-so-evil "telling instead of showing." The writer will hear you the first time. Or at least by the second.

Check your tone

As we all know from writing novels, it's not just about what you say; it's how you say it. The same goes for a judge's comments. Something you may have intended to be fun or witty may come across as sarcastic and mean to a person who doesn't know you. Be courteous and professional. After all, that writer may be judging one of your entries in the future.

There you have it—the stuff you need to know before you open up that next packet of contest entries to judge. May we all find winners among them!

After a situation involving a chocolate fountain, a group of feisty cabana boys and a magic marker, Bonnie Staring became the contest coordinator for the 2010 Toronto Gold Contest (formerly the Original Golden Opportunity Contest). The contest deadline is June 1, 2010. Visit www.torontoromancewriters.com for more details. This article appeared in the May 2010 issue of romANTICS, the newsletter of the Toronto Romance Writers, Susan Haire, editor. It may be reused by RWA chapters with appropriate credit to the author and chapter.

July Contests

****18th Annual Heart of the West Contest**

Sponsor: Utah Romance Writers Of America

Fee: \$25–30.00 (\$25 or Utah RWA members, \$30 for all others)

Deadline: July 1, 2010

Eligibility: Contest is open to published and unpublished authors. Unpublished authors are ranked separately from published authors. Published authors may submit only unpublished, uncontracted manuscripts. NOTE: If you have a romance novel published by a non-recognized RWA publisher, Utah RWA Considers you to be published. Entry: Enter the opening twenty (20) pages of romance novels of all sub-genres (projected length of at least 50,000 words). Categories: Contemporary, Historical, Paranormal, Mystery/Suspense, Young Adult, Published. Judges: Avid readers of romance, published and pre-published authors. Final Judges: TBA. Top Prize: \$40. FMI, email contest coordinator at dar-ceeyates@gmail.com or visit <http://www.utahrwa.com>.

****Indiana's Golden Opportunity 2010**

Sponsor: Indiana Romance Writers of America

Fee: \$25.00

Deadline: July 1, 2010

Eligibility: Unpublished in novel-length fiction by a non-vanity publisher in the last five years. Entry: beginning of story and synopsis (35 pages max; electronic entries only). Categories and Final Judges: Latoya Smith of Grand Central, Single Title; Maureen Walters of Curtis Brown LTD, Mainstream; Jesse Feldman of NAL, Historical; Holly Root of Waxman Literary Agency, YA; Romantic Suspense and Paranormal judges TBD. Best of the Best Judge: Meredith Giordan of Berkley. Top Prize: \$100; \$50 for first place in each category. FMI, www.indianarwa.com.

***The Heart of Excellence Readers' Choice Award**

Sponsor: Ancient City Romance Authors

Fee: \$15.00

Deadline: Entries postmarked by July 5, 2010

Eligibility: Open to RWA members with the first print novels with first print copyright of January 1, 2009, to December 31, 2009. Entry: Include 3 signed copies of each entry. (Book length, at least 50K; e-books are accepted in bound, hard copy.) Categories: Short & Long Series Contemporary Romance, Contemporary Single Title Romance, Romantic Suspense, Historical (includes Regency) Romance, Inspirational/Traditional Romance, Paranormal Romance (includes fantasy, time-travel, futuristic), Strong Romantic Elements, Erotic Romance. Judges: Romance Readers. Final Judges: Booksellers, Librarians, Romance Readers. Top Prize: First place winners in each category will receive a trophy and a winner's graphic to include on their web site. Second and third place winners will receive a certificate and a graphic for their web site. FMI, www.acrarwa.org.

****Golden Gateway Writing Contest**

Sponsor: From The Heart Romance Writers

Fee: \$20 FTHRW members, \$25 RWA members, \$30 all others

Entry Deadline: received via email by July 12 2010

Eligibility: All unpublished authors of novel length romantic fiction (40K and over) and those who have not published or contracted (in print or electronic forms) within five (5) years of the contest deadline. Entry: The beginning of your manuscript and up to a 10-page synopsis for a total of 55 pages in electronic format. Synopsis will be judged. Judges: Experienced and trained. Final judges: TBA. Categories: Short & Long Contemp.; RS; ST/Mainstream; Hist; Para. All heat levels will be judged within the primary category. Top Prize: Award Plaque. FMI, contest website: <http://www.fthrw.com/contest/goldengateway>, contest coordinator: gg_fthrw@yahoo.com.

2010 Heart to Heart

Sponsor: San Francisco RWA

Fee: \$15.00

Deadline: July 15, 2010

Eligibility: unpublished. Entry: the first 15 pages where your hero and heroine meet for the first time. All electronic entries; no paper submissions. No synopsis required. Categories: Contemporary, Historical, Paranormal, Erotic, Young Adult. Judges: PAN and PRO members, trained and unpublished members. Final Judges: Editors and agents, tba. Top Prize: Certificate. FMI, contact contest coordinator at

2010heart2heart@gmail.com or check for submission guidelines on www.sfarwa.com.

Fifth Annual Dixie Kane Memorial Contest

Sponsor: (SOLA) Southern Louisiana RWA

Fee: \$15.00

Deadline: July 15, 2010

Eligibility: Entrants do not need to be members of Romance Writers of America to enter. Entry: First 5 pages and one page single-spaced synopsis (not judged). No electronic submissions. Categories: Short/Long Series Contemporary, Single Title Contemporary, Historical Romance, Paranormal, Inspirational, Novel w/ Strong Romantic Elements, Romantic Suspense, and Erotic Romance. Judges: experienced, trained, published/nonpublished. Final Judges: Alicia Condon, Editorial Director, Brava (Kensington Publishing); Alicia Rasley, Editor, Red Sage Publishing; Lill Farrell, Editor, The Wild Rose Press; and others TBA. Top Prize, \$50 cash prize with tiebreaker and special certificate for the overall highest score in all categories. Also, first place winning entries will be sent to final judges for reading and potential requests for full or partial ms. First, second, third place, and honorable mention certificates. Winners announcements in RWR, posted to SOLA's website, New Orleans Times Picayune and other publications. FMI, send SASE to N. Genovese, 237 Pi Street, Belle Chasse, LA 70037, or ngenovese@gmail.com, www.solawriters.org.