

Romance Writing — Workbook

This workbook turns the course into the actual decisions and pages a romance manuscript requires. Each section maps to a course module and mixes exercises to draft, worksheets to fill, and checklists to enforce the genre's promises. Work through it alongside your work-in-progress and you will leave with a one-line positioning statement, a complete beat-by-beat outline, character wound profiles, a built tension ladder, and a pre-publish quality gate you can reuse on every book.

The Promise of the Genre

Lock in your subgenre, heat level, and tropes so every later craft decision has a compass.

Worksheet: Your One-Line Positioning Statement

Fill every field, then combine them into a single sentence (for example: a steamy small-town contemporary romance, three peppers, grumpy-sunshine plus only one bed). Pin this sentence above your desk; it governs structure, scene count, and word choice for the whole book.

Are you writing a romance, a love story, or a book with romantic elements? (only romance is bound by the two rules)

Subgenre (contemporary, historical, romantasy, romantic suspense, category)

Subgenre flavor (rom-com, small-town, Regency, fated-mates, etc.)

Ending you promise: HEA or HFN, and why it fits this book

Heat level on the five-step ladder (sweet, sensual, steamy, erotic romance, erotica)

Anchor trope plus at most one or two compatible tropes

Exercise: Trope Promise Audit

Write the precise emotional payoff your chosen tropes promise the reader, then plan how you will deliver it with fresh specifics rather than cliché. Answer each prompt in two or three sentences about your own story.

- Name your anchor trope and the exact pleasure readers expect from it.

- What is the genuine, respectable reason your leads clash or are kept apart (not bickering for its own sake)?

- How will you twist the mechanics of this trope while still delivering its emotional payoff?

- Write the one or two trope phrases you will put in your blurb and metadata so readers can find you.

Checklist: Genre Contract Reality Check

- My main plot centers on the couple falling in love and struggling to make it work
- My ending is emotionally satisfying and optimistic (HEA or HFN), not bittersweet or open
- I have chosen one subgenre and know its load-bearing conventions
- My heat level is decided and will be signaled by cover and blurb
- I have one anchor trope and no more than two supporting tropes
- If I broke the two rules, I am marketing this as a love story, not a romance

Structure and Emotional Beats

Outline the relationship arc and ground it in each character's wound, Lie, goal, and need.

Worksheet: Character Wound Profile (one per lead)

Complete this twice, once for each protagonist. The friction between two well-built profiles is your conflict engine. If you cannot fill the Lie row, the character is not ready to write.

Wound: the specific past event that hurt them

Lie: the false belief born from the wound (I am unlovable, trusting people is dangerous, I must earn love)

External goal: what they consciously want in the plot

Internal need: the emotional truth they must accept (usually the opposite of the Lie)

Fear/ghost: the dread of repeating the wound that the love interest will trigger

Why this person threatens their Lie more than anyone else

Exercise: Build Your Beat Sheet

Using Gwen Hayes's four-section structure, write one to three sentences for each named beat as it happens in YOUR story. Note the approximate percentage so pacing stays on track.

- The Meet (about 10%): what is the charged first encounter and what does each lead reveal?
- The Adhesion: what concrete reason makes it impossible for them to simply walk away?
- The Midpoint of Love (about 50%): what high point (kiss, vulnerability, first night) signals the relationship feels possible?
- The Dark Moment (about 75 to 85%): how does a character's Lie sabotage the relationship from the inside?

Exercise: Conflict Pressure Test

Stress-test that your conflict can sustain a whole novel and is not a thin misunderstanding. Be honest; this exercise catches the failure that sinks most first romances.

- State the internal conflict (wound and Lie) for each lead in one sentence.
- State one external conflict (rivalry, class divide, job, danger) that opposes the relationship.
- Explain how that external conflict directly squeezes the internal wound, so plot and emotion reinforce each other.
- Could one honest conversation end your central conflict? If yes, rewrite it until the answer is no.

Checklist: Structure and Conflict Gate

- [] Each lead has a distinct wound and Lie, and the two collide
- [] Every major beat (Meet, Adhesion, Midpoint, Dark Moment) is mapped to roughly the right percentage
- [] The external conflict aggravates the internal wound rather than being bolted on
- [] The obstacle stays active across all four sections; it never disappears for fifty pages
- [] The Dark Moment erupts from a character's Lie, not from an accident or a misunderstanding

Chemistry, Tension, and Intimacy

Engineer the pull, build a slow-burn ladder, and give every intimate scene a narrative job.

Exercise: Rewrite Tension Through Body and Subtext

Take a moment in your draft where you told the reader about attraction. Rewrite it to show the pull through involuntary physical tells and what the characters avoid saying. Run each prompt on the same scene.

- Replace any statement like they were attracted with a specific involuntary physical tell from the POV lead.
- Add a line of banter where what is said and what is meant clearly diverge (subtext).
- Insert a near-miss: bring them to the brink of a touch or kiss, then interrupt it.
- Read it aloud and cut every instance of narrator-announced feeling (sparks flew, the tension was intense).

Worksheet: Slow-Burn Tension Ladder

Map the escalating intimacy across your book in small, denied increments. Each rung should cost the characters something and raise what they stand to lose, spread across many scenes.

Rung 1: first charged awareness (a look, a near-touch) and roughly what chapter

Rung 2: first deliberate touch that lingers too long

Rung 3: the almost-kiss that gets interrupted

Rung 4: the first kiss (note the beat, often near the Midpoint) and its consequence

Rung 5: the first full intimacy (often in the Retreat) and how it sharpens the coming conflict

What each rung costs the characters and how it raises the stakes

Exercise: Give Each Love Scene a Job

For every intimate scene at your chosen heat level (including closed-door), define what it changes. Any scene that changes nothing gets cut. Complete this for each planned intimate scene.

- What does this scene change about the relationship, the stakes, or a character's understanding?
 - Where does it sit in the beat structure, and why there rather than elsewhere?
 - What emotional turn carries the scene (deepened trust, exposed vulnerability, a revealed problem)?
 - How is the relationship, stakes, or a character different on the final line than the first?
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Checklist: Chemistry and Intimacy Gate

- [] Attraction is shown through body and subtext, never narrated
- [] Banter carries subtext; what is said and meant diverge
- [] Near-misses and interruptions compound the want before payoff
- [] The first kiss is earned, placed as a beat, and has consequences afterward
- [] Every intimate scene has a narrative job and ends on a shift
- [] Intimate scenes stay in deep POV, maintain consent and agency, and were read aloud

Endings, Revision, and Publishing

Land the Dark Moment and grand gesture, deliver the HEA/HFN, then revise and position the book.

Worksheet: Climax and Resolution Planner

Design the ending so it pays off the wound, not just the plot. Tie the grand gesture directly to the wound established in your character profiles.

Dark Moment: how a character's Lie wins and self-sabotages the relationship (about 75 to 85%)

Grand gesture or sacrifice: the one thing the character's wound made impossible, now done

What the gesture costs the giver (ideally the very thing the wound protected)

Proof of internal change: how each lead moves from their Lie to the truth

Ending type (HEA or HFN) and the final emotional note that echoes the opening longing

Optional epilogue: the emotional payoff it delivers (keep it emotional, not plotty)

Exercise: Three-Pass Revision Drill

Revise for emotion and structure before sentences. Run these passes in order on your finished draft, keeping them distinct so you control every change.

- Structural pass: does the relationship escalate steadily and does each major beat land at roughly the right place?

- Tension pass: find every place the conflict goes slack or the obstacle disappears, and tighten it (fixes the sagging middle).

- Chemistry and POV pass: confirm attraction is shown through body and subtext in deep point of view.

- Write the three questions you will ask beta readers: where did tension drop, was the Dark Moment believable, did the ending satisfy?

Worksheet: Positioning and Blurb Builder

Romance is a metadata-driven market; positioning is the final step of keeping the genre promise. Fill this so the readers who want exactly your book are the ones who find it.

Blurb opening line that names the trope and central conflict in the reader's search language

Two or three genuinely similar comps (same subgenre, heat, and tone; not aspirational mega-sellers)

Six to eight KDP keywords using trope phrases (grumpy sunshine, small town, second chance)

Primary and secondary categories chosen precisely for your subgenre

How the cover and blurb will signal heat level to attract the right buyer

The HEA/HFN promise made implicitly in the blurb

Checklist: Pre-Publish Quality Gate

- The internal arc resolves: each lead moves from their Lie to the truth
- The grand gesture is specific to these two and tied to the wound from the setup
- Satisfaction comes from resolving the wound, not just pairing the couple
- HEA or HFN matches the subgenre and the couple's stage of life
- Tension never goes slack; the sagging middle has been tightened
- Blurb leads with tropes; comps, keywords, categories, and heat signal are set

Your Action Plan

1. Write your one-line positioning statement (subgenre, heat level, ending, anchor trope) and pin it above your desk.
2. Complete a Character Wound Profile for each lead, ensuring their Lies collide into conflict.
3. Build the full beat sheet with the Meet, Adhesion, Midpoint, and Dark Moment mapped to percentages.
4. Run the Conflict Pressure Test and rewrite until no single honest conversation could end the conflict.
5. Draft your slow-burn tension ladder with escalating, denied increments across the book.
6. Assign every planned intimate scene a narrative job and cut any that change nothing.
7. Plan the climax so the grand gesture is tied directly to a character's wound and proves their growth.
8. Choose your ending type (HEA or HFN) and write a final note that echoes the opening longing.
9. Run the three-pass revision (structural, tension, chemistry and POV) and send the three questions to beta readers.
10. Build the positioning sheet: trope-led blurb, two or three comps, KDP keywords, categories, and heat signal.

