

TOBI'S DOWN AND DIRTY GUIDE TO ADDING A ROMANCE ARC TO YOUR WIP

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Romance is the most complex form of fiction. Every romance contains a minimum of four arcs--a plot arc, a romance arc and two-character arcs--one for the hero and another for the heroine. Each of them has to grow into a better person to earn their happily ever after.

And these four arcs have to work together to create a cohesive story.

In a mystery novel, there's just a plot arc. The investigator doesn't have to mature into a better person to solve the crime--he just has to put the clues together.

Why add a romance arc?

PSYCHOLOGY: Why do we read or watch TV?

- We read to live vicariously through others, to see how they handle the situations, to affirm our own choices, and sometimes, we like the scandal/gossip. We may want to be the main character, or not, but that connection is what makes us want to read.
 - Example in fan fiction. #fanfic #shipping #NOTP (NOT ONE TRUE PAIRING)
- We are hungry for the connection between characters, vicariously going through the stages of falling in love.
- By adding a romantic arc in your story, you get to show a different, vulnerable aspect to your character.
 - Tom Booker— in SG Redling's Dani Britton series is a romance arc
 - Lee Child Jack Reacher's novels have sex, but not a romance arc
 - Robert B Parker's Jesse Stone—he's still in love with his ex, no romance arcs

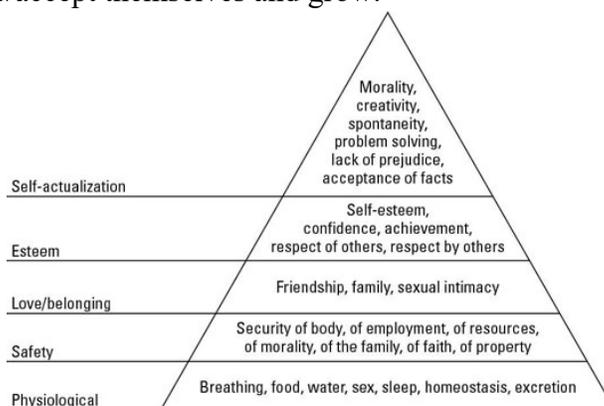
What is a romance arc?

A romance arc's **goal is emotional intimacy**, the characters grow and change to EARN their happily ever after (HEA) or happy for now (HFN).

- Romance arc should have
 - Emotional connection – meaningful conversations, shared values and interests
 - Emotional intimacy – caring about the other's feelings, considering them first
 - Physical connection – proximity, flirty touches, mirroring postures, the looks
 - Physical intimacy – kissing, cuddling, and more
- Tobi's definition of a ROMANTIC emotional intimacy (as opposed to familial or filial)
 - Being completely open, completely vulnerable, trusting, knowing you are accepted, and you accept your significant other, faults and all
 - Intense, anxiety-ridden, and FORCES the character to face their biggest personal misbelief and triumph over it in order to earn and accept the love of another.
- That journey to face their wounds/fears and grow makes them worthy of the love of another and highly satisfying for the reader.

When is a romantic arc appropriate?

- When you want to show your character learning to love/accept themselves and grow.
- BUT, it's really hard to add a romance arc if your characters are post-apocalyptic, sick, starving, and dying. Make sure their basic needs are met:
- Maslow's Hierarchy of needs:
 - Physiological: food, water, shelter
 - Safety
 - Love and belonging (intimate relationships and friends)
 - Esteem: feeling of accomplishment
 - Self-actualization



Who should have the romance arc?

- Main characters or secondary characters, but typically main characters.
- Quick tip...characters with a past already have an emotional connection and you can move straight into emotional intimacy. (Think sibling of a friend, classmate, coworker)
- The romance characters' goals should be at complete odds with each other for maximum tension (Fireman versus arsonist)
- **Please, do not use Stockholm Syndrome as a basis for your romantic arc.**
 - This is my personal pet peeve. Romance writers and readers are encouraging that all parties are mutually consenting and have equality in the power dynamic.

How to add the romance arc?

- Characters **MUST** have proximity on and off the page—hard to fall in love if you never see or speak to the other person
 - Forced proximity—think avalanche, cruise ship, work project
 - Can be physically close—coworker, neighbor, sibling of friend, etc.
 - or virtual—email, texts, social media, dating app, etc.

**Think of possible scenes for each of these situations/ideas
Intensity grows in each row, but the scenes can be combined**

Physical Connection	Emotional Connection	Emotional Intimacy	Physical Intimacy
Present in daily life (neighbor, co-worker, friend of friend)	Common ground – shared interests	Caring for the other person/considering	Intentional touch, hand holding
acknowledgement of other, smiles	Shared values	Sharing a secret, sharing a first experience	Cuddle, kiss, intentional romantic move
Stands closer, looks longer, mirrors movements	Meaningful conversations	Becoming vulnerable	Naked, literally or figuratively

Where to add the romance arc?

- Think of the romance arc characters as being mirrors or mentors to the MC's current dilemma, external plot.
- The romance arc should grow organically with the external plot
- Up the tension in a scene by forcing the MC to either abandon change or make change for love. In other words, **MAKE** the romance arc **ADD** to the character growth and plot of the story.
- These are great subplots, see *Save the Cat Writes a Novel* for more ideas or Lisa Cron's *Story Genius*

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