MarySue: Who Is She?

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COMPLETE! Ever wonder why your characters are called Mary-Sue? Is it because of his or her powers? Maybe his or her looks? It could even be as little as how you present your story. If you're confident your characters aren't Mary-Sue, maybe my guides can shed some light from a reader's and a creator's point of view without limiting your creative spirit. (Rated M-how to write sex.)

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Things You Need to Know

Mary-Sues: Things You Need to Know and What to do if you see Them

Mary-sues, Martha-sues, Marty-stus, Larry-Stus and Gary-Stus (MS), we will all come across them at one point. Most of us have heard of them, some have been violently accused of making them via flaming, and others are still naïve to the terms. While people who have been on writing sites for years absolutely loathe them, most are inconsistent with an all-around definition. A majority claim that MS' are characters that are absolutely perfect in every shape, form and personality, while others just say that they are characters that are just too powerful, unique, or are so clichéd from past characters, and a few say they are self-inserts. Some on fan fiction sites even say that all Original Characters or Fan Characters (OCs) who are paired with a canon character are MS. On the other side of the creative spectrum, the minority of minorities, say that "normal" characters are MS as well. All of these definitions were always too vague and too limiting for me, so I'm going to give you my personal definition that will hopefully cover the basis.

I say that MS' are overly-underdeveloped characters that don't give off any feeling of a three-dimensional depth or believability to the audience, in the fact that the character doesn't change in any way throughout the story, and somehow has a major influence over the other characters without doing much, or doing something that would be impossible for the character in the universe, time-period, or for his or her species.

I specifically didn't use the words perfect, unique, clichéd, or self-insert in my definition because that would limit to what kind of characters I could create or put in a story, even if they could be the main contribution in the underdevelopment of the character.

Perfection

Let's start with perfection. Ultimately, there is no such thing as 'perfect' even when you deliberately try to make your character that way. What you call shy could mean snob to another. What you call optimistic could be annoyingly-hyper. What you call logical could be way too smart, so any 'positive' trait can be twisted to become a flaw, depending on who the reader is, which is how a character becomes likable or unlikable to the reader. The problem is, that no matter what his/her personality is, whether the character is likable or unlikable, the character can somehow make everyone flock to him or her even though some characters wouldn't be able to stand the character's kind of personality at all.

Why would anyone want to make their characters 'perfect' anyway? As Stephen Manes nicely wrote,

" *. . . . You know what perfect is? Perfect is not eating or drinking or talking or moving a muscle or making even the teensiest mistake. Perfect is never doing anything wrong - which means never doing anything at all. Perfect is boring! So you're not perfect! Wonderful! Have fun! . . . . Perfect people never do any of those things. All they do is sit around and sip weak tea and think about how perfect they are. But they're really not one-hundred-percent perfect anyway. You should see them when they get the hiccups! Phooey! Who needs 'em? You can drink pickle juice and imitate gorillas and do silly dances and sing stupid songs and wear funny hats and be as imperfect as you please and still be a good person. Good people are hard to find nowadays. And they're a lot more fun than perfect people any day of the week.*"

So when you're striving to make a character, don't go to perfect, go to believable, even if it seems hard at first. It takes practice, so don't be discouraged if people don't find your character believable at first.

" *People and relationships are tricky things. The word 'normal' in the real world is an impossibility because if you broke down each person into the components they're made up of, you'd find someone who is illogical, contradictory, good and evil. You'd find the makings of a hero and quite possibly the makings of a Mr. Hyde. When you're*

writing a character, you're exploring those illogical, contradictory, good and evil people and their relationships. You need those things to make a character three-dimensional" (Karen Weisner).

Unique

While being unique is a good thing in reality, it is apparently a big no-no in fiction, which I don't think is true at all. You can make your characters as different as you want them to be, as long as they follow the rules of whatever universe they are in, and it follows the rules of your character. To do this well, a character has to have a balance of three aspects: how they act and think, how they appear, and their background story. If she is incredibly shy, don't make her wear a micro-skirt, a tank top that shows the midriff, gaudy make-up, and she is the most popular girl in her school even though she was traumatized when her step-father raped her. I know it's a pain, but you have to think about more than just creating looks, personality, a sad childhood, and just stick them in a story. Some deep thought is a major requirement.

Personality

There are a wide range of personality types, so you can basically be as creative with this as you want, just as long as there are a few actual quirks. Do NOT list their personality traits at all like you mostly see in character sheets, which shouldn't be in stories anyway. If you have to make a character sheet in a journal to keep your ideas in, I would write the character's history, and how it affects the character, which is not the same as listing the personality. With history, you can get a deeper sense of *why* this character is this way, than just listing random quirks.

More often than not, some characters are one way on the outside, but are completely different in their minds. For example, someone who seems to be confident and always has a sarcastic retort, could think, "What the heck was I thinking when I said that? Am I really that stupid to come up with that lame insult?" Thus, making them seem a little insecure, and adding a little more depth in their character. Of

course, at the end of every story, they have to change somehow, or else nothing is learned, and they haven't developed. The change has to take place in both outer and inner personalities, and they can't be subtle changes so your character is virtually the same as the beginning.

We have always experienced labels and stereotypes, and they all have a negative connotation to them. The Jocks have mush for brains, the Preps are mean whores, and the Emos cut. This itself is clichéd and has become the outline for characters that I find it to be underdeveloped. In the real world, athletes are actually intelligent, popular cliques are nice people, and people who wear black don't cut! Cutting is real, I won't deny that, but what I'm getting at is that not all people who cut are people who wear black. Some 'Preps' with a lot of pressure to do well in life cut. What's appalling is that some stories seem to glorify it, or that it isn't destructive (cutting, not stereotypes). Stereotypes in general are destructive in stories, and have become tell-tale signs that the story and characters are underdeveloped. Stereotypes are not the same as personality types, they are labels that someone else calls people. Do not get them mixed up.

Appearance

As much as we hate to admit it, but looks are important; however, it's for a different reason than reality. Most MS' are referred to as incredibly beautiful characters. Despite what certain authors on writing sites say, MS' beauty is not limited to certain physical traits like being blonde and has blue eyes, is busty, or has an athletic build. They only become MS traits when it's without reason, like having big boobs when the character is only 13, or being ripped when he doesn't exercise at all. Heck, you can make your character ugly if you wanted, but if they became popular instantly for no apparent reason, then it is an example of a MS. In addition, it does depend on what universe the story takes place in, but there are still ways around it sometimes.

In a universe where everyone has a normal hair and eye color, everyone by birth should also have the normal hair and eye color, unless they were born with a genetic mutation or such. If a person has an off the wall hair color, and there are no colored contacts or hair dye, then there is definitely something wrong and that it's the author's fantasy overriding their common sense. If the story takes place in a more colorful universe (like say *Naruto* , or *Star Trek* depending on the species), then you can go all skittles with the hair, eye, and possibly even skin tone.

Even so, research in the specific universe is always a handy tool, especially with anatomy. I cannot tell you how many times I have read or even seen artwork where a thirteen to fifteen year old in 1800's Asia has a DD chest. Sorry guys and gals, the earthly universe doesn't work that way; try another galaxy perhaps a few million light-years away. Be reasonable with how your characters should look. A common cliché, and myth, that an obvious MS character has, are eyes that change color, typically to their mood. It is a cliché, but MS' aren't about clichés, they are about the underdevelopment throughout the story. However, it is always better to try to be original.

Clothes are an entirely different matter. They reflect the character's mood, personality and upbringing; although if the character is rebellious, you can probably scratch out "upbringing." Would a serious Catholic woman dress in a tight leather jumpsuit that showed more of her cleavage, midriff, and legs than it should, especially when she wants to get married before that special night in bed? If your character is in a dark spiritual occult that has to wear dark robes, would the character be accepted wearing bright colored T-shirts? Or if the school has a uniform, and the character doesn't like it, would he or she be excused from it? Even without a valid reason besides not liking it? I didn't think so either. Along with the changing times, whether seasonal or every decade, clothes change with society of the universe.

Their Pasts

The last ingredient in making your unique character would be the background story. Even though it's all in the past, it can still affect your character in the present, so it is important to your character development. A lot of people think that tragic pasts are overused, and a trait in MS and especially a thing called Anti-Sues (they are still considered MS to me because they both represent underdevelopment), but you can put a twist on them to make them original. And, if done right, it can add another dimension to your character. However, if done wrong, it can break your character, so be careful. Of course your character can have a normal, happy, and cheerful childhood, and it could still be interesting, but I'm describing the tragic pasts because that's what most people have problems with. Some of the common clichés or MS traits are: amnesia, rape, physical or mental abuse, abandonment, being an orphan, or betrayal, and negative stereotypes. I got most of them at least, right?

Amnesia

Amnesia, either it is part of the plot for angst and suspense, or it's used to hide that the author hadn't thought of the entire story yet. Don't worry; the latter isn't as bad as it sounds. Just as long as the memory isn't triggered excessively, or you feel that you *have* to show something from the past every chapter, then you're fine, but it's always good to add some sort of twist. You can have patterns to what the triggers are, or have the character never remember, but is being developed through present experiences. It is possible.

Rape, Physical and Mental Abuse

There are so many reasons why your character being raped, physically, or mentally abused, would make your audience automatically think 'Mary-sue/Marty-stu,' and push the back button. It's not that the term 'rape' or 'abuse' is the MS trait; it's mainly what past authors have done with it. They basically used the most tragic event they could think of to gain the audience's sympathy so either they'll feel sorry for the character and 'rate high,' or so the audience is hopefully distracted from looking at the often awful content of their work.

What made rape and abuse so annoying to look at in stories was that the authors didn't know how their characters should have behaved after the fact. Yes, there are different paths a rape or abuse victim could walk down—seek other comforts by selling themselves, be an abuser, get into drugs and alcohol, not trust anyone at all, etc.—there are many paths, but they most likely didn't follow any of them, especially the first two. If they did follow the last path I listed, the ill-researched author didn't follow it for long by having their character immediately trust the intended partner, and spill their guts out later in one go.

People who have experienced this kind of trauma are usually not willing to share anything due to shame, and blaming themselves, let alone tell every detail all at once. Even when the character is at a stage of acceptance, they still wouldn't go into detail, because they would rather just let it be. It takes a lot of time to gain that kind of trust. Another trait that is most disgusting is when the character was raped, or being raped in the story, and they liked it in the end. No one likes getting suddenly raped! It's just glorifying it, and acting like it's no big deal when it is. It is disgusting.

Abandoned and Being an Orphan

Being abandoned can be a terrible thing, but authors either go too far with it, or take it too lightly. For example, the character was taken into a loving family, but he or she is too distraught with thoughts of why his or her real parents left; or when the character had been all on their own, they end up not caring at all about their parents, despite if they had good reason to leave. It's similar to the orphan scenario. Being an orphan or in a foster home isn't a great thing, but the character can still find plenty of opportunities to be happy. Usually, authors describe the orphanage or foster homes with abusive elders or other abusive children, which can happen, but you'd have to be extremely careful about writing it, and it is getting clichéd. Think of the random inspections, and the hopeful parents visiting, and seeing all the bruises or holes in the walls. Someone is bound to notice.

Betrayal

Everyone has been betrayed somehow in their lives, but authors seem to only choose a few scenarios because they had been done already. A cheating spouse, the character's best friend spread a false rumor, double-crossing spy, etc. I take it back, there are quite a few scenarios, but they all seem to feel the same. Anger, hurt, murderous, and confused is the most basic emotional tone to this, but no one seems to think of the other emotions. Someone can be depressed, sad, scared for themselves or for the betrayer, or even apathetic if the 'betrayal' was minimal.

Common Clichés That are Thought of as MS Traits

You may think that all clichés and self-inserts are part of being an MS, but that isn't true. I already gave a point about the changing eye-color and the tragic pasts, but there are more, and they can be found in the Universal Mary-Sue Litmus Test. You're probably thinking, 'That can't be right. It's the universal test for all Mary-sues, so there should be nothing wrong with it.' On the contrary. Even though they were meant to be guidelines and that only a huge number of 'symptoms' would make the character a MS, I felt that on taking the test wasn't as efficient as it should be. Even the creator admitted that it isn't as efficient. It could have been better if they simply avoid asking about clichés, or anything irrelevant to being a MS in the first place, but there isn't a definite term yet.

I was going to explain each question in detail why or why not the question was relevant to the character being an MS, but it would have taken way too long, and you all would be bored reading it. I already tried to—wasted four hours of the night, and didn't even get half way down the first section. Plus, all I did was end up repeating what I had been saying.

Basically, all the questions relating to your characters uniqueness, like name, and looks, can be negotiable, but you have to know what the limit is, which depends on the universe. In addition, don't go into every single detail to make her so beautiful or so ugly that it would

need repeating. Anything relating to what happens in the story to your character, like genetically modifying them, is OK as long as there is enough explanation to support it within the universal laws. It is also OK to have the character be a hybrid as long as it makes sense, so don't go crazy. If they have more than one special skill, like being bilingual or just know more than one language, or playing numerous kinds of instruments, is fine as long as there is an explanation, and they have had plenty of practice for it to set in.

Details and explanations that support each other is the main key. Some deep thought and a lot of thorough research would be helpful in this area. A lot of the questions were related to plot, so they are extremely negotiable, but unfortunately, a 'technically yes' is still a yes to the test.

Self-inserts, which was mentioned in the test, are usually a bad idea to begin with, but if done properly, and exceptionally well, I don't see the harm in it. If you want to insert yourself in a story, go ahead, just make sure to do a lot of self-reflection, I do mean a *lot* . Don't give yourself exceptions that would be impossible for everyone else, and basically use the three aspects of a well-balanced character. A lot of people who put themselves in their stories usually make themselves seem better than what they actually are or should be.

If the universe is in something like a superhuman universe (*Naruto, Dragonball Z, DC* or *Marvel*), then it's okay to give yourself chakra, telepathy and all that jazz, just make sure you give yourself flaws and weaknesses, which are two different things. For example, weakness would be that you can control your chakra well, but you just don't have any skills in martial arts. A flaw in the character would be that you are very opinionated, but can't hold a discussion because people are tired of listening to you rant without giving them the chance to talk.

If you are self-inserting in a country other than your own based setting, it would probably be better to translate your name to that country. Just go to a translating site where they'll translate your English (or other country) name to whichever setting the story takes

place in. It's based on the sounds your name makes, so it's still your name, it would just sound acceptable. For example, for a Japanese based setting, Charlotte would be Shaarotto, and Brian would be Buraian.

The biggest mistake and peeve that I can think of in a MS, is if they have the same opinions as the author. In other words, if the character is not a self-insert, the character becomes a mouthpiece so you can rant during a story. It is unprofessional, and never a good idea. We usually write what we know, and it's OK to have a couple of similar qualities, but going so far as from favorite foods to political views? No. It will never be acceptable and it can be easily seen.

Suethors

I'm pretty sure that everyone who reads this agrees that MS are bad in serious stories, and that they should be highly discouraged in writing, but don't reach for the nearest flamethrower and go at it at the nearest Suethor. Let's step back, and think why there are many MS on creative writing and drawing sites. From what I have seen, there are three types of Suethors: the Amateur-Hour-Writers, the Fantasizers, and the Don't-Give-a-Damners. From the names alone, they should be easy to imagine what kind of writers they are.

I write this guid mainly in concern for the AHWs. They come here for the first time, see all these great (or not so great but don't know it) stories, and immediately want to create their own. Some realize the mistakes a 'great' character can be, but most who have never heard of MS before fall into the trap, and then fumble it out of control. They still don't know that what they are writing is not very developed, and that with only a little touch-ups, could be a lot better to read.

Give the AHW suethors a chance, since there is a good chance that they didn't know what they were doing. They probably do want to improve as a writer too, so it's best to state why their story is underdeveloped, give helpful suggestions, and a friendly push in the right direction. When critiquing, I would suggest hinting that the characters seem unbelievable, pointing out why at which parts, and

only warning them about MS at the very end. Don't call their characters a MS, especially if the story is a work in progress. Since MS are all about the lack of progression and development, the story would have to be finished to accurately determine if the character is an MS.

If the authors whine and say that there is nothing wrong with their character, but it's obvious that they are a newbie, then there's a good chance that they are the Fantasizers. They are more likely to put in self-inserts so they can get together with their favorite character. With them, you'll probably have to give them hard evidence, and that means using plenty of quotations from their stories, and confront them with it, giving a more detailed explanation on why their character is unbelievable. Then give them a few suggestions on how to mask it, improve it, and give them a nudge in that direction.

Unlike the AHW or the Fantasizers, the Don't Give a Damners, just don't give a damn. They write how they want. They write for their own pleasure, but publish them online to get praise only, and can't seem to take constructive criticism (concrit). They claim that these sites are just for fun, and that they write for themselves, and can write however they want, and while that's true, the sites are also for sharing concrit to help improve, which can be fun in its own right. If they receive a respectable constructive criticism, they either ignore it completely, or they react terribly to it. Basically, they don't really care about improving whether their stories are absolutely great, or just plain suck.

Personally, if they can't take the concrit that's supposed to help them learn, they aren't mature enough to be here where other writers are here to read serious, and well-written stories, and to spread their own little tidbit of literary wisdom. With DGDs, they are stuck at whatever skill level they are at as long as they keep their minds closed, so there isn't much you can do to change it. Just leave your criticism and move on.

Despite the Mary-Sue Killers (MSK), and all the other stuff I have been told about MS, I think they are a necessity to good writing.

Before you go straight to the review button to prove me wrong, let me explain. While some beginners know about character development, but aren't good at spelling or grammar, I, and apparently quite a few other people, started off messing up our characters and the plot. We all have our starter weak points that take over our stories the first few times. It's a hurdle we need to realize quickly to improve. So if a newbie accidentally writes an underdeveloped character, don't think of them as inferior writers, but an aspiring writer that needs to get over this hurdle. Think of it as their practice run for more enjoyable stories in the future, no matter how far off that day may come. Encourage them to improve. Because there are new writers everyday, and they are writing stories all the time. MS will never fully disappear, so there really is no use flaming them, which will probably just cause them to write more MS for spite.

In order to improve, we must first make a mistake. Sometimes we need a gentle pointing out and a push. We need advice and a proper review to understand where the reader is coming from. We want to create well written stories for you to enjoy, but we don't know how at first, and with writing rules changing all the time, trial and error is all we have. We have to know that perfection isn't an option we can reach, but excellence and proper development is certainly within our grasp if we can get encouragement to keep trying.

How Not to Write Like One

Mary-Sues Part 2: How Not to Write Like Your Character is a Sue

After reading Part 1 many, many times, I decided that another part would be helpful in that extra step. In Part 1, I described what a Mary-Sue/Marty-Sue etc. are, what they are not, and how to develop a proper character, in addition some of the reasons why some Suethors would create them (more or less on accident). This second part will go into more detail and give you tips on what not to write in your story that will tip your readers off that your characters might be underdeveloped, even if the character will be developed.

MS don't have specific physical, behavior, cliché traits, but in combination to impossible physics laws in the universe, along with underdeveloped personality especially with other characters, they come out to be boring and annoying to readers. Unlike Part 1, I failed to mention that it also depends on how the writer writes the story itself that their beloved characters can become a MS. Basically, if the narration isn't developed, your characters will seem underdeveloped. Mary-Sueish.

Scary, I know. Your own style of writing that you have been developing for as long as you have been writing, can fail you in this aspect. Don't worry, your style of writing develops on its own, but with a few conscious changes, it will develop into something new, and hopefully something that will bring your characters and story to life. After some time and practice, it will come out more naturally.

Title

Every story has to have a title and it is an unlocked gateway that your reader will decide whether to enter or not. You want them to enter; you want them to read your story. The title tends to be a good indicator whether or not the story and your characters are well-developed. A long title that gives away the story or has a pairing in it

is usually my first sign to just skip it. Why bother? I know what it's about, and if you gave it away that fast, it was probably written just as fast filled with clichés with the same theme and plot as so many other stories I've read. Plus, if you put the pairing in the title, instead of the summary, that tells me you have a disregard for the writing rules. Has anyone ever read an actual book with "Jane X John" next to the actual title? Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* doesn't count because his title actually fits his story and it doesn't give away the tragic tale at all.

Title decorations with hearts, squiggles and such, I personally don't really mind it if the site rules don't care about it; although I still agree that it would be better if there weren't any decorations, but if there is an excessive amount of it, it is annoying. For example, if there are five hearts in a row, or between the words of the title, then I assume that it's a sappy clichéd romance story that I would hate.

If the title is read as text talk, there had better be a darn good reason for it! When the title isn't capitalized correctly, or not capitalized at all, I get peeved, but if it's not even spelled out correctly without abbreviations, then I wouldn't bother. If the story takes place in cyber-world, or if the character uses her phone a lot and it's important, then I could understand, and that's what summaries are for.

The biggest pet peeve I have are stories that are written in English, but have titles solely in another language, especially in a language that uses symbols; Japanese and Russian are quite popular. Unless it's a phrase, written using English lettering, that just about anyone knows, then I guess it's okay, but if it's written in kanji, kanfu, or uses symbols from other cultures that I can't recognize, let alone read, what's the point? Telling us that you researched your title in another language and this is what was pooped out? Remember that gateway I was talking about? If I can't understand the title, I have no idea what I will get into, and I would rather not take that chance and waste time when there are more decent stories with decent titles. If you like the title in that other language so much put it in the author

notes, or summary, just not in the title. If the story is written in English and the title is in another language using English lettering, like romanji Japanese, Spanish, etc. and the phrase in that specific language is important in the story, then that's fine.

Summary

People get so stressed over summaries that they usually skip it. DON'T! It's better to put something (besides the pairing) down than "I'm not good with summaries" or "Summary is inside." It tells me that you haven't put any thought into developing the story so much that you can't even give me one short sentence, or you don't have the ability to give out a sentence. Even if you're a great writer, first impressions are everything when your story is in a list with thousands of others. All that is required is one to three sentences depending on the space you have.

If your story is character oriented, describe what the story is about centering on the main characters. If the focus is the overall plot, describe the universe and what's happening. That's it.

If you do have more space, then some other things to think about putting in the summary is to list the story types or warnings. Lunaescence and Freedom of Speech already have entire lists of it so you don't need to put it in the summary, but if you don't have that drop-down list, the most common ones are: Alternate Universe (AU), Original Fan Fiction (OF/OFF), Plot What Plot/Porn Without Plot (PWP), Out of Character (OOC), Reader-Insert, and self-insert.

The first two are specifically for fan fiction type stories. Alternate Universe is when the original canon universal laws are purposefully changed, or the universe the original canon takes place in has been changed. When something as small as whether an iPod exists in the *Naruto* universe, you don't *have* to put it, but when there are any number of small changes in the given canon universe, it would be better to put "slight AU" than nothing at all. Another example of Alternate Universe would be to place the canon characters in an entirely different universe, from taking the *Naruto* characters and put

them in a high school setting, to putting them in middle-earth, or on a space-ship. In these major changes, putting "AU" in either the summary, in the story notes, or in the author note of the first chapter is a strong recommendation.

If you're new to the term Original Fan Fiction, it probably sounds like an oxymoron, but what this means is basically the opposite of a fan fiction being an Alternate Universe; inserting Original Characters (OCs), or Fan Characters (FCs), in the canon universe, and telling a story completely focusing on the new characters, not mentioning, or hardly mentioning on the canon characters. Next Generation stories would qualify as Original Fan Fiction, but there are others that qualify as well. For example, I'm planning on writing an Original Fan Fiction for a certain canon universe in which focuses on a few OCs. They each have families and possibly friends, so I would have to make more OCs, and only one or very few times would a canon character have dialogue or play a very minor part because the main focus is the OCs' side of the story. It doesn't matter of the plot, as long as the focus is on the OCs, and the canon characters, if they are mentioned at all, only have a very small mentioning or roles.

Plot What Plot or Porn Without Plot, is just how it sounds. The focus is the sex scene, or what is popularly known as a "lemon". This story type can be for fan fiction just as much as original fiction. This doesn't qualify as an actual story because there is no Hero's Cycle stages—a calling, trial, or return—it's basically just a sex scene. People write these either because they just like writing about sex and want to figure out how to diversify it so it doesn't all sound the same, or because it's a harmless fantasy, either with their own original character for an original story, or a canon character. Because this isn't a "story" per se, with no actual development between the characters, this can't be determined whether or not the characters are Mary-Sue or not, but I put it here to let you know that putting "PWP" where it can be seen can lessen your chances of annoying a reader when they expected an actual story. By the way, because there is no emotional development between characters, as well of physical development, any PWP would not be considered in the

romance genre, so putting "PWP" and your story being in the romance genre really would be an oxymoron.

Out of Character (OOC) is not the same as Original Character (OC). Out of Character, is when the canon characters in a fan fiction simply don't act like themselves. Now, a little OOCness is normal, because every author interprets canon characters differently, so you don't have to put "slight OOC" or anything, but if they are purposefully Out of Character with no effects of drugs, alcohol, or anything, whether it's for humor, parody purposes or anything, then that's when "OOC" should be added somewhere. As long as you acknowledge what you're doing, most readers don't really care one way or another and try reading it for what it is.

Reader-Insert is basically a story written in second person, better known as "you" P.O.V. This has gained some popularity on the internet, and people like what they like despite that the only time you see second person actually published in a book would be Create Your Own Adventure (CYOA) or Pick Your Own Path (PYOP), so it's just better to leave it alone if you don't like stories using solely second person. CYOA/PYOP is when, at the end of a chapter, the narrator asks the reader which next step should be taken, and thus which next chapter/path should be read. Another popular second-person story, typically only on the internet, are Who Would You Fall For (WWYFF) and Who Would Fall For You (WWFFY) where the reader is asked questions throughout the story to gauge the answer to determine which other character would best suit the reader as a love interest. The difference between Reader-Insert, CYOA/PYOP, and a WWYFF/WWFFY is while they are all written in second person; a normal Reader-Insert doesn't give the reader choices of which chapter to go for, or to see whether this character or that character would be better suited for you. While CYOA/PYOP and WWYFF/WWFFY can be interchangeable with Reader-Insert, it can't be the other way around. It's similar to how a raven is a crow, but not all crows are ravens. Reader-Inserts are not Original Characters, and nor are they self-inserts, so they all shouldn't be present in the same story. Reader-Inserts and Original Characters can work fine,

just as Self-Inserts and Original Characters, just not Reader-Inserts and Self-Inserts because they both suggest that the story is either written in second person or first person, which will be further discussed in the next paragraph.

Self-Inserts are basically author-insertions, but the main difference in writing style from Reader-Insertion is that Self-Insertion is typically written in first person. There are a few that are written in third person, but, in my opinion, that feels kind of like cheating. Like Reader-Insertion, if the story was written in third person, the reader/author knows things that they shouldn't, so might do something they normally wouldn't if they didn't know the entire situation. Because Self-Inserts have a bad reputation, I would totally understand if it's not mentioned, but people will think what they think and there really isn't a way you can change their minds from a computer screen. If you put in Self-Insert, that will just give people the warning that if they don't like Self-Inserts, then you did all you could to let them know that they are reading a story they might not end up liking.

Description

The description is the first thing your readers are looking for in your characters and in your writing, whether it's your characters themselves, or the surroundings. A lot of people say that describing a character in the very first paragraph, or the second, or the third, and so on until you reach at least half-way down the first (or second, depending on who) page, shouldn't be done, and is an easy indicator of the character or story being underdeveloped. Also, you shouldn't describe every physical detail of a character in that one, or two, paragraphs. Well, I say you can.

Who cares? The point is, you're describing your characters, and it shouldn't matter when or how much; although describing every single hair on the characters body really is too much detail. So go ahead and describe your character in the first paragraph, just don't get too carried away with the description that it sounds more useless than conveying feeling. Describing the hair, eyes, skin and rough

height for the first impression is definitely enough to appease most readers, but if there is something else that is important, describe it. After that, you can ease more descriptions further into the story to keep their attention; however, there are certain phrases that are tiresome to look at. They are one of the reasons why clichés became a trait for Sueism, but, as I've explained in Part 1, Mary-Sues are not about clichés or how a character looks. Raven locks, sapphire orbs, coffee waves are just a few of the many 'poetic' terms, and as much as creativity is valued (even though these small descriptive phrases are becoming clichés), most of the time simplicity is better. Being hit with lightly cryptic details becomes vexing trying to decipher what you mean one phrase after another (after all, 'orbs' can either mean 'eyes' or the breasts of women). It's okay to use them once in a while, but not all at once. I would say only use them if the detail is of utmost importance or noticeable. If the story is told in another character's perspective, and they happen to be poetic (and perhaps deeply in love at first sight), then I would suppose the poetic terms would be OK, but I would still keep it at minimum.

Some characters have unusual markings, for example a birthmark, scars, tattoos, and maybe a persisting rash. Apparently, they hike up points in most Mary-Sue tests. Even though it's the author's decision where or how noticeable the birthmark is, the characters can't really control it, and some are quite noticeable. One of my teachers has a birthmark that was dark in color that went from her chest to the side of her neck, and it looked like an old burn. Birthmarks are natural, but if it detracts or has no purpose in the story, a short description from the beginning is all you need. You don't need to repeat it every time the character comes up.

Some parents actually let their high school teens get tattoos. Heck, my dad was a tattoo artist, and if he was still here, I would be covered in them by now (I would probably regret most of them too). Some tattoos are connected to culture, so research in that area is always best. Still, only a general description is needed, and it doesn't need repeating unless it's important. As for scars, it's the same with as the birthmark and the tattoos. It doesn't matter if it makes the

character's face contorted, like Zuko in *Avatar: The Last Airbender,* or if it's so small it's barely noticeable. Any of the marks don't need repeating unless it's important.

Rashes, however, probably only need a repeat if the condition is either getting worse or better. Other than that, we don't need to know what color the ooze is every time the character scratches at it.

As for expressions, such as a blank face, or a heated stare, etc, that is OK. Those kinds of expressions are useful in stories, and they are real kinds of faces people make. Have you ever met a cop in an interrogation room who didn't have a piercing glare? These kinds of descriptions aren't poetic, and are needed. A slight change of the wording can make them more original, but the phrases are fine for now.

As for clothing, it would be best to not get into so much detail unless the clothes are unusual to what is normal, but not necessarily against the universe rules, because that would be a Mary-Sue writing trait. For example, a poor student striving for money stares at her richer peer, and takes in all of the details out of envy and desire. A military personnel takes notice of something on a uniform that is out of alignment. Just something that is of relative importance.

Plot

As I said in Part 1, and will keep repeating, research is important, especially if you need to explain something that is important to the plot. Research your own story in detail. Look at news articles, or look up psychological or medical essays that have information important to your plot. Without detail then, yes, even the plot itself can ruin the accused character, especially if there will not be any development to the character or plot.

Wanting something to happen, and it being possible for your characters, are two different things, even for the author who controls the universe they have created. As a small example would be that your character has amnesia, and you want him to remember

everything before the bad guy kills him. Will he remember all at once at the very end, or will he remember bits and pieces until that event? The character and the bad guy are at two different time frames with two different plans, and even though you are the author, once you have established your characters, they have to remain that way for the duration of the story. The bad guy could be a person who wants to tie up loose ends quickly, so why would they take their time to kill a witness when he doesn't know the witness has amnesia?Another thing I often see in stories is what I call Etheric Knowledge: when a character knows something that would be impossible for them to know. Because the author wants the character to know something, usually at a specific event and time, they forget to clarify how the character came about the information. A normal civilian wouldn't just happen to know top secret classified government operations just because the author wants them to know it. Even if a little kid overheard a confidential meeting, the kid probably wouldn't be able to understand what was being said if they were asked to summarize it. Both of the examples would be impossible if the characters just understood the information.

Etheric Knowledge also pertains as to when the main character instantly doesn't like a certain character without a plausible reason, and that character just so happens to be a major villain; however if the main character does have a suitable reason (i.e. a wicked smile, overheard parts of a suspicious phone call, etc.), then this is not Etheric Knowledge.

Granted, it's hard to identify the Etheric Knowledge as you're writing it, I even miss it from time to time, but that is why planning and research upon your story is essential to development to the plot and characters. What you miss in your writing, your readers are catching it and judging your skill, wondering if it would be worth looking into your other stories.

Another aspect that can put a bulls-eye on your character is when they suddenly gain strength that should be impossible. For example, in *Bleach* , Ichigo gained his Bankai, a special level of weaponry

skill, in less than a week, when it normally takes the average Shinigami ten years. How was that possible? Sheer will-power, guts, hard-work, and even 'Hollow Ichigo', an entity inside of Ichigo that unwillingly lends a helping hand, isn't a proper explanation. A few years would be an acceptable amount of time in my opinion, but less than a week?

In *The House of Night* Series, Zoey turns into a High Priestess within only three days of her turning. Yes, there will be a war, and soon, but the plot could have expanded to a more acceptable time frame. Why is Zoey special? Why did she hear Nyx's (Goddess of Night) voice? Because of her Cherokee bloodline, her knowledge? Why not someone with more experience where their youthfulness doesn't often get in their way of thinking things through, and their hormones towards the opposite gender?

I'll admit it right here, I gave up in the middle of the third book in *The House of Night* , so there might have been a very reasonable explanation, but I don't have enough patience with Zoey's girly hormones and sexual frustration. And I'm still trying to desperately catch up in *Bleach* , so there might be more explanation towards the end (how many chapters are there now?)

Published works do use this technique of power-development a lot; I can make an entire list of books with characters such as these; however it doesn't mean that you have to write like this. Maybe it's just me, but I get more than enough irritation through this method of main characters gaining power. It's one thing if something comes naturally, but I would still love a reason as to why.

Language

Imagine being in an American high school walking down the hall and you bump into a blonde, blue-eyed girl and you greet her. What should she say? It's not konnichiwa or nihao. Unless it's in a Japanese or Chinese language classroom, where she is formally learning Japanese or Chinese, this wouldn't be acceptable in a story. Any other language wouldn't be acceptable, except if the person is

born in another country with naturally blonde hair and blue eyes and she is used to greeting people in her first language. Please note that "born" and "first language" are the key terms. Language is part of culture and I know that it can be insulting to others seeing their language slandered all over the internet by people who are pretending to be a culture they aren't. Heck, I see it everyday with people who's mother tongue is English and they type stories 'lyk dis,' as if it is English at all. Language isn't just symbols, lines, or letters that create a written communication; it has history! Japanese wasn't just Japanese, as was Spanish wasn't just Spanish, and as in English wasn't just English. Changes had been made over written language for centuries. This also goes with sign language, a non-written form of language using facial and hand gestures. To practice writing in a different language is one thing, but just using it to make it 'interesting' and a 'fun learning experience' is another. Language itself sets a place and a time because it changes. There are some words that we don't use anymore, called 'Archaic,' which would be another good research topic, so most people wouldn't know the definition to them. However, you wouldn't hear "Yo! Dirtbag! You better give me back my purse," in the middle ages. Using a medium between the archaic language and modern language is best when writings dealing with the past. Don't ask me about our language of the future though because I have no clue what will happen to language. You can make up new slang terms, I suppose.

My overall point of this is that learning the history of language might be a good idea, or at least research it well enough to know what is acceptable when writing stories with another country as a base in a story. In a lot of stories referring to Native American culture, names and status are the only terms used. If you're writing a fiction based in Japan, using only greetings and the honorifics would be a safe bet in not offending anyone.

Flaws, Weaknesses, and Hindrances

I gave an example in Part 1 about the difference between flaws and weaknesses, but I feel that I need to go into depth with it. No, I'm not

going to give you a list because then I would keep adding on to it forever, and I would be doing the work for you. I decided against adding this section to Part 1 because wording matters, and learning how to avoid writing like the character is underdeveloped, a Mary-Sue, is the point.

Because positive/negative behavior traits can be switched around depending on who is reading, you have to create lines that define what is what for your character. To get this straightened out, flaws are a personality quirk or behavioral tendencies that a majority of the other characters wouldn't like. Weaknesses are physical activities that a character sucks at. If a character is born with a type of illness, disease, symptom, etc., it is a hindrance. Hindrances are something that is part of the character that they can't help. If it affects the character's flaws and weaknesses, it is merely a factor in the overall character.

In a character sheet, which shouldn't be in stories, I see a lot of euphemisms in the flaws and weaknesses list. Euphemisms are words that have the same definition as another word, but sound better, or are less offending. They can be a handy tool, but if it's used for personality flaws and physical weaknesses, then it can lead the reader astray and mistakenly think the character is unbelievable. Euphemisms, like language, also change with time, and you hear them often in idioms. The best way to show you what euphemisms are, are by using examples so here are a few:

1. "Kicked the bucket." Already a euphemism meaning he was hung by the neck until the person died, but now, we know it as, "Passed away". Doesn't that sound more peaceful?

2. "Murderer." A person who kills another. The euphemism would be "Mortality Technician." See, it doesn't sound as horrid even though they are the exact same thing! It actually sounds like you can get paid for this legally.

3. "Coffin." We still use that today, don't we? Not exactly. The word "Casket" is the decorated and slightly less offensive term to use now.

But really, from box, to pine box, to coffin, to casket. Who knew there were so many different words to put a dead person in to be put into the ground?

4. My last example: "Paranoid." Worrying excessively about stuff that doesn't need to be worried about. I would prefer to call myself "extra careful."

See, aren't euphemisms fun? They give us an excuse to make flaws and weaknesses sound good and less obstructing. My point is that if you use euphemisms for all of the flaws and weaknesses in your character, you're blurring the lines and taking the depth away. Do not use them for negativities at all.

There are some personality traits that are truly in the middle depending on how a person sees it. For example, if a girl is shy and it's more of a sign of modesty and humility, instead of getting in the way of making new friends, then it's more of a positive trait than a flaw. If someone is intelligent, does he or she sound snobbish? You have to ask yourself these kinds of questions to keep your character in order and keep their traits in black and white. If you do use character sheets to keep your facts straight, instead of listing his or her personality, or strengths or weaknesses, write about the character's history and how it affects the character example of weakness would be that when playing basketball, the character is fast, but he keeps missing the hoop whenever he shoots. It's something that a character has to work hard to overcome and get better at.

Some traits, like being clumsy or a bit air-headed aren't a flaw or a weakness. They are more of just normal hindrances, like diseases or symptoms. It's something the character has no control over, that has to affect the character at all times and not when it's just convenient, and that it usually gets in the way of them achieving something. It can be anything depending on the situation or plot, from being too short when the character wants to be a super-model, or being too tall when they want to be a limbo champion.

While I'm at hindrances, being 'innocent' isn't any kind of trait at all. For one, it's too vague of a term, especially if you meant to put naïve, and two, everyone is guilty of something at all times. The term I prefer to hear that word is in court (especially if I'm a defendant). Innocent, sinner, hypocrite, or any word that can be said about all human beings, or any species with humanoid emotions, is more like labels than traits.

So, yes, wording is everything especially to readers. You don't want your readers confused or misconstrue your meaning or theme to the story, unless you want them to be confused or misinterpret your story. There are still people who won't give authors a chance to fix their underdeveloped style of writing, and get flamed for it, so use this as a sort of guide or checklist on what's unacceptable, and adequate writing. I'm in no way a professional author, so you don't have to take this into any serious consideration, but I'm still learning, and just writing this guide has helped me wrap my head around a few ideas. I hope this helped in your developing journey.

How Much Power is Too Much Power?

Mary-Sues: How Much Power is Too Much Power?

I'm sure everyone has heard that an obvious Mary-Sue is one that is too powerful, but no one has explained to me in enough detail when the line is crossed. "Oh, an original character can control all four elements? That's way too powerful!" Since when? Since it became a clichéd idea? That idea was around since before *Avatar: The Last Airbender* aired on Nickelodeon. Aang, the main character in that show, along with eventually mastering all four elements, also practically came back from the dead a century later in the very first episode of the show, and no one called him a Gary-Stu (which he is not, I'm just saying that labeling a character over power is overused)! As I said in my past two guides, Mary-Sues aren't about clichés, they're about lack of explanation and key details that would help in their development of the character along with the story.

The point is as long as your character has had enough time to learn about their skill, practice it, master and perhaps perfect it, then the character can have whatever power he or she is given by you the creator, original or already been used. This does not leave out the power of influence on other people, or ranks in school, jobs, military or other social statuses. In simpler words, the power in any story can also be the kind in normal everyday power in our real life universe. Even when there are other kinds of ordinary powers, superpowers seem to be the biggest concern when talking about Mary-Sues.

When a character has a high social status in the "normal everyday power" kind, just make sure that they've worked at it long enough to earn it, or greatly proved themselves on more than a handful of occasions. As an example of what possibly not to do, in the *House of Night* series, Zoey earns the High Priestess rank after only a few days of her turning into a vampire, after saving her peers once, even though Aphrodite, the High Priestess before Zoey, had been High Priestess for at least a couple years. Granted, Aphrodite was a snob

in personality and had no regard to others, especially humans, or the rules, but why give that rank to Zoey, a fledgling? The only explanation given was that Nyx had given her that power (along with the four elements plus spirit). If Zoey had been saving people left and right and, or, she earned that rank by the end of the school year, then that would have been a reasonable amount of time to be handed the rank and would have been plenty of time to practice the elements, not just three days.

I was only talking about that nearly unexplainable rank jump aspect of the example I just gave, but the elemental power aspect was a bonus to another example.

"I thought you said that learning the four elements wasn't a Mary-Sue trait?" That person who asked that hasn't been paying attention. There are no 'traits' whatsoever, only a lack of explanation.

Zoey was given the four elements, and I didn't mind that part, it was the fast pace of how she and her friends mastered it that bugged me. Zoey and her friends only tried calling the circle once, maybe twice, and it seemed as if they had been calling circles for years after that, with only a snap of their fingers. Again, the first book was only three days long. The practice and mastering which was supposed to be one of the points in the series was ignored until the point that it was practically invisible. The only explanation was that Nyx gave Zoey and her friends the power. That shouldn't be enough.

Nyx, a goddess, may have given the power, but it's the receiver's responsibility to practice, thus it's the creator's responsibility to portray those hours of hard work of mastering it. Since supernatural powers are the most problematic, I'll discuss those kinds of powers instead of the "normal everyday power".

Immortality

Just to get this out of the way, let's discuss immortality. By definition of Microsoft Works Word Processor, it means "able to have eternal life or existence", but it doesn't mean that an immortal character can't

die. Elves are considered to be immortal, but they can die just almost as easily as humans can. Vampires can perish too although they're a lot more difficult to kill. All immortal creatures can die, but it's just that they have long lives. Immortality isn't even qualified as a power, but it's still arouses arguments.

So if I make a character that is immortal and can use magic, but is susceptible to death just as easily as any human, maybe even more, what's the problem? Well, long lives equals more time, more time equals more practice, more practice equals more skills, thus more power. If the character had already lived millennia of learning and practicing, then the person would have found different ways of protecting their life. So what? That sounds like a reasonable thing to do. So why can't the character I created be powerful? He's definitely had plenty of time and practice.

Oh, I know! With all of the time the character has lived, he's too powerful when comparing to other characters and it's especially bad when it's in fan fiction comparing to the canon characters.

If you're a fan fiction writer, don't worry about overpowering the canon characters. They aren't brittle! If the character you created is more powerful in his or her own right, then it's fine if he or she can beat one of the good people, is faster, or can mimic whatever they do. It's fine as long as there is a good explanation and a reasonable amount of time for the practicing to sink in. If the original creators didn't want us to create a more powerful character they could demand that right, just like J. K. Rowling doesn't want to see any explicit pictures or writing (and yet I see that rule broken quite a lot), and Anne Rice doesn't want fan fiction at all on the internet or published. These authors have the power to limit what kind of fan fiction is out there, and it's their right to make whatever rules they want. Have you ever heard an author make the rule, "No one can create other characters more powerful than mine"? I haven't, and I think it's because these authors don't want to limit our creativity, but it is acceptable to limit the content.

Immortality is a door that is there in plain view, not even locked, but since it has so many possibilities for powers, other people tell you not to open it. These people are trying to limit your creativity by slapping the Mary-Sue label. Don't be scared of them or the label. The only thing you need to worry about is your character development, and how immortality affects them. That is the real question here.

In Time (yes the Justin Timberlake movie), had a great sci-fi twist on the idea of immortality. Everyone is born with a time limit glowing on their arms, and when they reach the age of twenty-five, they stop aging, and their one-year of time starts counting down. As soon as a person's clock hits zero, the person drops dead. Instead of money, the economy works on time, so the ghetto people die and no one cares because they have to live with the risk everyday, and the rich never die and never share their wealth. If the character was born poor, how do you suppose they lived? How did they get around town? What skills do they learn? If the character was born in the more wealthy family, what was their life like? How did they react when they turned twenty-five?

Getting off the movie and more into the fantasy genre, did the character want this immortality? If they are around mortals, they have to watch all of their friends die eventually, and that's heart wrenching. Maybe the character has attempted suicide a few times, but was too afraid to go through with it and called for help just in time to save his life. If the character does like being immortal, may be all the power he has gained goes to his head, so he's careless and ends up dying on accident. Indifference to being immortal isn't an unreasonable idea either; it's just one more day at a time after all, right? Immortality can be a great thing in writing because the character can change and develop in so many ways.

How Many Powers is Acceptable?

Now that I'm finished with the immortality subject, I'm going to talk about just how many powers a character is allowed to have. Superman's powers consist of super strength, heat vision, x-ray

vision, super vision, super hearing, invulnerability to physical attacks in the form of force, extreme temperatures, diseases, and aging (effectively giving him immortality, but he does age, just a thousand years slower); super speed, superhuman breath, super smell, and has eidetic memory; along with other mundane powers like self-telekinesis enabling him to fly, and hypnosis enabling him to effectively disguise himself with only a pair of glasses, or throwing his voice to give Clark an alibi. With all of these powers, his only weakness seems to be Kryptonite radiation, the red sun or the lack of the yellow solar energy that Earth has, the use of magic, great force will temporarily stun him, and he won't be able to see through lead. Over the decades since his creation, the publishers for Superman have wondered if he was too strong since they found it hard to provide challenges for him, and while that can be difficult for the plot, does it make him a Gary-Stu?

Did he have these powers all at once? No, they developed over time, like puberty. Since he was an alien, most of these powers, like strength, were natural from birth because of the greater force of gravity or other forces of nature his home planet had. Since he's on planet Earth where the environment is much different, his natural-born powers would seem stronger and expand in strength as time passed, especially so with the immense yellow solar energy around for him to absorb, as explained by the publishers. Did he have to practice? Of course! I can imagine how many times he's accidentally crushed door handles just trying to open a door. In addition, he can have a bit of a temper, so he's had to learn to control that too. Was everything explained? Yes, and with science and psychic theories that would be acceptable in the universe the comic and shows it takes place in. In addition, under certain circumstances, not all of his powers will be useful or work at all. Superman can be killed, and it has almost happened several times, but part of his development also resides in overcoming these near-death obstacles.

Another key, besides explanation, is balancing between powers and weaknesses. All you need to think about is what would it take this and that power not to work? How would an enemy take advantage,

or what range of fighting would the character be weakest? For example of fighting range, maybe character would prefer long or medium-range fighting distance, but gets flustered at close range hand to hand combat. If an enemy knew that, they would do anything possible to get within the closer range because it's at least part of a weakness. Does that mean the character can't overcome this weakness? No, of course not. The character would have to practice close combat to overcome his flustering, but it will always be difficult since the character would still prefer long to medium range combat.

Does that mean Superman can overcome a weakness like Kryptonite? That's different since it's a chemical radiation instead of a physical kind of weakness. The only way he could overcome that was if he somehow got used to it like snake venom; however, since he's a Kryptonian, no. He won't ever get used to Kryptonite. It will forever be his weakness. Maybe he won't mind extremely small doses, but it will still zap his powers to some degree. Although, at one point, in the series *Kingdom Come* , he had absorbed enough solar radiation to counteract the effects of Kryptonite, but that kind of solar radiation probably wouldn't come around everyday, so it's not the same as fully overcoming the weakness.

So I'll ask again, is Superman a Gary-Stu? No, he is not. While some powers were natural to his species, he gained more abilities due to Earth's unusual atmosphere. He does have weaknesses, not all of his abilities would work under some situations, and he can die. It just hasn't happened yet.

Abilities

Another reason for the "too many powers" complaint may be because some authors just don't do enough research whether it's the universe or the abilities themselves. Many abilities have something to do with psychic theories, science, or magic, and most of it is a mix of the three. Some authors can't differentiate what the three are, so here it is:

"Psychic" refers to willing something to happen with the mind. This includes telekinesis, reading minds, pushing people (mind control), crytokenisis (freezing objects), pyrokenisis (heating objects or creating fire), and other abilities where the will of the mind comes into play. Even though wills and thoughts may seem too easy of a definition, if you've read *X-Men* , or seen the movies, then you would know that it takes a lot of concentration and a certain mental technique whether it refers to inner commands, or concentration on pictures. Some psychic techniques like levitation have scientific theories behind them, but they are only theories that haven't been proven, and the others are just purely fiction. If you do choose an ability that does have a scientific theory behind it as an explanation, it counts as a bonus for believability, but you certainly aren't limited to just them.

Abilities that are supported by science are abilities that can somehow be measured, or can be repeated. This would be heightened senses whether or not the character has lost a sense already, hybrid by genetics experiment, radiation, splicing, cloning or other such experimentation; drug use such as steroids to increase physical strength, speed, or to increase any of the senses are also included. The total understanding of alchemy or King Solomon's teachings of science, "changing lead to gold", "the elixir of life", or other elements would also be considered science despite the fantasy genre it revolves around. *Full Metal Alchemist* , and *Buso Renkin* , although not the same as the ancient alchemy, is a popular concept of what alchemy could have been in the mind of fantasy. There are some abilities, like having photographic memory, that can be developed naturally, but practice is necessary. This area would also include anything anyone was born with, from being a contortionist, to being an "indigo" child.

Something that can't be totally proven by science, but can be controlled by the mind on some aspects; however was not "born" with the ability, usually has something to do with magic. Sometimes, this area has a religious aspect to it also. It's something the character had to learn on their own or with a teacher with the

concept of "everyone has the ability to do magic, they just have to commit to it with a full heart" kind of deal; it's similar to the "everyone is a little psychic" phrase. Sometimes, a divine spirit hands down an ability. Depending on what kind of ability you want your character to have in regards to this section, there can be a ton of misconception, so research in the specific religion, symbolism, guidelines or type of magic is necessary before you make up your own rules. The magical or religious abilities would include witchcraft, the ability to talk to the divine, advanced divinatory practices, which includes summoning specters, or having an internal spiritual guide, and seeing signs that most people would play off. Sometimes a powerful intuition can have something to do with the religious aspect as well as being a little psychic.

There's a wide range of what these three areas can be involved in when creating an ability, but remember the rules of the universe. Not all scientific powers would work in a specific universe, just as psychic or magic wouldn't work in other universes. A slight exception would be if a universe clearly didn't have magic, but a character claims that there is and can use it; however throughout the story there is no way to prove or disprove that the character's magic was successful or failed. A curse failed because someone else had such positive thoughts. A spell to show the right direction could have been just a lucky guess. With this, the readers can decide whether the character either can use magic, or is a naïve believer, and that luck was just on his or her side.

As far as being a different species, it's only an unusual ability if it's exceedingly rare for any other of the same species to have the ability, which is what defines as having a superpower. So Superman, if he had lived his whole life on his home planet, wouldn't be very much of a superhero or different.

Other "powers" like martial arts, or weaponry use, aren't really superpowers. Anyone can learn them, but just as we've discussed, it is an added strength if one practices until they master it.

Weaknesses

Now that we've learned about what kind of abnormal abilities one can have, let's discuss the countermeasure: weaknesses. Like Superman, he has a ton of powers, but a few weaknesses. You can choose as many or as little weaknesses as you want, as long as they can affect your character at any time, and can pose a serious threat.

Before we get to the semi-specific weaknesses for the abilities, if for any reason you choose that your character can't be killed, like the Leviathan in *Supernatural* , you have to create enough weaknesses to render your character stunned or immobile. The Leviathan can bleed (black goop), and if they bleed a lot they're stunned for a while; they can't repel magic so can be bound for a few days at most; they can be decapitated, but if their head gets back on their neck, they are still alive and can immediately walk around; however they really can't be killed as far as season 7 of the show has shown. So they're seemingly invincible, right? Well, sodium borax, a chemical found in most cleaning products burns them and eats away at their flesh (who knew cleaning products had that kind of use!), and even though it doesn't kill them, Sam and Dean can get close enough to decapitate them and hide their heads so they can't regenerate anymore. That means that they're close enough to being dead, but still alive, perfectly rendering them immobile.

Another example of invincibility would be a soul bound in an object. They technically aren't dead, and they could have an ability so that the object should never be destroyed, so whosever soul is technically invincible. The object can be thrown into lava so no one can put on the object and the soul can't gain control again, or the object can just be locked away somewhere with the same results.

This is a given, but anything that can specifically injure the species is already a form of weakness (like Kryptonite), so I don't think I need to go into detail with that. The other forms of weakness, besides obvious natural-born and physical kinds of weaknesses would be distraction, environmental, and cancellation.

If the character is already easily distractible, then it's a given weakness as portrayed in the character flaws or hindrance, but I'm

talking about characters that have a concentration like the crosshairs on a sniper's scope. A psychic user can inflict imaginary pain in the character's mentality, or make them see illusions; just anything that is that can be implanted in the person's mind to ruin their concentration. The person doesn't have to be psychic to do that if the character is the caring type to worry about friends or teammates. This won't work with all characters; this is just a thought on what kind of weaknesses there are. For example if the character is a magic user, he or she may have a talisman to block mental attacks. Similar to abilities, you can be as creative with weaknesses as you want, just as long as the weakness isn't a euphemism like I discussed in "How Not to Write Like Your Character is a Mary-Sue".

Environmental, like with Superman, can be a boost, or a weakness. If there is a lack of something that is usually there in the environment, that can totally be a major weakness. This would include a lack of one of the five senses; even a lack of smell or taste can be a bad thing. What if the character is unable to smell the kerosene, so has no way to know that there's a bomb or a leak somewhere? Alternatively, if there is something added to the environment, like poison gas or a radiation spill; that can be just as harmful. This can be within a small area, or an entire continent. Another environmental factor can also include making something that usually is harmless, harmful (like when a power line falls into a puddle of water). Another factor that should be greatly considered is the character's charging and cooling time.

If anyone is in an online role-playing game like *World of Warcraft* or *Grand Fantasia* , they'll know what I mean, but the charging time is when a character is gathering enough energy (like with magic abilities) to attack or defend, while the cooling time refers to how much time is needed before the character can use the attack or shield again. If the character is new to the ability, then it will most likely take up a bunch of energy gathering it and spending it afterwards, so the charging and cooling time will probably be greater also. Obviously, as the character gets used to it and gains enough experience and strength, the charging and cooling time will

decrease, however, energy spent is still energy spent, and there will always be some sort of charging and cooling period. Another example of charging and cooling time is when a person throws a punch. They would pull back their fist, punch, and would need to pull back their fist again. With this example, pulling back can equate to both charging and cooling periods.

Cancellation can refer to one of two things: another ability canceling out the character's, or something that the character needs in order for him or her to use the ability is lost. If the person is an elemental user (but can use only one element at a time), another elemental user can use the opposite element to cancel it out. Or if it's brute strength on strength, it's the one that's a little stronger that will win (maybe that isn't your character). Anything that can match or beat the ability of the character's ability, is a part of the cancellation weakness. The example I used in the distraction was when a magic user uses a talisman to block mental attacks, but if that talisman was lost or destroyed, then there would be nothing that the character could do to defend his or her mentality. It's similar to if someone disarms another whether the tool be mystical or ordinary. If the character is not within reach of the tool, then there isn't a way the character can use it.

If someone does have a problem with your character because it seems to be too strong or have too many abilities, then it probably means you haven't described the weaknesses yet, how your character is able to use their abilities, or if it seems the character has had too little time to practice. As I said in "How Not to Write", it isn't necessarily what the character is or can do, it also has to do with the execution of the writing or comic. When there aren't enough details, people get skeptical, so don't take it to heart too much. They don't have all of the answers to your story, you do, but you do have to eventually explain everything; however, it doesn't have to be from the beginning or when the audience observes the strengths when the character is showing off. The only time a weakness would come up is during battle. Why would the character reveal their own weaknesses (except to people whom they trust)?

The Hero Cycle

So why can't I make a powerful main character? As long as I give him or her explanations, key details and weaknesses, that should be enough to let me have my freedom of creativity, even despite the character being in fan fiction. I know the answer to this too: writers, focusing more on fan fiction writers, probably never considered using the Hero Cycle effectively. The Hero Cycle, or also called the Hero's Journey, is used to effectively tell a story in stages. While there are various versions of the Hero Cycle with many stages in various orders, the most typical and plain cycle works in three stages: the Separation (or Calling), the Initiation (or Trials), and the Return. When someone doesn't use the cycle in their story, even though it's a practical subconscious form of writing, it seems as if the priorities aren't straightened out, or the author doesn't know when or how to describe the character's strengths or weaknesses.

In the Calling stage, the author would introduce the universe and the main character(s) (M.C.) where the M.C. would hear about what's beyond their scope of vision: an adventure, a war, a battle, a monster, just something that would require assistance, whether the calling specifically called for the M.C. or not. In some cases, the M.C. refuses the calling, but some outside force eventually forces them to accept the mission. This is the beginning, when the picture of normal for the character and the universe is described.

The next phase is the Trial. This is where the M.C. faces the mission. Sometimes there are small battles before facing the real monster, tests if you will, where the M.C. develops his abilities or skills. Other times, the M.C. has to face the monster immediately. In some cases, the M.C. fails, escapes, and tries again, but there are some stories where the M.C. fails, escapes and returns home to let someone else handle it. The M.C. can face the monster alone, or have help. When facing the tests, this is where the hero gains power either through practice or (magical) tools, and can fail some of the quests, developing his weaknesses and overall character. After a time, or immediately, the hero finally faces the monster stage. It's also the

stage where the hero is on the verge of dying, or in some sort of deep hole, and somehow miraculously finds strength, an adrenaline rush, to defeat the monster to show off the hero's strength. In rare occasions, the author has the M.C. die, thus ending the story. If that's the case, either there is no return, or one of the M.C.'s friends takes what's left of him home.

After the Trial Stage, whether the M.C. completes his mission or runs away, the M.C. usually returns home. If the hero overcame his obstacle, they earn rewards and share their knowledge with the people. In some cases, the M.C. may not want to return home or spread their knowledge because they think the normal people wouldn't be able to handle it, so there may be some outside force, forcing the character to return home, or the M.C. makes a home for him or herself somewhere else to start over. If you have a plan for another battle, there may be another Calling, thus starting the cycle all over again, where you can forgo some stages or add more.

Other stages may also be included somewhere within the story to make it more complex or epic, but the Calling, Trials, and the Return are the basic stages of any story. Obviously, some powers, like witchcraft, may force the author to add in the teacher stage where the character needs some sort of mentor, or needs a vast collection of books, so needs connections to acquire these books somehow. The more you know about the Hero Cycle and the many stages it can include, the more you can question and understand your plot and characters.

Well, I hope this was helpful to anyone who reads it, novice or experienced creators. This is supposed to be a tool to think and reflect upon creatively instead of to be insulting or as to have all of the answers, especially since this is based on my opinion and observations. I've never seen another Mary-Sue article that specifically says that a character can be as strong as the creator wants, so I'm sure I'll have mixed opinion of this.

In a Fight

EDIT: Thank you, Lynn, for letting me know that I goofed in this one. I fixed it.

Mary-Sues: In a Fight

From a petty cat fight with slaps and hair pulling, to an action-packed superhero vs. super villain brawl, action scenes can start anywhere; however writing them effectively is harder than planning on who wins. It isn't just about writing down who hit who, and if you don't describe how a character handles the situation, you can accidentally make him or her seem stronger or even weaker than they should be. If the character seems too powerful without explanation, your audience will point the finger and label it a Mary-Sue, and you don't want that (unless you're purposefully writing a parody). Action scenes, whether it's important to the overall plot or not, are an effective tool to establish your characters' strengths and weaknesses —weakness being just as essential to highlight, if not more so, than strengths, but first, you have to know how to write a fight scene in order to know where to insert these vital traits.

The most important rule that you need to know is that the action always comes before the reaction. Of course, if there is no action there is no reason to react, but what I'm talking about is how you order it in your sentences. You cannot use passive sentences in an active scene. It forces your reader to slow down even though something is happening one after another. The scene has to be fast paced, so you have to use active sentences. Here's an example of a passive sentence:

Passive: *Tenshi stepped back when the sword was swung by the enemy.*

In this sentence, it starts off active, but is actually a passive sentence. Tenshi stepped back is perfectly active, but everything

after is passive, which will be made clear later in this entry. Besides the passivity in this sentence, I do think that the ordering of the sentence is a problem. Obviously, Tenshi reacted before there was an action, which doesn't make sense unless he was psychic and could predict what was going to happen next, but even so using an active voice is still better because the audience would be on the same wavelength as the character. If I cut that sentence, "Tenshi stepped back," your audience doesn't know why Tenshi is stepping back. There are other ways this could be rearranged, and it would still be passive, but what you should be aiming for is to have an active sentence:

Active: *The enemy swung his sword toward Tenshi's neck. He stepped back to avoid the singing blade.*

Active doesn't necessarily mean shorter, but it gets right to the point, and that's what action scenes are. They get right to the point in establishing who's doing what and what affects are happening as they are happening. The point is in this example is someone with a sword swung at Tenshi, he dodged, and the sword rang as it cut air. Just because something is happening at a fast pace doesn't mean there isn't enough room to use description also. It's just that using a passive tone ruins the flow and breaks the action to reaction pattern.

Other ways to identify passive sentences is when the subject does not perform the act, but the act is performed on the subject.

Genna was hit with the crowbar.

Or when the subject or object is preceded by the word "by".

Genna was hit with the crowbar by James.

Both of these happen in the first example. While these sentences may not be so bad by themselves, they would be in the middle of an intense scene.

James slapped Genna, making a loud clap, and making Genna cry into the school sink. One moment it was numb, the next, it stung. She didn't know what to do or how to escape from him. Genna spied a broom leaning against the door behind him. James tried to grab Genna's arm, but she shoved him square in the chest. He toppled over a desk. She ran. He sticks out his legs, tripping her to her hands and knees. James gets up and gets the broom. Genna was hit with the broom handle (by James).

See what I mean? While it's not super bad, it just doesn't sound right if you read it out loud. Now replace that last sentence with "James hit Genna with the broom handle." That doesn't break the flow, it's straight forward, and it just sounds better to read.

The only time a passive tone should be used is if there is a break from a fight scene; when the characters start having a discussion, or is taunting each other with words. That's when it's OK for the pace to slow down, if the pace does slow down, but when someone finally continues to fight, the active sentences have to start up again.

The second rule is to keep sentences short because short sentences contribute to a fast reading pace. Even though I say to keep the sentences short, there should be some differences in length from sentence to sentence, or else it will seem choppy. Here's what not to do:

Too dark to see. I punched blindly. I hit his nose. I hit him again. He covered his face. I kicked him.

If you kept up with this pace, the voice eventually turns monotone in your head because it feels like the same sentence one after another. In order to vary the sentence, you can stick with the periods and adjust the sentence lengths:

I listened. Peered into the eerie dark. A shuffle of feet to the right. Shoes squeak closer. I punched. The bridge of his nose crumbled. He cried into his hands. I kicked him in the gut.

You can also combine the phrases, separating them with a comma. With commas, the flow is still set as if short phrases are continued to being used, but with commas, the pauses are shorter than with periods:

I listened, peering into the eerie dark. A shuffle of feet to the right, his shoes squeaked closer. I punched. The bridge of his nose crumbled, and he cried into his hands. I kicked him in the gut.

Another note to remember is that after a while, punches, kicks and slashes will start look the same, especially if you keep using the same words over and over (kind of like the "said" rule in dialogue). Use different verbs. If the character has a sword or something, you can use lash, or cut; if it's a club, there's crush, crash, dent; there are thousands of words you can use. Sound affects can be a great tool so your audience can hear what's going on as each blow is dealt, and some sound affects can be used as verbs. Basically, because these scenes are pure action, it's great if you incorporated all five senses into the actions. Does someone have the taste of blood in their mouth? Is someone in pain? How bad is it and where? Is there a smell of sweat? All of these can be added nicely into the scene.

Now because action scenes are filled with short sentences, taking turns with the characters, it seems as if each phrase or two should have its own paragraph, but let's face it. That's tedious, and having to break them up after every sentence just breaks the precious flow. In addition, most fight scenes don't have dialogue, unless someone is crying out or grunting, but those don't usually have quotation marks around them. While the scene should definitely not be one huge paragraph of text, you basically have free reign as to how to format it. You can have one or a few sets of action to reaction have its own paragraph, or you could separate the scene by switching who's on the offensive or defensive. You can do anything.

Since the English lesson is over, let's get to the fun part: the research! Don't *aw man* at me! Research is a word I use when I'm searching for something I'm interested in. If I'm not interested in it, I just call it studying. If you are writing a fight scene, you should at

least be a little bit interested in it, right? I'm not going to do the research for you, but I do have some tips.

The first, and practically only, tip I can provide is to switch right to left and vice versa, but the flow of the movement will stay the same.

I cracked his jaw with a closed right fist, and turned on my right heal to kick him with my left.

If you got up and tried this yourself, you'll notice that the entire body, while switching from right to left, will continue to move counterclockwise. It's too hard to start a movement and turn around in the opposite direction. You'd have to plant first, and then switch the flow, making it two different moves (plus if the situation is dire, the character might not have enough time to plant). Study fighting tournaments, or practice in your room. Do whatever you can in order to know what's going on. Most of the weight is on which foot? Is the body straight or bent at the waist? In what direction is the body leaning? I'm sure there are a ton more questions that would need to be answered, but those were just examples of what would need to be answered.

Of course if the character is into an organized style of fighting, you're going to have to research the style specifically. How is their weight thrown around? Is the style more in defense or offense? (Even though most martial arts are bent on the 'self-defense' speech, a lot of them are more in the line of offense than just the practical defense.) Does the style depend more on flexibility than strength? Ask yourself more questions and do your best to answer them.

After doing all of that research, you'll know new terms, but just because you know something, doesn't mean your audience knows. It would probably be best to strictly describe what happens instead of giving the move a name, unless you've already described how the move works before. Just remember that if you keep using the name of the move, it'll start to sound like simple kicks and punches would after a while. If a move is too complicated to be described in a short sentence, then it either needs to be simplified, or not used at all.

Some people preplan the fight scene before actually putting it to paper and others wing it, stopping periodically to see if a combination of moves would work. You can do whatever comes best to you, just as long as you provide your character the appropriate strengths and weakness. This can be difficult to show, especially when writing instead of drawing a comic. With a comic, the audience can see the anguish on the character's face, but when in written form, an author has to describe what happened effectively to get the same reaction from the audience. If the character isn't in any sort of pain during or even after the battle, then the character would seem too strong—practically inhuman.

As I described in "How Much Power is Too Much Power", fight scenes are the time to make use of all factors of weaknesses: natural-born, physical, distraction, environmental, and cancellation. Use the weakness to create more tension as the opponents switch between offensive and defensive. That tension is what audiences are looking forward to, not that your character can take down the most evil villain in the world with the snap of their fingers.

I'm not saying that your character can't win, and easily, it's just as long as there is some thought put into both character's strengths and weaknesses. For example, in *Supernatural* , when Sam was in high school, he was bullied. When he finally went to fight the bully, he beat him easily because even though Sam was smaller, he had formal training, and the bully didn't. The bully was only relying on pure strength and his opponent's fears to get by. Sam didn't even get a scratch during that fight. Did that make Sam too strong? No. It made sense especially since he and his family have to face monsters nearly everyday. Sam had to learn how to fight. Your character can win in many ways; just make sure to accurately gauge both opponent's strengths and weaknesses to make the scene worthwhile.

In addition, I'm also saying that a character, whether an original character or a canon character, can lose. Fan fiction, especially with OCs with major roles in them, get notorious complaints from people

when a canon character, usually highly respectable or popular, loses a battle even when there was a reason as to how and why. When a canon character loses, it's not always because the author is portraying them as a weak fighter, it just could be that the opposition is stronger, or they had a clever strategy, or the canon character was just overwhelmed; the list of what could factor into why the canon character lost a battle could be numerous, even right down to sheer luck. Yes, I don't like seeing my favorite characters lose, or even die either, but if it was reasonable, moved the story along, portrayed another angle of character or plot development, or any other good story-telling reason, then I wouldn't ask the author to change anything if it would change any aspect of their story.

Similar to "How Not to Write Like One", don't use euphemisms. In a scene that is dependent on actions, wording definitely matters. If the character should be seriously wounded, they can't just simply brush it off and keep fighting like it isn't there. An adrenalin rush can't be used every time the character gets hurt, and most serious injury is at a time when not even that would help the character. If the character was hurt, there would be pain obviously, there would also be hesitation, and odds are there would be places left open for attack. It's not shameful to have a character be carried off the battle field at one time and another.

If the character is in pain, describe it, to remind your audience that your character, as strong as you made him or her out to be, can still be hurt.

Blood slithered down my body. The source is burning. It's unbearable! I feel dizzy. Moving my arm just makes it worse. I stumble around. It's getting harder to dodge his oncoming attacks.

The last thing to take note of is the surroundings of the fight. Is the ground smooth or rocky, or maybe it's a forest area? If the fight is taken outside, how's the weather? Rainy? Super hot? Environmental factors may not only be a weakness to your character, as I discussed before, but depending on the conditions, it can either prove to be worse, or be the stroke of luck your character needs to win. If your

character is wounded enough that he's about to drop, if the enemy slips in the mud or trips over a stone, your character can still have a fighting chance. Just remember that that can happen to your character too.

To sum everything up: action before reaction, keep the sentences short, use description of the action, switch between offensive and defensive if the situation calls for it, and make sure to effectively utilize both opponent's strengths and weaknesses, and that's your basic fight scene along with how to make a character a little more developed—physically anyway.

Realistic According to the Universe

Mary-Sues: Writing Realistically. . . According to the Universe

I'm sure I've told you that you have to be as realistic as possible in order for your character to seem, well, real. Believable. Three dimensional. Someone who can practically pop out of your writing or comic and interact with you. The truth is that was half of an exaggeration. Yes, be real, but only as real as the universe it takes place in is. If the universe is more manga-esque or cartoony where the average female can punch a burly person sky-high, and you create a character who doesn't do anything of that sort, or if you as the creator think you can't do that, then your character can become quite plain because you'll restrict yourself. Basically, be as real, or as loose, as the universe is.

If you're a person who constantly makes the, "This is totally unrealistic" comment when reading a story, especially in fan fiction, there is probably a reason for it, and shouldn't be docked down points until all of the attributes are observed.

Realism vs. The Universe

One of the biggest complaints I've read that I've even noted about it as well, are women's breast size. As silly as that is, this one thing raises so many red flags that the female character may be a Mary-Sue. Female characters, especially the more important characters, in original stories or fan fiction, can't have sexual appeal or be endowed in the chest area? Moreover, who's to say that having big breasts are even sexually appealing? (I'm not a guy, so I probably wouldn't understand it even if a guy explained it to me.) I also explained in "Things You Need to Know" that physical description shouldn't matter too much as long as there is some reason behind it. In that part, I said, "They only become MS traits when it's without reason, like having big boobs when the character is only thirteen"; however, if the universe's thirteen year olds have a DD chest

naturally, then you can certainly make your character have a large chest without it having fingers pointing at her. Or him if that's how the universe works.

In the *Naruto* fandom, there are fans that have made female characters, and many of them do have larger than B cup breasts. As much as an inconvenience to having large breasts should be to a female ninja, it's genetics and hormones in food that give them that size, so it's not the character's fault. Besides, you don't hear Tsunade, the biggest breasted ninja around, complaining about her assets. She doesn't even bind them or wear a bra (are there even bras in *Naruto* ?) In fact, you don't hear any of the female characters complaining about their chests!

Also in *Naruto* , even though the majority of these characters are fighting during their missions, they don't wear much armor, and yet those who make fan/original characters without armor get the brunt end of the Mary-Sue Killers for not being real enough. The most armor I've seen on the average canon character are the clothes on their backs, their headbands, and a vest if they've earned that rank. That's it. No one wears flexible chain mail, helmets, some wear kneepads and elbow pads, and only a few wear leg or arm plates. Yet the fans that make characters for their stories have to think about armor in order for their character to seem realistic? If you want more realism in something like this, complain to the creators, not the fans who imitate what they see.

Even the character's background stories, and how it affects the character's personality, can be unrealistic in some universes according to certain psychological studies. Have you really ever met someone who was so shy that they actually fainted (on more than one occasion) whenever the person he or she liked talked to them? Or, a person who seemed to be on a constant sugar-high with no crash? How about someone who has a patience of a saint, and never ever seems to get mad, even in the most frustrating of situations? It's fun to compare your friends to these kinds of characters, but you'll realize that you haven't really met anyone with

those kinds of personalities. None of these examples are realistic character personality traits, and yet used in animated shows. Granted, those characters aren't like that one hundred percent of the time, but are like that most of the time. They are fictional cartoons and aren't supposed to be taken seriously, so writing in those kinds of universe, fan fiction or original fictions, should be looser, than realistic, depending on what kind of story you're writing.

Of course, all of this would also work the other way around. You wouldn't see a guy able to survive on the moon without the space suit on in the real-world kind of story. If you wanted to write in a historical, realistic, universe, then you definitely need to do your research. Japan, where there would be ninjas, you would have to do extensive research on the clothes, weapons, and why they needed ninjas. Unbelievably, kunai knives weren't made to be thrown, and ninjas can't disappear in a puff of smoke. They were more spies than assassins. Guns in the US civil war era were wildly inaccurate, hence the saying, "Don't shoot until you see the whites of their eyes," otherwise it was just plain luck that someone actually hit someone at a farther distance. There are Native American tribes who honor homosexual people and called them two-souls because they had both the feminine and masculine aspect in their soul. I could list on and on that even some realistic historical fiction overlook them, but I think you get the message.

In realistic fiction, you have to stick with the facts. Period. In unrealistic fiction, do what Mark Twain said, "Get your facts first, and then you can distort them as much as you please." In addition, even though fan fiction is based on already published media, the fans still have to study whatever the universe they're going to be writing.

I've said before that Mary-Sues are often unrealistic in one way or another, but are they Sues only because of the universe it takes place where, in actuality, they fit in? If so, then the character you're calling a Sue isn't a Sue. The character is just unrealistic when compared to the real-life universe.

When is a Character or Story "Realistic"?

Basing on what the universe is like is the question of realism. The universe is the base, the soil—a fictional "Earth". The story is the tree, and the characters are the leaves. The universe itself has to have a type of environment that's balanced. What's the history? How much pollution is there? Is it mostly rainy, or is it dry? What are the communities like? Are there any major religions? What are the taboos and superstitions like? How does all of this and more affect what's happening in the present? Does this affect the story or the characters?

The last question's answer should be an obvious 'yes'. The universe, no matter what it is, will always have an affect on the story and characters.

Study how the world in which you create, or whatever was created, works, and then work on the plot. What's the villain planning, and how will it be stopped? How does the guy get the girl (or guy if he swings that way)? What is your idea of a good story? Work out a timeline or something. After you at least have a basic idea of what you want to happen, work on the characters (refer to "Things You Need to Know"). Balance the universe, the story, and the characters. Once the tree is in full bloom, the fruit will grow, telling you that your story is good, and "realistic", no matter how many physics laws are broken in your universe.

As long as you think your story's good, that's all that really matters, but it doesn't hurt to listen to a critic occasionally, especially when it doesn't make sense from the reader's point of view. You as the creator know all of the answers, and so leaving the readers clueless even after the ending is bad. If you can't fit a major detail in the story, and it's an important detail, that tends to be a bad sign. Don't write the story with plot holes and missing information, even if you plan to write a handbook for the book/series (i.e.: *Twilight* , by Stephenie Meyers). Even if it's tiring, and boring, think of your readers. The details and explanations, no matter how mundane, are important to someone. It's better that it be in the story itself than in a handbook.

If everything in the universe, the story and your characters are explained, it's "realistic" enough.

When the Real-Life Universe Isn't Real Enough

If the otherwise fictional story takes place in the real-world universe, then the laws of physics have to be followed just as the characters have to be limited to being realistic. This still especially applies when the story is claiming to be the real-world, even when there are additives to it (i.e.: magic, vampires and werewolves, monsters, and other fantasy and superstition inspired fiction).

Because I am tired of picking on the *House of Night* series, I'm going to pick on the *Twilight* series by Stephenie Meyers, merely because it serves as a better example.

The *Twilight* universe is set in the real-world with the addition of vampires, werewolves (although none actually made an appearance), and shape shifters (the werewolf wannabes). I have read the four book series, not including the story of Bree, nor the leaked Edward's point of view version, and I have looked through the handbook guide, and it was merely mindless entertainment. I liked reading it, I just wouldn't read it if I wanted to read something more serious and in depth. The story had marvelous conceivability, an original twist on the vampire mythology (despite that a lot of people despise the sparkly attribute), good potential in the villains, and, despite it seemingly a cliché idea, what would have been a great love triangle, except that Meyers could not execute the story at all well. At some parts it was obviously tried too hard and other parts there wasn't enough trying.

The universe wasn't at all the bad part—it was practically our world anyway—the physics laws stayed mostly in tact, and the surroundings had a great influence on the plot and characters. It's just that the story wasn't fleshed out, the characters were ill-described whether actually describing them through adjectives, or describing them through action, but what really killed the story was

the writing style, mostly because Meyers made her characters separate pieces of stereotypes.

Edward Cullen, the vampire heartthrob, acted like he hated Bella in the beginning, spied on her when she was sleeping for months, and probably followed her around most of the twenty-four hours in a day before he told her he was watching her. He dumped her on various occasions for his own reasons without hearing her out, got extremely jealous when other guys were in the picture with Bella, all the while villainizing himself just because he's a vampire and that he's killed people before. Despite all of that (great flaws!), Bella thinks he's the perfect gentleman and loves him, ruining her and Edward in one fell swoop.

Jacob Black, the thought-to-be-werewolf-but-actually-a-type-of-shape shifter, is the seemingly perfect boyfriend: cute, cuddly, into cars and mechanics, and actually cares, despite all of the stolen kisses because he knows that Edward is practically carrying a picket sign saying "I'm emotionally abusive and am self-absorbed" and Bella, the one he initially loves, is suffering. However, Bella just manipulates him for information, emotional support knowing his feelings for her, but didn't tell him that it wouldn't work out between them that way from the beginning, and just used him for her own gratification. Then, as if it's supposed to erase all of his heartache, he imprints with Bella's daughter. Therefore, overall, Jacob Black is just a pushover.

Then there's Isabella "Bella" Swan, the human who has no interest in other human beings, so just ignores the people who immediately befriend her. She criticizes herself constantly, calling herself either too plain or too ugly, despite all the people in her life telling her that she's beautiful, or the fact that people had taken an immediate interest in her, and is overall defenseless and weak in the physical aspect as well as socially and mentally. She also manipulates people, including Edward in order to gain a sexual favor (though it didn't work on Edward), for her own benefit. Basically, Bella is an overly lovesick, damsel in distress, teenager.

Since most of the story is in Bella's perspective, you can probably guess how badly the story would be. So much self-angst, self-criticism (which all too suddenly disappears as soon as she awoke as a vampire), and romance, with not nearly enough action especially when there were supposed to be fighting scenes because Edward didn't want to put her in the line of fire. A pathetic attempt at mental cracking in the form of hearing her beloved's voice every time she did something dangerous, and a love triangle that wasn't at all a love triangle because all she ever thought about was Edward, and becoming a vampire. All of this affects the overall writing style, so it's average; something you would find on preteen writing sites. Also, some of the more supposedly powerful villains weren't powerful at all. Victoria was the real threat. James was just the spark, and Laurent became a chew toy. Not even the Volturi, the oldest vampires in existence, who set up the rules and enforced them with the help of the chosen vampires with special abilities, were even real villains. They were just a broken record of threats.

Then there's the overall writing style. If you haven't figured it out, the description between characters, action were mediocre at best, but there was better description in the setting. Interactions between characters were either in the range of hardly having any important interaction, to super cheesy, as if you were watching one of those 1920's romance films with over rehearsed lines, as if just one sentence would make all the years of hurt just disappear. I appreciated the use of a thesaurus; however, Meyers overdid it a lot with words hardly anyone uses, especially not a seventeen-year-old girl.

To summarize it, the universe is solid because Meyers hardly changed it. There is a tree, but it's in the middle of rotting because there's so much she could have done with the plot, but didn't. There are hardly any leaves at all, and they are brown and cracked because only a few characters were developed, but the writing style was filled with exaggeration and euphemisms that it made even the more decently described characters bad. Even with all of the potential the books had, there are no fruit, unless you count that

Meyers earned millions of dollars on this story and is now rich beyond all reason, then money would equate to fruit. Therefore, because of these errors the story and characters are deemed unrealistic in this real-life universe, and would make the story as a whole Mary-Sue.

Although, in the example of the *Twilight* series, I don't think that the characters are Mary-Sues per se, because if they were stripped from the story and the writing style, then they are all balanced, it's just that the priorities are skewed in terms of interaction between characters in the plot, and there's a major issue with the overall writing style. The main problem was the writing style, and that ruined the story.

In conclusion, there are times when realism is called for, and other times where you have to write in a more loose style. If you keep restricting to the safe-zone of absolute realism, despite how hard it is writing in a realistic way when constantly questioning yourself if something is real or not, you'll have a tougher time writing in looser kinds of universes where the realistic physics laws are often broken, whether for fantasy or comedic purposes. Readers, you too need to read in both styles so you can tell the difference between realism, and the fact that most fiction does not take place in a realistic universe, so most characters shouldn't be called Mary-Sue or Gary-stu because of the universe their lives takes place in. The authors don't have to state what kind of universe it is, it's pretty simple to figure it out as you read.

How to Review Character Sheets

Everyone has there own way of making character sheets, whether you include them in stories, or just keep them as personal references. Some deem the looks more of a top priority than the skills or hobbies. Most include the "Likes and Dislikes" tab while others forgo it altogether. For describing how to analyze character sheets, I will be using my own personal template as an example.

Character sheets aren't needed. If you include it, it's usually the first sign of underdevelopment.

That's not necessarily true. Lots of people make character sheets whether if it's as simple as the name, age, and looks, and others make it more complex, but they're used to help the author keep the facts straight while writing the story. It's when people post the character sheets online that people make a big deal over it. When people put up the character sheet in the first page, what usually happens is that the author doesn't take the time to introduce or describe the character, especially when there's a picture in the biography. The authors end up thinking that the character sheet is a substitute for description. However, if you make a character sheet and take the time to introduce and describe the character as needed, there isn't a problem with having a character sheet published (there are some sites like Fiction Press and that explicitly state that character sheets aren't allowed). Some people like looking at them, and some don't. For those that don't like seeing them, just skip it— don't automatically assume that the story is going to poorly written.

Below is the kind of character sheet I use along with what each tab means. I write all of the information as if the storyline hasn't been started yet because things can change at any time, and the only use for a character sheet is to keep the basic facts about the character straight. I also don't write what's going to happen in the story

because there are some things that can be told, more accurately, through the story telling. Character sheets aren't accurate indicators of Mary-Sueism because you also need to read the actual story for the plot, and need to view the writing style itself. It's not all about the characters, but they are good to view to see if the creator has plans for development for the character, and whether or not the character fits into the universe. This can work for the main characters, supporting characters and the minor characters if one wishes to.

Character Sheet Template

" **The Title of the Story"** (If you don't have a permanent title, than either put whatever you have, or 'Untitled')

Universe: If fanfiction, what series? Is it an alternate universe or a crossover? If Original or alternate universe, which of these universes is it:

I) The Real-World: a story based on strictly of the real-world universe. It can take place in the past, present, or future provided there is thorough research on technology, politics, economy, etc. Having odd hair, eye and skin color are not allowed here, unless there are dyes and colored contacts.

(II) The Real-World Plus: a story based on the Real-World universe, but contains supernatural forces, like the existence of aliens, vampires, ghosts, or faeries, etc., or the available use of magic. Having odd hair, eye and skin color are not allowed here, unless there are dyes and colored contacts.

(III) Alternate: while all or most of the physics laws remain unbroken, it's not the Real-World universe. This would include worlds like from *The Lord of the Rings,* by Tolkien, or *Ender's Game* , by Scott Card. The use of magic or the existence of otherworldly creatures can apply here. Naturally odd hair, eye, and skin color can also be applied here.

(IV) Complete Fiction: stuff that is mostly or completely implausible, compared to the Real-Life universe, but makes for a good story. This includes most cartoons or anime like *Bleach,* by Kobe or *Demon Diary,* by Lee Yun Hee, but it's only the more far-fetched or extreme plots. Some anime and manga would belong to the other universes. *Storm Hawks* would belong here too. Naturally odd hair, eye and skin color can be applied here.

Describe a little of the setting: time period, what's the main news (war, famine, etc.), is it the normal Real-World universe? What's different from the normal Real-World universe, if there's a difference?

Names plus Aliases: This is a given, but it should look something like, John "Jo" Doe. I don't list why I chose the name, because most of the time I don't have a reason; I choose it by random within reasonable boundaries. The aliases can have some information attached to it, like if it's a superhero name or something of more importance than just a nickname.

Species or Nationality: This is pretty much a given. If the person is a human, list the nationality. If the person is not a human, put down what his species is. This goes well with shinigami, vampires, etc. If the vampire, shinigami, or any human-like creature has a nationality, you can put that in. If I decide that a human becomes a vampire, I don't put that down because it's part of the actual story telling. Character sheets are about the universe and the character, not the plot.

Age: List the exact age. If the character is immortal, tell the age range the character looks like.

Height: Feet, inches, centimeters, meters, just whatever measurement under a mile (unless the character is over a mile tall).

Weight: Whatever measurement that works well. You can use pounds, kilograms, etc.

Skin: The Fitzpatrick Skin Tone Scale would be great if people knew of it, but people can use the roman numerals, and describe the color of skin. If the character isn't exactly human, therefore has a bizarre skin tone, than you can just say what color the skin is.

Hair: Is it curly, wavy, or straight? What is the color? What is the length? In addition, what style is it usually in?

Eyes: What are the color, and whether or not the character needs corrective lenses? If the character needs corrective lenses, what kind of glasses does the character have? Is it thick, thin, for reading, or everyday vision problems. Is the character near or far sighted?

Clothes: What kinds of clothes does the character have and likes? If the character is some sort of superhero or villain, what is the outfit?

Family: Who's deceased, who's alive, and who of their blood relatives is the character living with or often visits?

Friends: What's the name, and how long has the character known them. If the character doesn't have any friends, that is an option too.

Intended Partner: You don't have to answer this, especially if you don't want to give anything away. This is optional. If the story is within a fanfiction, and the intended partner is a canon character, then all that is needed is a name unless the fanfiction is an alternate universe. If the story is original or an alternate universe, then just put down the character's name along with how the character would come to know him or her during the story. If there's going to be a love triangle, square, etc. and the author doesn't want to give away anything, list the characters as you would if it's fanfiction or original/alternate universe. Keep note, if the intended partner is just one character, it can still change during the writing process—a creator's mind is often filled with different paths.

Weapons: I'm referring to physical weapons like knives or bombs, not magic, psychic powers or martial art styles. This one is not

always needed especially in the normal universe, so it is optional. If the character doesn't have any weapons, just put "None".

Hobbies: On the character's spare time, what does he or she do? It doesn't necessarily have to be anything he or she is passionate about or is good at, it's just what the character does when they have time.

Skills: Does the character have any unusual talents? Alternatively, can do something that hardly anyone else in the world can do? This is where the magic and psychic stuff can come in, but it doesn't have to be that extreme. This is also, where the author can describe fighting style, strengths and the conditions under how their powers or skills wouldn't work—in other words, their weaknesses.

Goals: The character's own goals and you as the author's goals for the character. What lesson do you want this character to learn? This shows that you do have some form of development in mind, but whether the character follows their own goals, or the authors, can only be told through the story. It should look something like:

*For the character: To get vengeance.

*For the author: For him/her to learn how to trust others.

History: The basic and quick run through on the history of the character up to the start of the story. We don't need to know every place the character's been. If the character is immortal, what's one thing that changed the character's immortal life? As I mentioned before, I write down anything, stopping at the beginning of the story, so you can write out the character's life until that point where the story starts. It can be several paragraphs long or just one paragraph —it's up to the creator.

Additional Notes: This is for anything else the author feels is important to add on to the character's profile. Is there more information on the universe? Is there anything to add on the intended partner situation? What is the culture like? What is considered

"beautiful" or "healthy" in that culture? Explain that you do have more information and thoughts, but didn't want to reveal the story. Anything.

What to Keep Note Of

The universe is one of the biggest things to keep in mind. Some things may be acceptable in one world and be utterly impossible for the other. Not everything is going to be 100 percent realistic, especially if the universe is going to be in the Complete Fiction where cats can talk, and people can float from their own will. In the culture, maybe females that are more sought have a flat-chest than the bigger breasted. Maybe they state a similar culture by name, and you don't know what it's like; in order for you to accurately critique the character sheet, you must look up whatever you don't know. They did enough naming the similar culture rather than describing all of it.

If you know me and my opinion of Mary-Sues well enough, you know that looks aren't a big factor. This includes the name, age, height, weight, skin, eyes, and clothes. The main things you need to look at are if any of these doesn't fit the culture or the universe. If the character has expensive looking clothes, but is dirt poor, that should raise some red flags, but other than that it's not a big deal really. If it all fits, then check it off and move on.

The family, friends and intended partner are things that can only be described through story-telling, so it's not a factor at all in Mary-Sueism, but it's just good to know them.

Weapons, hobbies, and skills are also big aspects to look at. Not every character will have a weapon, but all should have hobbies and skills. If the weapon fits with the culture, or the character has a big interest in another culture's weapons, then it fits, and it's not a big deal. Like I said in hobbies, it doesn't necessarily have to be something the character is good at or is passionate about, but it still shows what the character likes doing when they have spare time. Of the three, it's skills that have to be looked at on a deeper level. It

shows both the talents/strengths and weaknesses. If you've read "How Much Power is Too Much Power?" then you already know what to look for, but I'll summarize it.

It's easier to list strengths than weaknesses, and that is particularly why some people think that character sheets are underdeveloped; however there are those who know the weaknesses, but don't want to list them and leave it to the story-telling to do that. In the skills section, you need to be able to learn how to read between the lines a bit. For example, for my character Blithe "Zusanna" Sutcliff, intended for a Black Butler fan fiction, I put:

"She's able to hear bells (described more in detail under History), use magic, perform divination, and can speak and write in over 150 languages so she can obsess over her books and research. She is more comfortable in a long to medium range fights."

A lot of the critique is going to be asking questions and assuming, which is about all you can do when you don't have the actual story in front of you. From what I wrote under Blithe's skills section, the only form of 'weakness' that is shown is in the last sentence. That means if someone gets within a closer range of fighting, she might not have control of the situation. While it wasn't in a more direct phrase, stating her exact weakness, the reader can still assume she wouldn't be alright in hand-to-hand. I also didn't put in what kind of magic she is able to use, because I meant it in general. She has knowledge about all forms of magic, and can use a little of everything, but of course there are weaknesses for all forms of magic—she wouldn't be able to use talismans or charms if they aren't within reach, or if her concentration is broken somehow she wouldn't be able to accurately perform spells and such. There is another form of weakness, though not in the form of fighting with. "Obsess over her books and research" can be just that—an obsession that consumes her life so much that she has no sympathy for another being, thus no skill in human interaction.

The vaguer it is, the more for a call of questions and assumptions should be in the critique.

For the history of the character there is just one thing that needs to be looked at, which is length. If it's a long history, then there will be a lot of explanation and would be important in explaining all the aspects in the character sheet, thus is very important to note. It shows only a fraction of the writing style, and it shows the character's personality. If the history is short, it generally means that either nothing super important happened, or will be explained more clearly in the actual story-telling and didn't want to spoil what happened.

The goals are semi-important, though brief, because it shows two planes of thought, the character him or herself, and the author. What the author wants may not be what the character wants, and thus shows that the author has plans for the character to change and develop. It shows that the author has thought or is thinking about development. No character sheet that I have seen has this, so if the character sheet you're critiquing doesn't have this, ask the author what the character wants and what lesson the author wants the character to learn.

The additional note, depending whether it's filled out or not, can be important. Whatever it is, it needs to be included in the overall thought of the character. It could be an addition to any of the above sections.

The last thing you must keep in mind during all of this is that the character isn't a story. Even if the character seems Mary-Sueish just by looking at the sheet, the plot and the writing style can change that for the better. There are just some things that only writing the story can describe.

The Critiquing

First, read everything before you start your critique. Writing as you go will probably not work.

Most of the critiquing will be based on asking questions and assuming. Character sheets don't mean anything, they are just made

for the creator's fun, and if the viewers want to know more about the character on one page. The creator is going to assume you've been reading, or are going to be reading whatever they create, thus will find out the details and the needed explanation.

The first assumption is to take everything literally. "Beating post" can be assumed as someone getting physically beat up every day, which is what you'll comment on, even if the creator meant more on an emotional or mental kind of abuse in the story. By commenting on the physical abuse, it shows the creator that they weren't clear enough in the character sheet.

Take note of where there might be flaws and praise it. Even if the creator didn't mean it that way, it shows that, as the viewer, you like where it's going and to keep it up. If all there is are flaws though, then you have to point out all the strengths and positives in the character. Explain how a character can't be all bad and weak just as a character can't have strengths without weaknesses.

Finally, highlight the conclusion, Is the character headed for Mary-Sueism? It shouldn't be a direct yes or no, especially because this isn't the story where more things are explained and developed. Point out if the character sheet had vague phrasing, a lack of information, or if there doesn't seem to be a plan for development. Then, state what is liked about the character (depth, amusing, fits with the universe, etc.). Lastly, if the character was written in a story (you make up a random mini-plot) as is from what you've interpreted, state if the character would seem like a Mary-Sue, not by name, but through description. If the person wants to know if the character is a Mary-Sue, you can be blunter about it, but if they don't want to hear the term "Mary-Sue" then don't use it, just continue with the phrases "lack/good development", "good balance between flaws and strengths", "over exaggerated phrases" and other such tips.

Here are a couple of examples from =chocolateangel97's "Which is the Sue? Redone" (art/Which-is-the-Sue-Redone-257634563). This piece is a parody, and was meant as a test. She was looking to see if

people would think the characters were Sues or not. It would be best if you read the bios before looking back here, or find my comment.

Yuki Harshi

1. *Yuki: Aside from the family name (which could be just a harmless typo) there are more. There is a lack of proper description with her bloodline technique; does she have to touch them, or just get close enough for her chakra to reach them? And while it's a unique ability to think about, I think it would be better if she had to touch a certain point of a person's body in order for her to gain the knowledge of her opponent's weakness. In addition, even if she knew the weakness, she still would have to read up on the chemicals and train in order to utilize her advantage. I don't think "it came naturally" would be an available option for her; however, considering that most families with a bloodline technique are usually extreme with their private training, that could just be a comparison between her and her family. Like I said, there is a lack of explanation here (which would be best explained within the actual story).*

I immediately start off with her skills and how there isn't enough explanation of how her bloodline works. Between asking questions about the technique, I inserted some suggestions, but they were just that. Harmless suggestions based on what limited description she gave. I pointed out the many options "it came naturally" could have meant, either comparing the character with other students, or the character with her family, and then repeated that there is a lack of explanation, in addition to admit that it would be better explained in the actual story.

People calling her a bully because she states what she 'sees' (mixed up from touching to seeing?) could be a good indicator of a flaw, especially if the technique isn't understood. It also gives it a good start of where she needs to change. Just because a person has a certain chemical, doesn't mean they can't change. Or maybe she had a family or close friend who had certain chemicals and ended up being a crazy serial killer, betraying her trust? And that chemical just so happens to be common in all people, but it depends on how

much, so she worries and doesn't want to get close?The lazy and undedicated part is gold, however the 'No one understands her because she's the best' is over the top. You could have stated that they didn't understand how she could be strong, and yet appear lazy and undedicated. And wanting to show people that she does care is a good indication that she wants to change, and that the writer has plans for character development.

Here, I praised the flaws and the mention of development of the character wanting to change, while I also point out the odd sentence "No one understands her because she's the best" as over the top. It was an obvious exaggeration. If you refer back to my guide "How Not to Write Like One" you'll see that exaggerations and euphemisms are a bad thing in character sheets, and this is precisely why.

I think you kept Neji in character even though it was one sentence. Before his epiphany, he would probably let people bully her, and probably bully her himself. After that event, however, I can't really imagine him discouraging every person he sees putting down Yuki, so it's good you kept him in character even though you didn't state whether or not he found out his father wasn't murdered against his will.

If it's in fan fiction, and there is a mention of a canon character in action, state whether the character was in character or not, along with why. Here, I also questioned when such and such happened because Neji did change almost drastically when he found out his father wasn't blatantly betrayed. *I understand killing people in order to keep the family secret, but a baby is an exaggeration, right? The baby wouldn't remember anyway, so there would be no need to kill it.*

Here, I called on the exaggeration, and that killing babies really weren't needed, especially if she's a native to the peaceful village of Konoha.

Conclusion: *Yuki is a Mary-Sue but only due to a minimal lack of explanation in her bloodline technique, and for some over*

exaggerated phrases; however has good depth and already shows potential for character development if it were written in the story as is. Finally, as the conclusion, I did state that Yuki is a Mary-Sue, but explained why it wasn't directly the character itself. It was the phrases and lack of explanation that did the character in. I also stated the potential the character has in a story if it was written as is.

For the next example, the character took on another angle of what could be found in a lack of explanation and development.

Kogata Takaminjo

2. *Kogata:* *Since her gold eye color, purple hair, and dark skin are common in her village, the odd coloring wouldn't count, especially so since the Naruto universe is generally colorful. On the other hand, for being overweight for her short stature and having a "juicy sought after curves that are great for child birth"; however in some cultures, being pudgy is considered healthy, so curves (as in rolls) and great for child birth (as in seemingly healthy) could still apply without Mary-Sueism. The village itself and the cultural standing needs to be described if you want to continue to use that phrase though. I won't even comment on the D breasts since Tsunade has bigger boobs and weighs less.*

I commented on the odd coloration and looks because I saw some other comment on them in a slightly more negative way. For this, you have to keep in mind that this was the *Naruto* universe, so people could be even slightly fat, and still weigh less than the average normal-weight person. I also quoted the curves part because sometimes in a culture it is sought after, but I also stated that the culture of the village was never described.

Since character sheets are usually taken literally, "beating post" may indicate physical harm. Some mothers do result to this, and some fathers may let them, but it's always better to indicate it clearly since it can be taken as her just being the "scapegoat" which also happens in families. As a result of this kind of abuse, she may think that she still loves them because she was made to feel that way; "because

they are her family she has to love them no matter what" kind of way. Because it's the female doing most of the abusing, despite the "beating post" statement I'm going to assume that most of it is emotional and mental instead of physical, which would reinforce the previous sentence of Kogata being forced to feel love for her abusers.

I already explained about the "beating post" statement earlier in this guide, so I won't explain again.

Since I don't recognize who The Killer Bee and Omoi are, I can't comment on this; however her fantasizing about being rescued or being the rescuer is common.

I admit when I don't know about something, and know I can't go into depth with it.

Conclusion: *Kogata remains undetermined until some phrases and the culture of the village are cleared up; however if it were to stay like this, she would be a Mary-sue with no plan for character development. Basically the only goal the character has is to be rescued.*

As the conclusion, I rated Kogata as undetermined because it's good overall; it's just the problem of lack of information and no indication of her going to develop. Between Yuki and Kogata, I think a lack of information is better than over exaggerated phrases.

The way these critiques are done, is basically starting up conversations. By asking questions, you're compelling the creator to want to answer them, either through directly answering the questioner, or through the story.

Once the critique is submitted, accept that there is nothing more you can do. It's the creator's choice whether or not to follow your suggestions or critiques, so don't take it to heart whether you check up later and see that there are no changes to the character sheet, story, or other forms of art.

She Banged the Love Shebang: Part 1

She Banged the Love Shebang

Part 1: The Scenarios

Whether it's in an action-packed bring-to-justice horror-mystery or in a feminine girl-drama novel, who doesn't like a bit of romance in the mix? That is, only if it's well-developed, and well-written romance. Let's face it, I've read stories with "romance" in the selected genre, and it didn't feel like a romance, or even remotely romantic to me. Two characters meet, it's love at first sight and they act as if they've known each other for years. They kiss, end up in bed immediately upon that first kiss, and then they get married to live happily ever after. When, in real life, has that ever happened with positive consequences?

Yes, writing stories are supposed to be fictional, so a few instances of unrealism is bound to be in the story, but do people want to read a rushed-love where there are no conflicts, yelling matches, or questions of doubt? I certainly don't.

Unfortunately, even though most stories aren't as bad as that, the romance genre (in the amateur world at least) is taking hits, and lots of them, for three main reasons: (1) the characters come off as underdeveloped, in other words, a Mary-Sue, (2) the plots are clichéd, and (3) the appearance of sex scenes.

Starting with the characters, I've already written a guide on how to make a character and develop them, but because of the romance theme, I have to add something just to quickly clear it up. For the fan fiction writers and fan fiction readers, not all OCs who are paired up with a canon character, or even more than one character, are Mary-Sues. If you've read my other guides, you'll probably have figured out the Mary-Sues come from things deeper than looks or plot devices. If someone decides to pair up an OC with a canon, that is

what they want to write. Other people enjoy reading them too, so there isn't a lack of an audience to worry about. As long as there are no false advertisements, or a lack of information on the pairing, there is no reason for a comment full of bashing toward the author, the character, or the story simply because you don't like OC and canon pairings at all. It's not as if you paid money to read it.

For the original storywriters and readers, not all of the main characters, of either gender, which happens to get the person they want, or end up in multiple relationships (maybe at the same time) during the entire story are Mary-Sues either.

In order to determine Sueism, there needs to be an analytical thought process of multiple factors besides the characters themselves along with the plot. If it was just those two, I can safely say that all of the books I've ever read probably had Mary-Sues as main characters. The universe, writing style, the use of the Hero Cycle also come into play along with other smaller factors, but that's for another guide.

Romance, in general, means that there is going to be a developing romantic bond between two or more characters. There doesn't have to be any kissing, sex, or even any "I love you" talk for a story to have a romantic factor. The feelings, action and reactions are enough of an assertion that there are strong feelings in the air. Those feelings don't necessarily have to be returned with an ironclad hand of commitment either, however I think for the story to positively have a romance tag on it, the feelings have to be returned in some form, whether it's for pure or impure purposes is all up to what you want to write.

So even though there is a wide range of what is considered "romance" a ton of people complain about over-used plots. Do not worry about writing with a clichéd plot. Don't even worry about being original. Just write what you want, and write it to the best of your ability. If you try too hard, your story will end up bland whether it's a clichéd or original. Meyers spun the vampire thread and ended up with some original ideas, but wasn't written well because she was so

focused on Bella and Edward, trying so hard to keep the tension and angst that she forgot about the other aspects of a good story.

Besides, tons of people still like cliché romances, including me. Just as I've stated in my other Mary-Sue guides, as long as there is character and plot development, the language fit the characters, and clear explanations pertaining to the plot and emotions, then it should be fine. Let me talk about the over-used plots anyway, and give you some tips. They aren't necessarily restraining, but, if anything, it'll give you more material to think about. I have a couple categories with multiple plots, but for the sake of simplicity, I'll name them by the pairing of characters or the scenario. Each scenario will bring up something different, but it will probably be best if you keep all scenarios in mind even when you're only writing about one.

Forbidden Fruits

Best Friends

The first on my Forbidden Fruits category are the Best Friends, or Roommates. Why is this considered 'Forbidden Fruit'? It's simply because in most mindsets of the stories I've read, the character cannot fall in love with his or her best friend or roommate. It isn't supposed to happen, or is wrong to have these feelings for this person, opposite gender or not. Moreover, when they do accept these feelings, they are afraid of telling the person because they don't want to ruin what they already have a close, or at least a mutual in trusting, friendship.

This has been written many times, and it has been written so many times that I've seen people claim that it doesn't happen. Let me clear that up right now: all of these love stories, with all of these different pairings of people, have happened before, and will continue to happen. It's not just the Best Friends plot, it's all of the plots I will be talking about, plus more. So if you say that it's unrealistic, or that it's never happened happily, it's most likely because you haven't experienced that kind of love before or seen it (whether due to personal experience, friends, or in the media).

I have fallen in love with my best friend (not to mention that she's also a woman, but I digress), and I was in high school. Just because teenagers are young, doesn't mean that they can't feel actual love. What makes teenagers so different from adults is that teenagers sometimes set too high of an expectation, and when they are let down, they don't know how to handle an emotional pain. Therefore, a rejection can feel like a death sentence to some, especially if they've never actually been hurt before. After the first few hurts, they'll learn how to deal with pain in some way, from starting a new hobby to trying drugs and alcohol.

There isn't much advice I can give you for this kind of story; the only complaint is that it's over-used, but you don't have to worry about it. If the characters are teenagers, make them go through major emotional pains, and if the characters are adults with jobs, and college, along with other stress factors, nothing beats some sexual tension. Even if you don't plan on writing any sex scenes, it would probably be helpful to read the section about how to write sex scenes below, but, for now, let's move on to the next pairing.

Adultery

It's strange that the only complaint I've found on this scenario is that people somehow believe that spouses can't fall in love with another person besides who they are married to. Well, guess what? It happens. Whether the spouse is a cheater or not, it happens, but it's usually when there is something wrong or missing from the marriage. If I came home to frequent arguments, I would be looking for someone else too, to talk with.

For those that say that people, shouldn't be going after married men or women, well they shouldn't, but if the marriage is having problems, is that really going to be a topic of discussion? It's easy to miss the wedding band even if someone wears it at it's appropriate place, but what if during doubt, the spouse takes off the ring and puts it in their pocket? There's no way a person would be able to tell if the person is already married.

Of those that do find out, has the third wheel already fallen in love so much that they would be willing to fight for the one who's married? It shouldn't be too hard especially if the marriage is already starting to have holes. There are a few ways how this could end, and that's for you to find out through reading stories, but if you do plan on writing this scenario there is a few things to think about.

Decide if you want the marriage to have problems, whether it's major or minor. I've already described what could happen when there is a problem, but it can happen when there isn't a clear problem either. The husband and wife could be very happy, but one of them is unsatisfied because they just simply like having more than one partner, so either because they're too afraid to ask, or they know their spouse wouldn't agree to it, so goes exploring on their own to have sex, thoroughly cheating in secret. The person still loves his or her spouse with a full heart, but likes having flings on the side. Eventually the other spouse could suspect what's been going on, and either refuse to believe it and secretly feel depressed, or confront their spouse about it, probably arousing arguments. If the spouse ends up feeling depressed, they could also be subject to cheating if they found someone they begin to like.

After deciding whether the marriage will have conflicts or not, well, it's really your story. Adultery in a story could go a thousand ways. The spouses can stick together and get marriage counseling, they could live off cheating on each other, and I could go on. I've said all that I want to say about this.

Teacher and Student, Master and Pupil

I absolutely adore reading these kinds of stories. It's probably why I haven't stopped reading the *Vampire Academy* series as of yet, or that I hung on the *House of Night* series until after the teacher died. Even though I love the thought of loving the person you admire because of their strength, knowledge, wisdom and the likes, I can admit when things have gone too far, or isn't explained.

The biggest complaint is the pairing choice, that it "doesn't happen", but alas, like I've said before, it has, and continues, to happen. The second complaint is if there is sex in it, and if there is, that the characters "could have waited". Well, part of the tension is going to be sexual, with or without sex, and even though it's illegal, has that ever stopped real teachers having sex with their students? Those that were caught were labeled as sex offenders, yes, but what of those that haven't been caught. What would there lives continue to be like? So having sex can be a probable factor depending on who the characters are, how they normally behave, the risks, and if the student (normally) seems emotionally committed enough to want to have sex. In addition, in some countries, or at least in some states in the U.S.A., it's legal to marry your teacher as long as the parental consent forms are filled out, according to an article I read online less than a year ago. As for having sex after that, I don't know.

Aside from being caught, each character should have their own dilemma to deal with. Actually, I can give this advice with all of the pairings, so keep this in mind, period. With most romance stories, there is an internal problem between the two love-interests, and an external problem away from each other. For example, the characters could be contemplating on having sex, even arguing about it, while the student's ex keeps begging to come back, and the teacher has a debt to pay to the mafia. They have a problem together, and they have a problem separate from the relationship.

Specific to this type of pairing, think about the law. Even if the student graduates, or if the teacher suddenly gets fired, and if they just kiss in front of everybody, there will still be an investigation for any prior secret meetings. If you decide to have their secret be kept until it's safe, at least wait a couple weeks, or a month. Parents, or at least most parents, wouldn't just accept it either. If they find out, whether the teacher makes the student happy or not, they would most likely report it to the police; however if the parents care about image, they might keep it quiet, threaten the teacher, and monitor their child more closely, move away, or just beat or kill the teacher.

Sometimes, being arrested is less shameful than having people find out about their child's secret relationship.

If the public finds out the relationship, and after the investigation, court, etc., how will people treat the teacher and student? If the student is male, his bros might pat his back for "tapping that"; however, if the student is female, people might call her a whore or a slut, even if there was proof of no sexual misconduct. The teacher wouldn't be able to teach again, he or she would probably have to register in a sex offender list and introduce themselves to their neighbors as a sex offender. The teacher would be shunned, possibly for life. If there was a crime targeting little children, even though the "sexual misconduct" was towards an older teenager, the teacher would be on top of the suspect list.

Obviously, I have a lot to say about this, but you get the gist of what I'm trying to say. If it's illegal, there will be a ton more problems along with the romance.

Homosexual

Unbelievably, there are some countries where it is illegal, or dangerous, to recognize yourself as a homosexual. In Africa alone, there are quite a few countries where being a homosexual can literally mean the death penalty, while other countries can have a person deemed a homosexual, or engaging in sexual acts with the same gender, can send the person to prison for about ten years. There are only a few countries in Africa where they have laws protecting LGBT people, and only one country, South Africa, where they legalized same-sex marriages as equal unions to heterosexual marriages. However, even South Africa can be dangerous.

Men" taught" lesbians how to be a woman by raping them, or were beaten and even killed. In late 2011, there had been a series of murders targeting gay men, and the police didn't do anything about it, say it wasn't a doing of possibly one or more killers. They didn't acknowledge it as a serious crime. It's still going on even in 2012, and the police are still ignoring it.

Even in the seemingly safest of places where any sort of violence is a crime, violent discrimination still happens. Does that mean the homosexual characters need to be beaten to seem more realistic in fiction? No, you don't need to go that far if you don't want to. Just know the area, the culture, laws, other minor characters, and the main characters. Aside those, treat the story as you would any other hetero-romance, although the type of drama might be different.

Polygamy

I haven't read even one of these types of romances, but I want to. Unfortunately, people have the wrong idea about polygamy because they can only think about what other cultures do, or the harm polygamy can lead to. In a few other cultures during history, it was legal to have polygamy, but it was mostly in the form of a man marrying multiple wives. Back then, it was legal to forcibly marry them, and rape them. Some cultures may still have that, and probably in that form, but that's their business; I'm talking about Northern American type of culture, where it's promptly illegal, though not as regularly enforced. It isn't pimping, slavery, a strange fetish, a door for kinky sex, or even about adultery. Yes, it could some of those, for those rare occasions, especially when all of the parties aren't consenting adults, but it's more than what most people give credit.

For it to be actual love, or a true romantic situation, it's basically when two people have more than enough love to give to another persons, and wish to be in an equal, loving relationship between all members while the third (or more) party give consent and also want to give and receive that kind of love. As long as all of the parties are consenting adults, it's fine. If teenagers want to try it out for themselves, or if a teenager wants to be a part of a family with adults, that's different, but will make for a good story all the same if you play your cards right.

As with all things illegal, the people have to keep it a secret. Even though in most places, in the U.S. at least, it isn't regularly enforced. If the characters are caught (usually due to having been caught in

something else), the law will tack polygamy on to the list of charges and the people will have to serve more time. In addition, if they are caught, people will most likely treat them differently. If a minor is involved, there will be "sexual misconduct with a minor" situation, and names will be added to the sex offender list, in addition to who knows what.

If the story takes place in another country, legal or not, research the public's attitude toward the relationship. Other than those aspects, there isn't much I can say. I've never read any for myself, so I don't know what people have tried to do with it besides the story not having any major internal or external conflicts.

Incest

My morals aren't the same as most other people's, because I personally don't see anything wrong with this as long as all participants are consenting adults, but I know that just because I would accept it, doesn't mean that other people would. Automatically, people will think of a parent molesting their thirteen-year-olds, or sisters and cousins giving birth to deformed children, or even think that incest only happens to redneck hicks, but that's mainly because of the media focusing on the negativity. Whether it's legal, shunned, or illegal, past or present, it happens.

Let's just scratch out all the rape and molestation talk, and first assume that both parties are consenting in forming a romantic bond. Whether it's cousins or siblings, falling in love won't just happen when the other is born. Like with all love, it will take time, and with all the threats and legal issues, it might take more time than a "normal" relationship would to form. If they are under aged teenagers, they may have sex secretly, or wait either until they are both adults, or until they move to another state away from their family and friends to commit to their relationship. Even if they are consenting adults, they may have to move anyway to commit fully to their relationship without their family knowing.

As for the "deformed babies" talk; it's true, but it's most likely totally exaggerated due to focusing on those few cases. I had trouble finding hard statistics about this is probably because people won't admit it because it's illegal, so I don't know how high (or how low) the statistics are on genetic mutared infants reproduced due to closely related family members. I don't trust Wikipedia as far as I can spit either.

Even so, there are women who, without the consummation of incest, reproduce offspring with genetic defects, so does that mean that she shouldn't keep trying, or love her child? What about stepsiblings? Even though they aren't blood related, that relationship would still be frowned upon. Less than two hundred years ago, it was legal to marry your first cousin. What changed? They realized then that they shared genetics, so why make a law only recently?

If you're going to write a story involving incest, think about what kinds of ramifications this kind of relationship can follow. Take careful note of the character development, along with the romantic development. Just be careful, overall. Like I said, most people automatically think it's disgusting, but there are some who would like to read these kinds of stories, so don't worry. It's more of a public morale image people are trying to keep.

Over-Used Plot Devices

Unlike the Forbidden Fruits section, the rest are just other kinds of romances that people like writing, and readers are only annoyed by the shear quantity of them.

High School Sweethearts

The point of having a boyfriend or girlfriend in high school is to hope that they end up high school sweethearts. Some end up marrying their first, and some don't, just as some people can stand to be married to a single person for fifty years, and some can't stand marrying at all. I'm witnessing four high school sweethearts, all still going strong. Granted, three of those relationships are around the

same age as I am, so graduated high school a few years ago, but the fourth has been married for eighteen years in counting.

There are some high school sweethearts who decide to not marry at all. I can guarantee if my dad was still alive, he and my mom would still be together, and they were together since her sophomore year. Granted, they were both drinkers, and if my dad cheated on her, my mom cheated on him back, but I am convinced that they still loved each other. It was just one of those weird relationships.

Those that say it's close to impossible think that all teenagers are childish and immature. They don't give credit to those teenagers in their resilience and flexibility. Yes, teenagers can get hurt emotionally and could throw a tantrum, but even grown adults act that way. Some women key a car, or men throw their ex-girlfriend's belongings out of the fourth story apartment window. For teenagers, I described it as it could be like a death sentence, but once they are over it, they move on. Some teenagers move on quicker than others, and end up with a new partner within a day, whereas others may take a month or two. Teenagers can range from immature and childish to strangely full of wisdom.

Just keep in mind that not all relationships last, so if the characters seem all wrong for each other, don't keep shoving them in a room and expect them to make up and keep up their relationship. In addition, even if the story ends, if it doesn't show either of their deaths, it doesn't mean that the relationship ends in a happily ever after. They could break up some time after the story ends and find a new mate. The only job a story has is to tell a story, not the entire lives of one or more persons.

Love at First Sight

People swear that love at first sight is a myth . . . but it's TRUE! There is proof that love at first sight exists, and it happens within the first three minutes of meeting. John Tesh, a radio host who talks about living healthy, caring for your pets, love and relationships along with other subjects, said that there was a scientific study on

this. It's just that the phrase "love at first sight" is misleading. So let me explain what actually happens.

You meet a person for the first time, and as soon as you see him or her, your mind instantly deems if the person is physically attractive or not. Our brains are hardwired to look for a mate with good genes, and our brain lights up when a person is deemed attractive. All, or nearly all, men think that women with a good face and a good physique are attractive, but women are different (this is all on John Tesh's website but on different articles). Women can be attracted to different things. Some are attracted to scruffiness rather than clean-shaven, or is pudgy instead of muscled; some women even look at men's taste in clothes rather than their actual physique. Women also prefer average looking men because they think that good-looking men are more likely to cheat because they have more opportunities with beautiful women. Does that mean all attractive (and wealthy) men can't be trusted with commitment? No, they just have to work harder to convince the woman they like that they are in the relationship for the long run.

Next, you say hello and hear them greet you back. The sound of their voice is the next indicator of whether this person is "the one", and it only takes a few seconds. Men prefer women to have a higher-pitched, and slightly breathy voice, as Marilyn Monroe had, and women think that men with deep voices are more handsome than they actually are (I love you Josh Turner!). Both genders also think that those who talk faster are smarter.

Finally, you and the person have a conversation, and it's immediately about something you think is important; whether it's about kids, marriage, religion, or even something generally menial, but is important to you, like how to keep a house tidy, or music. Unconsciously, you judge their words and phrasing. If it's more similar to your use of words, like being formal, scientific, or descriptive, and you are in complete agreement, then you have found a likely candidate in a life-long partner. This doesn't happen to everyone; only about eleven percent in a study in Israeli university

said that their relationship started at hello. In addition, even if you decide not to make a move for a few years, being strictly only friends and then try to make a relationship, those first three minutes are still a make or break.

While I'm being scientific, there are a few facts that are interesting when it comes to overall love and relationships. Men and women rate each other. While men do find beautiful and healthy women more attractive, they might not go for them, but find love in more average looking women. They know that looks don't matter (that's why they don't pay attention if you've gotten new shoes or changed your make-up) so rate a woman's personality from a simple scale of one to ten. Women, on the other hand, do count looks, but not in a shallow way. At first sight, they may rate a man's look a measly four, but if the man's personality is a perfect then, they average it out to make seven.

Who do you think is more likely to say "I love you" first: men, or women? If you said women, you're wrong! On a survey in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* , men were three times more likely to say "I love you" first, with an average of forty-two days before women said it. Men feel happy when people say they love them, but not so much with women. Women know that "I love you" are just three words, and value commitment more than men themselves, so will wait until they know the man will stick around before rewarding him with the happy-inducing phrase.

Whether the two go off and immediately start a relationship, or stick to being friends for the time being, depends on what kind of persons the characters are. Moreover, as I stated in High School Sweethearts, just because the story ends happily, doesn't mean that the characters couldn't break up afterwards. Keeping all of these men, women and relationship factors in mind, writing a Love at First Sight story should be a piece of cake.

Stockholm Syndrome

For those unfamiliar with this term, it's when the person kidnapped falls for, or feels sympathy for, his or her captor. Yes, this is real, not fiction, but some people don't realize it can be from more than just kidnappings. For instance, a daughter could have been molested by her father for so long, observing his sad drunken state repeatedly and eventually convince herself that she loves him (probably thinking that her life could be worse than it already was). It's emotionally and psychologically scarring. If someone wants to save this person, it's going to take more than just asking the victim to go with the hero.

It also takes an extended amount of time for the victim to feel anything more than fear or rage at his or her captor, but it varies depending on the victim. Some would break within a day, or it would take a month or even a few months.

Sometimes, there are cases of Stockholm Syndrome where it isn't purely awful. In *CSI: New York* , although it's a fictional show the cases portrayed on TV are based on real cases, a little girl witnesses a convenience store robbery gone south, when she went to buy aspirin for her mother. The little girl didn't have a father, and her mother was a low functioning alcoholic, so the little girl didn't have anyone she could depend on. The thieves/murders realize they have a witness and the girl ends up kidnapped so there wouldn't be a witness. One of the two thieves contemplates killing the girl just so there isn't any unnecessary baggage, or a living witness. When things became serious, the other thief killed him, showing that he had the heart to not kill a little girl, especially when it was their fault that their plan didn't go as well as they had hoped. Therefore, with nothing left to do, he takes the girl and claims her as his daughter (no rape or molestation), and for five or so years, they lived happily as father and daughter. Eventually the police catch up, and due to poor commands, SWAT shoots the thief in front of the girl—by then a teenager who loved him like a father.

As far as giving story advice for this scenario, just know your characters, and decide if the kidnapping was an accident or on purpose. Some people kidnap other people specifically to have a

partner, expecting to induce the Stockholm Syndrome, though the kidnappers don't say it out-right. Also, keep the law in mind. Stockholm or not, the kidnapper will serve a sentence for kidnapping if he or she is caught.

Popular vs. Unpopular

This is a cliché idea, we know, but it doesn't mean some people still don't enjoy reading them, but I need to remind you of something. As I've referred in a few of my other guides, do not state the stereotypes! If a character (especially a teenager) has a habit of labeling people at first sight, and you don't want your story to sound anymore cliché than it already is, make up your own set of labels instead of the usual "geek" or "prep" set. What about Book Addicts or Wannabe Models? Second, by trying to create this relationship, you are forcing a character to try something he or she wouldn't normally do, so it's going to take some time before love starts to click. In high school, there is an image to protect, so someone may be afraid to know what would happen if people found out. Adults don't have as much of an "image" problem than teenagers, so it might not be as big of a deal. Other than that, create an internal and external conflict, and you should be fine when writing the story.

Arranged Marriages

To my surprise, arranged marriages are becoming popular, even in the U.S., so for those that say that it's strictly an Eastern tradition, they need a wake-up call. First, I'm going to summarize what happens during an arranged marriage.

The parents meet other parents and select their child's partner. In the past, it was more for rank, or for any monetary gain, but in the more modern times, parents choose the partner they think their child would like, and whom they would like. In medieval times, once the decision was set, the groom and bride meet at the altar, and soon after the wedding ceremony is complete, they consummate in the bridal bed. Now, the arranged partners have more of a choice whether they only want to see a photo, to arranging small private

get-togethers to get to know each other better. They can date for a few years to get to know each other before making the big leap if they want to, committing before their relationship advances too far, and in the end, if they decide that they don't like each other, they can tell their parents and have them decide another person.

As you have probably guessed, the parents are at stake for the marriage to work just as much as their children are, so they are heavily involved. This can be a huge problem for the free-spirited American who doesn't like being controlled by his or her parents, but if someone really doesn't mind, then it's not a problem on that end. If things start to get tough, it could feel like the parents are blackmailing you to stay together, even though divorce is still an option.

With arranged marriages, love isn't sacrificed. It forces two people to learn how to compromise with people you hardly know, and let a caring kind of love, different from attraction kind of love, blossom. With finding your own partner, you meet a person you get along with, but then as soon as you tie the knot, problems start to arise, and neither one knows how to compromise because they were never forced to before and give up.

Between finding your own love, and having it arranged for you, they both have upsides and down sides, but think about your main characters, and keep in mind of the parents. "Forced" arranged marriages in places like the U.S., where the child has absolutely no choice is very unreasonable unless there is another factor involved, like the parents abusing their child, threatening them to accept the marriage. If there are no forms of threats or abuse, there's nothing that's keeping them from saying 'no.' If the expecting-bride or groom yells no loud enough, someone will hear, and the marriage will be canceled.

Love Shapes

First off, just to clear up something I once read, a love triangle is a love V. If love Vs weren't love triangles, then that would mean that at

least one of the characters are bisexual, and in most stories featuring love triangles, all of the characters are straight. A love triangle is a situation when two people have strong feelings for the same person, while that same person has strong feelings for both of them, and is faced with a heart-wrenching choice of which person to go with. The reason I put Love Shapes instead of Love Triangle, is that authors have added more love interests into the equation, so there are love squares, pentagons, hexagons, and so forth.

As I've said before, and will keep saying, stuff like this happens. Women fight over men all the time and men fight over women just as much. It's all about turf wars.

The main thing to think about is whether the two feuding characters are committed enough to verbally, physically, or emotionally fight for that desired character, in addition to if all the fighting turns off that desired character. So which of the three might give up first? I know if I liked two men and they were throwing punches to prove their manliness, I would be totally turned off. Also, if you want to write a proper love triangle, make sure that the desired character actually likes both characters close to equally. In *Twilight* (Meyers), Bella was so fixated on Edward that the promised love triangle was just a line and a dot. It's false advertising, and will just anger your readers.

If you want the love triangle story to end in a polygamy, you'll have to make sure your characters are willing to try it. If not, drop the idea immediately. Most likely, if the two people fighting are men, they won't try it because of the hard-wired "she's my property" slogan, plus, if they are straight adult men, just thinking of being in bed with another man can be rather off-putting. Women are more complicated where they are more likely to try it even if they deem themselves straight. Straight women kiss each other for kicks all the time after all, so it might work if the women are appeased, and they each get their special one-on-one time. It still depends on the kind of woman though, so, men, get those images of lesbian sex out of your minds right now!

In the next part of this guide is where I discuss genre, a more important aspect than I first gave credit, along with how to write kissing and sex scenes. Even if you aren't planning to write sex scenes, it can still help you create that tension you're looking for.

She Banged the Love Shebang: Part 2

She Banged the Love Shebang

How to Write Love Scenes

Love scenes, whether it be kissing or sex, can be difficult to write; although not much harder than writing action scenes. They are quite similar. The main difference between the two is that with love scenes, you have to ask yourself a different set of questions along with a few extra things to keep in mind.

These are tips and by no means iron-clad laws when writing love scenes—in which most of these tips will more or less apply to sex scenes; however there will be some exclusively on kissing. It's just easier to integrate them together instead of writing separate sets of tips. Every writer is different, therefore preferences will be different. You can find a hundred different sets of guidelines for writing love scenes, and you'll find a hundred different opinions. Nevertheless, this will also help in creating that sexual tension between characters whether the romance aspect of your story will have love scenes or not. So just use these as a starter point to create your own style.

The Author's Decision

First off, for you, the author, if you don't want to write a sex scene, you don't have to. You're the author, and the story is yours; therefore, you don't have to write anything you don't want to. If reading or writing about sex, or even kissing, makes you uncomfortable, but you feel it's still important, there are ways around it, especially if the genre and rating system doesn't allow you to be explicit.

If you do want to write these scenes, don't just stick kissing or sex scenes in just to fill the pages or to give the readers what they keep asking for (especially if you think it's too soon). Some publishers make authors keep an outline, stating when certain scenes should

happen by what page, so if it's for professionals, that's an exception, but amateurs have their own schedule. Even if the readers end up unhappy, if you have a good reason for making them wait, make them wait because you know your story and characters best.

Whether you do or don't want to write love scenes, find out what you're comfortable with. I love Harlequin romance and Cassie Edwards, along with a few other authors, but I'm not into erotica, so the chances are that I wouldn't write in the erotica genre anytime soon, which is fine. I also love young adult and teen books too where there are hardly any indecent scenes, and those can provide some scenes that can just splinter my heart to pieces! I'll admit, *The Hunger Games* (Suzanne Collins) made me cry so many times, and the little romance bits in there made me genuinely crack up, not in a bad way. After you've experimented with a few or more books, and maybe practice writing a few vignettes or scenes, think about whether you want your story idea to have a sex scene in it at all, or whether if you only want to hint at it. It's better to decide early, but you can still think about it during the writing of your story, so don't sweat it right away. For now, for the sake of this guide, let's assume that you do want to write the scenes.

When you get to the part where there would be a love scene, write it. It's better to write it than save it until you finish the rest of the story so you can go through it and just add in the scenes. You'll lose the emotion, and your scenes will look too similar because you wrote them all at once. Write everything chronologically. And it's OK to get aroused writing your story, it's almost kind of required if you want to connect with your readers in that way.

Genre

Having multiple sex scenes doesn't make your story pornographic, but most writing sites do have rules against sexually explicit material. The difference between love scenes and written porn (or Plot What Plot? [PWP], or as I would like to say Porn, Where's Porn?), is that love scenes balances emotional and physical affection, and porn has

little to no emotional ties between the characters and focuses on sex. Even the erotica genre isn't considered pornographic.

This leads me to question the word, "lemon." "Lemon" was originally the title "Lemon Crème" for an old anime hentai (hetero-sexually explicit content), and it was basically cartoon porn. Now, the term is used for any kind of fan fiction, and more recently original fiction, and refers to any sexual content (ranging to other kinds of citrus words like lime and other types of pairing) that are published on the internet. Does that mean that anyone who has "lemon" in the summary is basically writing (cartoon or anime) porn, like it was used originally, or is it considered romance? Well, with time, words take on new coinage and definition. "Cool" used to be strictly for temperature purposes, but now it's used to deem something of great acceptance. So, yes, "lemon" can also be used for romance if there is sexually explicit content within the story instead of an indicator of just written pornography.

With the whole romance genre, what gets me mad more than anything are false advertisements. If there's going to be a love triangle, incest, or any of the scenarios I stated in the previous part, say so. If there will be sexually explicit content, fluff, or even rape, say so. That's what the summary, the genre, story types and warnings are for; however, if there won't be any of those things, ignore the phrases completely! Don't put "lemon" in the summary when there won't be any sex scenes, or else you're going to piss off a lot of readers because it shows that you don't care about giving readers what you promised. Don't even put "No lemon" in it because it'll still come up in searches, and it's just wasting space. This goes for genre too. If you claim the story is Romance, there had better be romance in it with in-depth characters and a well thought-out plot. If you don't know what something is, it's OK to ask someone, or look it up.

I often see the words "yaoi" and "no lemon" in the summary, and that's just oxymoronic. So to quickly clear this up, yaoi (male) and yuri (female) are homosexual relationships that do lead to sex.

Period. Shounen-ai and shoujo-ai also portrays homosexual relationships, however does not get into sex. Or masturbation, or anything sexually inclined. Slash is specific to fan fiction where you take a canon character, and whether the sexual orientation was firmly established or not, changes it, so presumably straight characters are homosexual, and firmly established homosexual characters are straight. Whether there is sex in it or not depends on what you want to write, so if so, you might want to add "lemon" wherever you need to.

Know your genre along with its expectations and limitations. Some publishers have certain requirements, so although the genre technically can have certain scenes (masturbation) or mention certain things (sex toys or condoms), some publishers won't allow them. These publishers are similar to writing sites, so as an amateur or a professional, it's best to know all of the rules in regards to physical love whether it's the little to no sex inspirationals to the sex abundant erotica.

Deviant Art is one of the stricter sites when in regards to sexual scenes, so even if they are very important in your story or comic, the graphic depiction of sexual content is not aloud. You're allowed to only briefly hint on it; however any scenes of a sexual nature when regarding minors are absolutely forbidden despite outside laws, universe or time-period (you can't even hint at the sex scenes).

Other sites, like FanFiction or FictionPress don't allow graphic sexual content, but allow you to hint at it, whether or not the characters are minors. They have no rules when regarding minors specifically.

Lunaescence allows graphic content so long as the warnings, genre and such are noted; however will not allow graphic depiction of sexual content with minors; although they state, "You may reference a character being raped or molested, but may not actually depict it," in that section.

Quizilla, a teenage-focused site doesn't allow sexual content at all whatsoever, so if rape is a big deal for your character, you can only

state so, not hints or anything.

Wattpad doesn't allow graphic sexual content even though it has the R rating, but they allow hinting.

generally doesn't have restrictions as long as the more graphic chapters are password protected; however you are definitely not allowed to explicitly describe non-consensual sexual acts, or sexual acts involving minors, password or not.

The rules are usually somewhere in plain site, but check the Terms of Service also, as they go into more detail. If you're still confused, ask the administrators, they're usually helpful.

Besides romance genre in general, remember the other genre or subgenre you're including whether it be horror, historical, western and so on. The different genres and settings carry different usage of description of the story, and the scenes. In Western, you might go for the setting sun in the desert to be the romantic point for a kiss, while in horror the same setting sun would probably mean that it's getting darker and colder, making the surrounding spookier, making the female lead cling to her partner more out of fear than being romantic, so there wouldn't be any mood for kissing.

Your Characters

You can't just stick two random people in a closed room and expect them to automatically get along and love each other (love at first sight is an exception, but please read everything first). You also can't just state that they like or love each other. Show your readers how well they get along, how they work out their problems; show how they compromise when things get tough. Basically, show us how committed to each other they are through thick and thin. That's what romance stories are. How do these people fight to be and stay together? Or not. Some stories don't have a happy ending.

The Greywalker , by Kat Richardson, is about a private investigator that was brought back to life after two minutes of being dead. When

she woke up, she found that she had supernatural powers like identifying vampires, ghosts, and could walk into another realm called the Grey. During one of her cases, she meets a guy, and there an instant attraction that is strengthened whenever they meet; however, because of her case and the supernatural aspects, he was scared off, so broke off their beginning of a relationship (they had only started dating). Feelings were returned, but outside and inside problems proved too much for him to handle.

How do we show that the characters have an interest in a person, or each other? Normally, I say that exaggeration is a bad thing, but if a character sees something he or she likes, he or she will focus in on it to the point where it does become exaggerated. This is called exaggerated awareness. For example, a guy likes a certain shape of a girl's mouth, so when he sees it on a girl, he takes an initiative to get her interested in him even though they don't know each other. When he finally succeeds, how do you think he'll feel when he finally gets to kiss her? You don't have to choose a certain trait for a character to obsess over, but it makes it easier for beginners. If the character is very much attracted or obsessed with the character, he or she may even ignore, or not even notice, some of the other negative traits like being constantly pessimistic, or may be even abusive.

This is a given, but let your characters decide when they want to go to the next level along with what will be done or not, not your readers. No matter how much they beg you wanting more, just thank them for liking your story, ask them to be patient, and, or, move on. Shy characters will take more time to get to know than brash characters; therefore there will be more pages to dedicate character and plot development before the romantic development. Shy characters are probably less inclined to try other certain things like bondage or certain fetishes because of embarrassment (they would need a lot of coaxing, even if it was their secret fantasy). Even kissing can be too much for some people.

That said, being deeply in love, or having sex, is no excuse to make the characters overly lovey-dovey or spout sentimental gush if they weren't that way to begin with. They have to stay in-character even during "mind-blowing" kissing or sex. Are the characters casual about the acts where kissing or having sex is no big deal, or are they more on the naïve or self-conscious end of the spectrum? Keep everything about the characters (attitude, personality, dialogue, actions, etc.) consistent. Kissing and sex can be very exposing, making characters feel vulnerable, so maybe there will be some fear, or maybe feeling vulnerable is exciting so will try for more. These feelings add another dimension to characters; just make sure it's consistent with the rest of them. Every love scene should add another side to each of the characters involved, that way it won't look like you just added the love scene (whether kissing or sex) just for the sake of it or to fill pages.

Because every character is different, the descriptions will also be different. Use the character's background and experiences to help you build up a descriptive vocabulary. A person who works in a flower shop will feel like a person who works in construction's hands will be overly rough. Play on the differences, and play on what the person knows. Also think about dialogue before, during and after the scenes. If the character's crude, they will use vulgar language. They probably won't tone it down just for the sake of the other person's innocent ears or the mood.

Your Story

The hardest question to answer, when it comes to romance, is when the first scene, whether it be a kiss or having sex, appropriate? Again, the characters will answer that themselves, but think about what you want to accomplish. In *The Dragon Lord* , by Connie Mason, the first scene was on the very first page in the very first sentence between Dragon and his mistress, Veronica. That scene portrays that Dragon is very much attracted to the woman he already has, so would have no interest in another woman, but by the King's orders, he has to marry another woman, Rose. This book also has

another "first scene" to answer to; when would Dragon and Rose consummate their marriage which was more important to the story than between Dragon and Victoria's. Dragon eventually found Rose's snappy and rebellious actions more appealing, plus their love-making more sensuous, than what he and Victoria had. The book describes the difference between a relationship based on being purely physical, and another relationship based on emotional and physical aspects.

Basically, when would the two main characters find the time and mood to have sex, whether it was more forceful or wholly consensual?

Another question to think about is whether the number of partners is important. Like Mason's book, some characters may not start off with "the one". It was very apparent that Dragon had many past lovers, even before Veronica. Or maybe the character did end up with "the one", screwed up, separated, lived their lives separately with other partners, and, after a few years, reconnected, then begged and apologized until they finally made up and got back together. This is just a minor aspect with a simple answer depending on the kind of story you're going for. Is a character a casual one-night-stand kind, or maybe he or she has many partners for casual sex whenever he or she feels like it. Is it profession, impulse, or does it have more feelings than it just being casual, and so on.

Despite a character feeling casual about sex, if he or she finds "the one", the act won't just be physical anymore, and will start to become more focused on the emotional aspect—romance. Equalize the emotional aspect and the physical aspects. To help portray more emotion, more physicality, or even both, you have to raise the stakes.

What does that mean, "raising the stakes"? All this is is to have conflicts in a direction that forces the romance to go in an either emotional, physical or both ways.

If you're writing a story that won't have any sex scenes, then you're going to have to rely more on physical stakes than emotional, but just because there won't be any sex, doesn't mean that there can't be any other physical rewards, like hugging, holding hands, and even kissing if you want that in your story. Right off the bat, whether there's a known conflict or not, the main character already has something to lose by pursuing his or her interest, and that is his or her heart. Being rejected hurts, and being rejected can take a toll. Because of the fear of rejection, the character (more often a female) can set him or herself for rejection by picking out their negative traits, and end up obsessing over them, which would be also be considered a conflict. So even if the interest miraculously accepts and returns the character's feelings, the road of raising stakes doesn't end there for the one picking him or herself apart.

In *The Body Finder* , by Kimberly Derting, Violet watched her best friend over the summer break, Jay, grow into the heart throb that had captured the other girl's attention, in which Violet also learns that she's become quite attracted as well. Apparently a bad thing to Violet because, one, they're best friends, and she doesn't want to ruin what they already have, and, two, he's been keeping her secret. It's not that she doesn't trust him to keep his mouth shut about her secret ability, she just never wanted him to shoulder the responsibility. If he got hurt because he knew of her ability, she would have been devastated, best friends or more. Violet can sense the presence of bodies, and when she lives in the middle of forested area, it's mostly animals that were prey, and her cat helps to add the number of prey, but she could also sense human bodies too. Every body leaved an "echo" either through sight, smell, auditory, taste, and can even leave a vibration, and this only happens when a body isn't laid to rest, and also because the death wasn't natural—more often murdered like the animals in the forest. These echoes also attach themselves onto their killers, in which Violet calls those "imprints". As you can probably imagine, this can be a bad thing, especially when Violet found her first human remains—a fresh corpse of a fourteen year old girl—when she was eight.

So because of the best friend scenario, and because of her ability, she, at first keeps telling her that she and Jay have to stay just friends. That can be considered more emotional than a physical conflict.

When more girls disappear suddenly, and Violet found another body of a young girl, she takes it upon herself to find the killer because of her ability to sense echoes and imprints. Jay gets angry, but agrees to accompany her. During school, girls flirt, Violet denies being jealous, and another guy asks her to Homecoming. After hearing that, Jay doesn't talk to her for a school-week, making Violet feel worse. These series of events leads to more of emotional conflict because she had essentially lost what she most wanted.

Of course, when confronting the killer, she could easily lose her life, so that would be physical—even if it has nothing to do with the romantic aspect of the story. It still raises the stakes, especially if you ask, "Who is more important, Jay, the guy she has been wanting since over the summer, or the killer, who wouldn't ever stop killing unless he was stopped?" Violet is forced to prioritize her duty for justice over her feelings. This is a conflict of prioritizing could easily be considered both physical and emotional.

Basically, ask yourself, "Would this affect the character emotionally, inside, or would this affect her physically, outside, or could it be both?" Another example, probably a better example, would be Disney's *Beauty and the Beast* , but there's already a blog that explains that into detail.

Twilight, on the other hand, was about eighty-five to ninety percent emotional (gush). The main physical conflicts that I could think of was (*Twilight*) James, when he tricked her to coming home alone, (*Eclipse*) when she purposely did dangerous stuff to hear the voice in her head (this can be considered physical as well as emotional though), nothing significantly physical happened in the third book, mainly because she was well-protected throughout the story besides her random acts of clumsiness and between freezing or being squished to death in the tent, and then there's having a baby that

could kill her (*Breaking Dawn*). The rest of it was emotional—how will Bella gain Edward's love? How will Bella keep his love? How will Bella cope without him? And what about Jacob? Oh, he's finally back! Since such-and-such happened, I have to be a turned soon, but I want him to do it, but how, because there's no way there's anything good about being a human? Blah, blah, blah.

To help even this emotional angst, like I said before, there should have been more action scenes that she could have at least watched from start to finish, like say, the whole Victoria's yearling war? When she was finally a vampire, she could have realized that there would be a time that she would never be able to see her parents again, whether they were still alive or dead, meaning she couldn't be with her parents and have their support anymore, but I guess Carlisle and Esme were fitting replacements—definitely classier. Couldn't she have just lost herself to killing those hikers? If holding her breath solved it so easily, why wouldn't another vampire have just thought of that? Lastly, there could have been a huge physical risk when the Volturi came, but no, there was no fight. The high-and-mighty Volturi left without even getting a scratch in. There could have been more, I'm sure anyone could think of more physical risks, but those were my main peeves.

With short stories, there obviously wouldn't be room to raise the stakes too high, so it's OK if you don't want to even if you have a few hundred pages of room, but if you want that tension, and you have room for it, go ahead and raise them as high as you want to; however, in between all the climaxes (it is possible to have more than one in a story), leave a bit of rewards. In *The Body Finder* , there were plenty of hand-holding, side-ways smiles, and even a kiss to her forehead before there was even a possibility that they would even get together (and even after that there were definitely more hand-holding, smiling, and definitely more kissing).

Use these scenes, whether it is simple hand-holding to kissing, and definitely if there will be sex, to either create tension, reveal a dimension of the character, or advance the plot. Portray at least two

out of three of these with every love scene. Every time Jay held on to her hand, she kept thinking about keeping their friendship, which can be very tense, and it reveals that she definitely cares for Jay's well-being. With these simple gestures, you can use the same reasons as long as the risks stay the same. Just because Jay held her hand one minute, let go, and five minutes later held her hand again, doesn't mean that Violet would think that there's another problem to think about. If it was another day, then there could be something more to think about, especially since a new body was found. She could be grateful for the comforting hand despite her feelings.

With kissing, it's a little more extreme because "just friends" usually don't French kiss out of the blue or casually (at least not here in the U.S.). Even without the tongue can be iffy depending on certain people. There's more risk in kissing than holding hands. If I kissed my best friend full on the mouth, that would definitely freak her out despite her being the physically affectionate type.

Sex, the ultimate sign of affection, approval, and trust, is an even higher risk. It can definitely be an emotional and physical risk. Would the scars scare the other off? My father sold me to him, so I shouldn't give in, so why was my emotional resolve broken so easily? Oh gosh she's pregnant! I'm not ready to be a father, so should I run? It's these stakes before, during, and after the act that can create tension, reveal character and advance the plot.

The Scenes

Finally, we get to the section on how to actually write kissing and sex scenes, but it's more of a list of keep-in-minds along with the absolutely-do-nots. They basically cover the same rules, but there are some that are obviously more inclined toward the sex end of the spectrum. Before I continue farther, if you find my use of wordage crude, blunt, or offensive, I'm not going to apologize. Until this point, the closest I've come to naming certain body parts were using the words "boobs" and "groin", and perhaps I could continue like that, but I need to be more precise from here. There are some that find "vagina" or "penis" too blunt and would prefer "pussy" or "dick", but I

personally find those words crude, so because this is supposed to be at least somewhat educational, I'm going for the neutral textbook language, which was why I used the word "homosexual" instead of "gay".

I already asked a variation of this question in the genre section, but you have to ask yourself at each scene, "How explicit should it be?" A single sentence could easily equate to a two page long hot scene without it having to be explicit, and some audiences prefer it that way because it leaves it to the reader to imagine and fill in the blanks instead of reading it as if it was a step-by-step how-to manual. Like I also said in the genre section, some publishers/web sites won't allow you to be too explicit, so you have to think of how to heat things up without breaking the rules.

For example, Deviant Art doesn't allow graphic portrayal of penetration or the depiction of seminal or vaginal fluids; however if you wrote something along the lines of:

The bed creaked beneath our wrestling match, our bodies slick with sweat and patches of the residue of randomly placed kisses. He won, but only because I let him. With our chests so close together, I could feel his heart beating just as fast as mine was. He eased inside, connecting our mouths once again as he did so, and created a gentle rocking rhythm.

This would be fine as long as you have the sexually themed mature filter on it. In some cases, you wouldn't even need to be that explicit. I could have stopped at the second sentence, and it would have been fine with me. Sometimes, it's the dialogue really says it all.

" *Hey there," Chad greeted, eyes taking everything from the bottom up. He leaned over her, putting his hand on the wall she was leaning on for privacy, and whispered, "Are you looking for a plumber tonight?" He gave out a seductively charming crooked smile.*

" *I don't know," Yvette took notes of the small creases she could see through his V-neck T-shirt. He definitely had a body to boast about at*

least. "What kind of tools do you need?" She purred seductively.

" Just me."

" Nothing blue?"

" Nope."

Yvette smiled. "Bring some gloves."

If you don't understand all, or at least most, of the little innuendos, you probably should borrow your mother's or grandmother's romance books, and practice writing sex scenes before you publish anything, even online. (Well, not that it matters. Every story I've read online where there was sex in it, all the reviews say "wow, that was hot" and other sort of praises, even if it was one of those fill-in-the-blanks over-used cliché sex scenes. [Why am I writing this guide again?]) It isn't enough to know what sex is, what kinds of positions there are, or even what kinds of foreplay there are. If it were only that, you may as well just stick with a high school sex-ed textbook and some porno videos, which neither helps how to develop your story or your characters.

You also need to show some variation, which doesn't necessarily mean different kinds of foreplay or sex-positions. Who initiates the act? Is it rough? Gentle? This also goes well with kissing scenes too. What kinds of feelings are incorporated in the acts? Possessive? Relaxed? Casual? Neither is always loving or filled with pure joy. Between short, one-line innuendos, to pure dialogue like the above example, to a short, slightly explicit scene, to a fully explicit sex scene, the length of each scene should also vary, but remember that every scene has to complete something.

Location can also help in variety, as well as show some of the character's qualities. Does one of the characters choose a public location to kiss, make-out, or even to have sex (making them an exhibitionist at this point)? Would the other be comfortable with that? Try to consider the location and the position the couple would be in.

A row boat wouldn't be comfortable to lay down with one on top of the other to kiss much less have sex.

Also, try and avoid those overused settings to have sex in, like near a waterfall or in a cave when they're trapped by a storm, etc. I don't mind it if the setting is important, but if the characters are trapped in a cave because of a little rain storm, I'd rather wait until we were in a warm building than do it in some cave where rocks poke at my back.

The after-sex scene can also have the potential to be a huge factor between your couples. Not everyone likes cuddling after sex; some may not even like it enough to sleep in another room for the night. Some women, and some men, cry, which is mainly due to hormones. Some eat because they had just exercised, or some go jogging! There are tons of reactions to after-sex physically, and emotionally. Was she disappointed because her first time wasn't at all like she fantasized it? Would she want to talk about it? Does his not spooning her afterwards annoy her? This could definitely help in developing character and plot, don't you think?

Is safe-sex an issue? There weren't contraception or condoms way back then, and weren't too concern with STDs. Abortions have been around for thousands of years by herbal dosage, but it was dangerous. Even today, some men won't wear condoms, and countries in Africa still don't believe that HIV or AIDS are transmitted sexually and aren't doing anything to prevent the spread of it. It isn't a big deal, but it's still something to at least keep in mind. If you want to portray safe sex, it can be as little as "Do you have any . . . ?" or the mention of tearing the condom wrapper. Are birth control pills involved? Please do your research. Some girls think that if you pop a pill right then on the first day, then they're safe. The pill doesn't take affect until however long that certain brand says—most between twenty-four hours to a couple days, or even a week.

And what about the taboo in the literature world: masturbation? There are obvious ways around getting too explicit, you could write about your character mewling in pleasure alone in his or her room or bathroom, you could also mention the character rubbing his or

herself through his or her clothes, but there are some publishers and websites who won't go for masturbation. At. All. Even if it's as non-explicit as you can write it. If it isn't important, you don't need to write it; however you can hint it if you want with the mention of a cold shower or needing a new lotion bottle. If it's for foreplay, or if it's to describe a fantasy, then by all means, go for it, as long as it follows the publisher or website's rules, and/or if it's important to your character or the plot.

"Toys" are another taboo to think about. Again, there are publishers and websites that don't want even hints of them at all. Just like masturbation, if it isn't important, you don't need it, but if it's for foreplay, or to describe a fantasy, then it's your choice. I'll leave you to research toys on your own though, and please do. Some of them can be dangerous if used the wrong way.

Speaking of foreplay, it is important in more ways than just getting the woman to climax faster. Similar to action scenes, there are a lot of small punches and kicks before someone finally gets the upper hand—things need to heat up and lead to the actual sexual/kissing part. For kisses, does the guy hug, maybe he kisses another part of the face first before he actually kisses her/his lips. Of course, for kisses, this doesn't happen all the time; however, it's a must for sex scenes. Foreplay in sex scenes creates a tingling sensation creating a kind of teaser. If you go straight for the humping part, it's anti-climactic, like when you reveal the winner of a fight within the first sentence. Foreplay allows you to reveal more of your characters—physically, along with emotional and mentally—as they get closer. I'll leave it to you to how best portray these, in the meantime, let's continue.

Believe it or not, no matter how mind-blowing the love scene is, people think (and talk during sex). Is the laundry done? Oh shoot, that paper's due tomorrow! I hope I don't fall asleep. "Hey, I think your mom's home." "Can you hurry it up?" "Damn, this feels really good." This can easily make your scenes funny, if you want to, because sometimes, kissing and sex is funny.

"You came already? Goddamn it!"

Noses bump, ears hook together, the helmet gets in the way, lipstick smudges on the other's lips, there are various opportunities for a bit of humor with kissing, but having sex can have those embarrassing rolling on the floor dying of laughter moments. If the story had been depressing, a good bit of humor can lift the mood up, and if it's supposed to be a romantic-comedy, go for it!

Look into disastrous sex tales or embarrassing sex stories, there are tons of people who have them and are willing to share. They can provide some inspiration after you're done laughing so hard. Also think about expired condoms. In one article I read, a guy's penis went numb and couldn't finish because the condom was expired. Maybe someone walks in on them, or someone has to hide before they can continue. Does one of them have to sneak out, forgetting where the underwear was thrown? Who finds the underwear later?

Getting back into all seriousness, this rule should be a no-brainer: use all five senses. It'll help portray the mood, and not to mention describe the characters, and the surroundings. Are there candles burning? Does he or she taste of sweat? Are the hands smooth or calloused? Where are the hands placed then they kiss? Did someone eat something spicy? Does the tree branch tapping the window, giving them a timed impromptu rhythm? Thinking, talking, and movements are also considered senses. Are the thoughts or speech erotic? Is the friction between the two more like desperate animals than careful?

Similar to action scenes, when there is an action there should be a reaction. He squeezes her bum, and she squeaks in surprise. If the scene is supposed to be hot, steamy, and, or, erotic, then, like action scenes, the short, fast-paced sentences would better portray this purely carnal act, but if the scene is supposed to be more on the loving and careful side, then you can use longer sentences because you have plenty of room for description. Not that you shouldn't describe the hot and steamy sex, you can, but you have to do so in a

certain way, so refer to another one of my guides "In a Fight" to get the idea of how to describe action scenes.

Also, whatever happens on the outside "echoes" on the inside. Does the soft stroke of the cheek cause her heart to beat faster? When he jerks her forward into a forced kiss, does her angry tirade momentarily erase itself from her mind, maybe enough to forgive him?

Besides the obvious sexual organs (including mouth and nipples), direct the reader's attention to other parts of the body. Explicit or not, it gets boring when all the attention is focused on those few body parts when there are more areas to explore. Even if it's a simple kiss, you have room to describe how close the chests were, where the hands roamed, if the feet bumped each other, whether the hair got in the way and the likes. Learn the anatomy and look for articles where readers comment and tell stories of their own. What does it feel like when this happens? Or where are their more sensitive areas?

Interesting trivia: The bigger the breasts are on a woman, the less sensitive it is, therefore, the smaller the chest, the more stimulation she'll feel. Yay for guys whose chests are almost always flat.

Men's Health is a good site to look through for these kinds of facts, and maybe you'll get information. The Girl Next Door Q and A, asked by men and answered by a woman, are fun to read too because you get a sense of what annoys guys, and why women do these things that annoys them, or vice versa. The site doesn't push anything under the rug, and does talk about everything when it comes to sex.

The last key aspect of love scenes to keep in mind, that are often forgotten, are the fluids, which includes vaginal, seminal, sweat, saliva, and whatever lubricant the couple decides to use. Remember, there are some sites that do not allow the portrayal of certain fluids, mainly vaginal or seminal; however, you still have sweat, saliva, and/or lubricant (if the site allows lubricant). If one is a virgin, blood could also be counted as fluid, but we'll get into virginity later. You

can mention being sticky, or that there was a cold spot on the bed. What about dried saliva all over the neck or facial area, recalling some very sloppy kissing. Lubricants can have appealing scents, as well as sweat.

Water is not a very good lubricant, nor is saliva, so sex in the shower, where the steam sucks up any natural feminine lubrication would probably be a bad idea. Not to mention the potential of slipping, falling, and drowning, and all sorts of other hazardous accidents just waiting to happen.

I've listed all the keep-in-minds, and now we get to the absolutely-do-nots.

Number one is, and unfortunately I see this a lot, no porn dialogue! There is a huge difference between a character that is being crude, and another that is straight off of a pornography film. Who actually says "Deeper, harder!"? Or "Give it to me, big boy"? I cringe every time I read these and just want to push the back button. If it's for pure smut where the emotional aspect doesn't matter, and where it's basically porno literature, fine, but for those of us that want romance, please warn us that it's smut and not romance. Porno dialogue is unneeded; if women, or the bottom, want to direct the show, they definitely wouldn't yell out "Deeper, harder!" Or "Yes! Yes!" There are body and other verbal cues that usually let their partner know when something feels good, or when something isn't comfortable and to change something about what they're doing. There are also body cues when a man or a woman wants it, so why say "Give it to me," much less "big boy"? As for other dialogue lines, like "Suck it," maybe, maybe if the couple was into BDSM (which is a fetish fantasy, and not pornography most times), but it's still iffy. It's best to avoid pornography dialogues.

Porno dialogue also includes yelling out when their about to climax, which is another thing not to write. Hardly anyone ever announces their orgasm, or even if they are getting close to. Describe the arching of the back, the tingling of the spine, the pulsing of the organs and so forth. Telling when it's almost over not only borders in

unrealism (possibly into pornography territory), but it also ruins the tension. "Oh, I'm gonna come," means that in one or two sentences this scene is over, but if you don't put it in, you can keep your readers reading the whole scene and keep them guessing. I'll discuss orgasms later, but for now, we'll go into the next tip.

Do not compare nipples, whether they be man's or woman's, to anything. Nipples aren't supposed to look like anything but nipples. Yes, they come in all different shapes, sizes and colors, but, really, they still just look like nipples. Speaking of which, the areola (the circular part around the nipple, is much more sensitive than the actual nipple, just as another piece of trivia.

As a last rule of the absolutely-do-nots, don't use the words penis, vagina, clitoris, or the name of the genitals at all, including euphemisms. For one, using textbook terms kills the mood. Two, if you decide to not use textbook terms, you may offend your audience with more crude words, and it may come off as more pornographic than romantic. In general, there is no real reason to even name the genitalia area at all. If the construction worker says "Touch me," odds are, he's going to mean his groin, but you could also add something along the lines of "he guided my hand to his swollen self" to further emphasize what you meant.

If you are purposely trying to be funny, then those whacky euphemisms would get a few laughs, like "Tunnel of Love", or "Shaft of Manhood". Otherwise, no, don't use euphemisms.

Questions to Ask

Finally, I can write about the top two questions that need answering. The first is how often do females get pregnant? I'm sure you've heard about nine year olds getting pregnant, and it's shocking, but what these articles don't tell you is how often that nine year old girl had sex. Was it once? Or maybe it was after multiple times. Another scary thing is that textbooks tell you that you can only get pregnant after you start your menstruation cycle, but that's false. The actual bleeding is the last step when it comes to female puberty, which

means that girls start ovulating, releasing eggs, before they actually start bleeding, also meaning that they can get pregnant before they start menstruating; however, most of these romance stories don't portray nine year old girls, so let's talk about young adults and older adults.

You also always hear about that woman who gets pregnant so easily versus couples (also fairly young) who are having such a hard time getting pregnant. It ultimately depends on the woman, her health, lifestyle, if she's taking any medications and all sorts of other factors, so there isn't any statistics out there that are accurate due to other variables. However, for teenage heroines especially, there are some bullets for the cautious and wise:

She can get pregnant on the first try.

Even if there is no penetration, she can get pregnant off of dry-humping because sperm can survive for a couple days on clothing and the body.

Even if she calculates when her ovulating cycle is over, she can still get pregnant because sperm can survive in the womb for up to a week.

It only takes one sperm to fertilize an egg.

And, once she's pregnant with a baby, she can still release another egg and get pregnant again, while she's pregnant. It's pretty rare, but it does happen.

Even with birth control pills, condoms and other contraception's, she can still get pregnant.

In other words, if she has sex at all, there's always a chance that she can get pregnant. Or STDs, but that's for you to do your research on.

The next question is basically a string of questions about a woman's orgasm: Is it really that hard to get a woman to climax? What is a

woman's climax like? And so on and so forth.

First off, a woman has multiple types of orgasms, but the two main ones are, first, being the clitoral which generally feels like pulsing on the outer area of her clitoris, and the other being the vaginal orgasm which most romance stories portray during their love scenes as pleasurable waves deep inside. Remember, just because women have multiple types of orgasms, doesn't make either one easier to reach. On average, it takes women fifteen to forty minutes to reach an orgasm, where men have several sets of averages (from different sources) ranging from two to seven minutes, three to five minutes, or eight to twelve minutes to ejaculate, that's why it's rare for women and men to climax together, especially on the first round. But there's good news, after the first orgasm, most women have an easier time climaxing in the next rounds, so in the third or fourth round to have your characters climaxing together would be more reasonable; however your characters may not be able to last that long to have three or four rounds.

If you want any techniques, read health sites—they're better than watching porn because they actually explain what's going on in the body, or why this position is better than the other, etc.

Cliché Love Devices

If you've read a lot of "lemons" or stories with sex scenes in them, I'm sure you've realized some reoccurring themes in amateur story-telling. Climaxing together is one theme, and it is pretty unrealistic if it's going to be in the first round, and another theme was reoccurring settings to have sex on (the waterfall or the cave), but the other theme is having the woman being a virgin. Let's think about this though. Most of the stories you've read probably have female characters ranging from sixteen to twenty-two, so is it really that unrealistic that they would be virgins? Even if she's legally allowed to have sex, it's not as if she would want to the day she turned whatever age the country legalizes it, and some young adults are perfectly happy being single up until they meet so-and-so when they are in their mid to late twenties or whatever age they meet him at.

I'm not even going to talk about fifty year olds who quit being a nun either. The point is, whatever the circumstances, and how the character is, the female character can be a virgin without her being a petty plot device during a love scene.

The same goes for virgin men. The biggest mistake when it comes to men who have had no portrayal of any kind of experience in sexual situations tends to still be able to get a woman to climax. That is totally unreasonable because virgin guys usually don't know what the heck they're doing or how to interpret when a woman is feeling good, and there tends to be a lot of miscommunication. It's not as if guys are born with heavenly knowledge on how to get a woman off, or even a guy if he swings that way.

Speaking of which, not all gay men will engaged in anal penetrative sex, nor will find it enjoyable. So if a character does not want it, or would rather not, explore other ways of sexual pleasure. Gender roles (top, bottom, seme, uke) are usually not defined in real life, so take turns who's topping or bottoming; however if the characters find it more comfortable in receiving or giving than the other way around, then the roles can stay the same, just remember to vary the scenes throughout the story like you would for heterosexual couples.

I know this was long, and I'm glad I divided this into two parts, but I hope this was helpful. Have fun writing!

Romeo and Gertrude?

Romeo and Gertrude?

"Names. What's in a name, really? I mean, besides a bunch of letters or sounds strung together to make a word. Does a rose by any other name really smell as sweet? Would the most famous love story in the world be as poignant if it was called Romeo and Gertrude? Why is what we call ourselves so important?" (Julie Kagawa).

I'll answer that question with another quote:

"I read in a book once that a rose by any other name would smell as sweet, but I've never been able to believe it. I don't believe a rose WOULD be as nice if it was called a thistle or a skunk cabbage" (L.M. Montgomery).

Names, despite its seemingly simplistic role in society, do have some importance, even in fiction. So how do you name your character? Names aren't just an arrangement of letters that sound cool or unique; they have meaning, language, and culture behind them. Names are so important, that, in real life, people are discriminated by their namesake. People with foreign names, whether their ethnicity roots to there or not, have a harder time finding jobs. Before he won the election, there was a rumor that Barack Obama wasn't even American. Even between feminine and masculine names can affect what a teen will want to learn, and not to mention the bullying a kid can go through because of their name. And it's the parent's choice (fault) for choosing the name for their child to live with.

However, names are no more important than choosing what color hair or skin the character has.

In my first guide ("Things you Need to Know"), I only mentioned that it had to be of the universe's region of the character birthplace's

culture, but there can be exceptions. *In Degrassi: The Next Generation* , which takes place in Canada, Spinner's sister is Chinese, but was adopted into his family. While we don't know if it was a foreign adoption or strictly within the country, they named her Kendra instead of looking up Chinese names, but they probably had a reason. Finding the meaning to Chinese names, along with respecting the Chinese rules on how to name a child is difficult, even on the internet. So, as a slight revision, whether the child was born there or not, whether the child is still with his or her parents, or someone found him or her, name the child with something that is available to the parents, or the adopting parents, who deem fit as a name.

On a side note, I stick to what I said about your name and self-inserting ("Things you Need to Know"). Even though you're most likely not of the region the story takes place in, unless you're saying you moved there as part of the plot, change the sound of your name to fit into the culture. There are plenty of Japanese name translators, so I'm sure you can also find other cultures and countries to translate your name to.

The reason I say that names are no more difficult than choosing a hair color or skin color, is because they both represent the same thing: genetics and culture. Just as blonde-haired people are more probable of European descent, as people having red hair can mean they have Irish or Scottish blood. Alternatively, it could just be a random genetic quirk. Although not a lot of people think that hair color is as important as something like eye shape or skin color (unless it's a color like bright blue skin in a non-skittles universe) it does play a part in appropriateness. Just as African Americans can't be redheads unless dyed, certain names won't be appropriate. Names, while not everyone will have that original culture in them genetically, do have the same kind of history, and it will affect the character somehow.

The chosen name also reflects the person who chose the name—the parents or guardian. Are they more free-spirited and choose an

unusual name, or more elegant and choose an Elizabethan name? This kind of choosing will reflect more on how the guardians raise the child than why the parents chose this origin with this meaning (if they know the meaning at all). More often than not, though, in most fiction, the story of how the name came to be is usually never told. The parents aren't always the ones who choose the name, it could be the grandparents, a friend, or even the nurse, so if the part of the naming the character isn't in the story, you don't have to sweat about the parents too much. This goes with the nicknames as well. If there is no source of who started it, it shouldn't matter. If the name does have an accurate source, then think of how the namer would behave, their hobbies, or acts to reflect the name that they chose.

Another problem people have about names is that the name is more like a label. To be more specific, I mean that the name turned your character into a stereotype, or an author chose a stereotype and chose a stereotypical name (and you know how I feel about stereotypes). For example, I want to write about a Goth kid, so I choose to name a boy "Bram", like Abraham "Bram" Stoker. According to Think Baby , Bram means "bramble; a thicket of wild gorse; raven", so by definition alone, I decide he's going to be a Goth kid who has a sarcastic wit to and is a writer. It would be bad if I started writing the story with the character off only that. Think about it, the boy turned Goth, except the labeled stereotype is "Bram."

In order for this to be acceptable, let me describe how his time was during his life with his name. Upon first hearing the name, Bram seems like a strong, jockey kind of name, and not to mention that his full-blooded Irish father loves hurling (the sport, not vomiting), so he tries out for the lacrosse team in late middle school, a close alternative for hurling, but some of his classmates tease him. "Hey, it's Bram the bum. You're too wimpy to be playing something like this. Why don't you just go write in a corner or something?" Bram prefers to wear baggy and loose clothing and has a lean frame, but it's because he likes running around the block with his father in the early morning, not because he isn't strong enough. The bullying deters him from trying out. On to high school, where he learns about

Bram Stoker, the teasing continues, but his English teacher refers on how good it would be to be a writer, and not just write any kind of story—it has to be dark. He finally realizes why his teachers all throughout his school life mention to him about writing. So, because of his teachers and his peers keep commenting to him about writing all through high school, he sticks with English, other writing classes, theater and art instead of continuing on in sciences or math in college even though he could if he really wanted to. The all black outfits and make-up could be a phase, short or long term—maybe even for the rest of his life, but now it is explained why he chose writing and why he felt like he should be writing and play the "goth" kid role. With enough explanation, the kid in the corner writing horror stories and wearing black and make-up isn't just another Goth kid. He's Bram and this is why he is the way he is.

While high school is all about trying out phases, the "Goth" thing would be acceptable, but it shouldn't be everything. The audience would have to know what the character is really like, and not just from the stereotype. If Bram had been "purely" Goth from the beginning, we wouldn't know that he does enjoy sports, especially hurling and lacrosse, and that he does enjoy other activities. People can like things over others, from hobbies to the style of clothes, thus other people may label them, but the character should have many facets that should be explored through the act of storytelling. Stereotypes don't make the character, just as names shouldn't either, even if the character unintentionally molds themselves to fit their name.

In real life, people also mold themselves to fit their name, so this does happen. That's why most characters whose names are like Raven are attracted to the occult, or why Alfred likes math, or why Priscilla is snobby. So go ahead and choose those "stereotypical" names if you want. The real test is how the make the characters unique despite the overused names like Sakura or Michael and so on and so forth.

So, in which order do you make a character? Do you think of the name first and make the character fit it, or do you make the character and choose a name after you develop the personality? It doesn't matter because, either way, after you choose the name, there's going to be some revision of how you think the name would affect the character later. All creators are different with different methods of deciding different factors. If it works for you, it works, but let me point some stuff out anyway.

Personally, and this is my dirty little secret, I think of the character first before even the plot. My mind starts with, "Oh, wouldn't it be interesting to write about a character that has this kind of physical/personality/mental quirk?" and then thinks about a plot that goes with the character. If a character has this kind of quirk, what kind of activities, or jobs would this character have, which branches off to what other kinds of characters would he or she meet, which branches further to what kinds of problems could their be for the character. This takes all of only a minute at most, which is how I end up having too many plot-bunnies. The descriptions and names are the last thing I think about, and I choose those at random.

If you look in my Deviant Art gallery, I have a two-part tutorial on how I create the character's looks. It just takes too much time to deliberately choose every single thing about a character, including names, which is why I don't blame authors who base a character's looks off themselves or other people or deliberately find names with certain meanings. I'm not saying that looks and names aren't important—they are, but just in a different way.

Unfortunately, people who hunt for Mary-Sues do put looks and the name to the forefront of their minds, even though there isn't a consistent rule about them also. I see comments about not using Japanese names, but what if the character is Japanese? They also discourage plain names for not being original or memorable, but they discourage highly unusual names because it makes the character too unique. It's as if they can't make up their minds or want authors to avoid names with the letters Q, X, Y, or Z in them.

I don't choose names completely at random, so if something doesn't fit, I don't list it in the first place. First, I choose the origin of the person, and where the story is based. For example, a full-blooded American who was born in, and maybe raised in, Vietnam, the character is allowed to have a Vietnamese name as well as European English speaking countries, especially if the parents are fluent in Vietnamese or just want their child to fit in.

My basic rules of thumb when it comes to names in general are:

(1) Since I mostly write fan fiction in a Japanese based setting, if the story takes place in Japan, and the person is Japanese, stick to Japanese only (similar to most other Asian countries except Russia and the Middle East). Japanese originated from Chinese, so Chinese names can also work.

(2) If the character or setting is American or English-based European countries, any name in that region is fine, and because English has many roots, Italian, Spanish, German, French, Latin, Greek and Russian are also accepted (basically all of Europe).

(3) If the character is Spanish speaking, then Spanish, Italian, and Latin are very acceptable, along with English-to-Spanish translated names. For example, Richard would become Ricardo.

(4) Any country along with their older roots can be grouped together. For example, Irish, Celtic, Gaelic, and Scottish can be grouped together just as Russian, Slavic and Czech or German and Norse can.

(5) Any set of countries that were once one country, like India and Pakistan.

(6) A culture can have names from the surrounding different cultures' names.

(7) If the parents are passionate about another country, and are fluent in the language, any country would be acceptable despite

origin and/or weird reactions from other people (this would just add another facet to your character due to constant questions or bullying).

There are a couple other points to think about when it comes to names, but I think you can come up with more rules. And yes, whether or not Isabella "Bella" Swan from Twilight is actually Italian, she can keep her name.

The only origins of names that stump me are African and Native American names. I don't generally write settings in Africa, so haven't done research on the history there, plus I haven't found a list with many African names, but if I did, I would stick with the specific country/tribe just to be safe (this goes with any other country in general). In African-American history, however, I know in the slavery days the white owners would make their slaves give up their African names and force other names upon them—making sure it wasn't a "white" name. Greek and Roman deity names were popular for them in that time, but there were also place names and days of the week. It was rare that owners let the slaves keep their name. Generations later, as the slaves started families and were allowed to name their own children, some named their children more after their grandparents than their parents, and because many slaves converted to Christianity, biblical names were also chosen. Once slavery ended, many dropped their slave name and chose another, again, mostly biblical. In the 1960's, African-Americans started looking for their roots when naming their children, and chose native names. They also put a spin on names, like choosing the root of a name and then changed it somehow. This trend of inventing names still goes strong even today.

The only reason I'm stumped with Native American names is because there are no lists of accurate names. All of those baby names sites that have Sioux, Cherokee, Apache, Blackfoot and the rest of the list of tribes are usually false, so I ignore the section completely and stick with the above rules if I can. To be frank, I'm not even completely sure how Native American tribes form names.

In some tribes, such as Mohegan, I know that they are given descriptive names when they are born, and then their names could change as they grow older through adolescence, and adulthood according to their knowledge and experiences. They change as the individual changes, and these names are usually tied with nature and their tribe and family. Other than that, it's still pretty obscure to me.

After I limit to what specific origin I want the name to be based on my personal rules, I limit the list further by choosing a letter, and then the specific name. I've already thought of the basic history and personality of the character in mind, so once the name is chosen, I only tweak the character to suit the name. Does he or she like the name? How does the name sound in general? Pretty, plain, elegant, strong? How do others treat him or her because of the name? Has he or she ever looked up the definition, and if so, does it affect the character?

Picking on Meyer's Isabella "Bella" Swan again, it isn't her name that irks me; it's she as the overall character. To start the example, the fact that Isabella doesn't have a direct source or story to how she got her name, the free-spirited Renee and introverted, bashful, Charlie can be off the hook for not reflecting the name that was chosen. The nickname, however, can be pondered about because Bella's source is, in fact, Renee, but because Renee's so wild and flighty, she could have tried out several nicknames and Isabella just seemed to respond to Bella more. Bella, on the other hand, doesn't act like a normal girl with a name like hers.

Upon merely hearing the name "Bella" (since she demands to be called by her Italian nickname instead of her English Isabella), I think of church bells or chime bells, very soothing and beautiful to hear, and that's exactly how she's treated during the books. The people fawn over her even though she just arrived to Forks, the girls get jealous or gossip to her to make friends, and yet Bella constantly ignores them and belittles herself, calling herself plain, or boring. You would think being practically called beautiful every time someone

says her name would give her more self-respect and confidence, but no. She's either very stubborn to just have her way no matter how ridiculous it is, which is repeatedly shown in other ways (sex, childbirth, doing something extremely dangerous for a hallucination, and a bunch of other trivial acts), or she has some sort of mental disorder which causes low self-esteem, mood swings and suicide attempts. Even though Bella was trying to pull off the "he's my only one" shtick, suicide attempt usually means that something is seriously wrong. Yet, no psychiatrists are called, no anti-depressants, no nothing, as if she's perfectly fine, when any other character would probably be on suicide watch, in a mental hospital, or have a 24/7 escort.

Anyway, let's move on to the rest of the tips for forming names. Depending on the culture's tradition, you have to be careful to choose a certain number of names. In many canon media, a majority of the characters go by a single name where the full name isn't known, like Undertaker in *Black Butler* going with the profession rather than an actual name, or Professor Palladium in *Winx Club* . Therefore, even if the culture and the rules of names are established, you're allowed to choose just one name if that's the only name that's going to be used.

This also begs the question, if fan fiction writers are going write about one of these characters without a full name, much less a first name, how would someone go about writing him or her? It would probably be more preferable if you can just keep calling the character by the name that is given, but it would be understandable if you just can't avoid the first name situation forever. Giving the character a first name probably wouldn't be a good idea, but if you do, do choose an appropriate name with a meaning similar to the character (if until the real name is revealed in which you would edit it afterwards). Alternatively, you can make up a nickname that is like an inside joke in which it doesn't have to be accurate, or even be related to the actual name if it is later revealed, but it has a story behind it.

Some Asian countries only have a first name and a family/clan/last name, so there is no need to choose a middle initial at all. Similarly, some people just choose not to give a middle name to their child even if they could, and some decide to give two middle names. In a Latino culture, family names are tacked on to the next generation, so the character's name could actually be as long as a list.

If the setting is in the United States, then names like Bobby-Joe or Suzy-Anne would be acceptable since it mostly happens there. You could even name a character Mary-Sue and she wouldn't be a literal Mary-Sue. Sometimes parents can't make up their mind, so they combine the names like Mary-Margret did in *Once Upon a Time* .

Another trend is to capitalize a letter in the middle of a name, like McKenzie, or AnnaBelle, or MaryAnne. This is also appropriate in the US; although it isn't done so often.

The various spellings of names are another matter for a couple different reasons. The main concern is when the usual name is spelled differently, like Lindsay is spelled Lyndsie. If the parent is like Renee, a free-spirited or unusual person, then yes, it's plausible. Parents still do that, even in real life (and some admit to regretting it). Therefore, if that's the case, it's not a big deal, so move on. Another reason, is that the usual name can be officially spelled different ways because it has branches in different origins, so a name that may be of unusual spelling, may actually be normal, just in another culture.

Sometimes names are spelled with additional symbols such as with an apostrophe, which is sometimes needed for aiding making an appropriate sound while reading, but it is mostly due to the person being a foreigner and their names could have been pronounced differently without it. A lot of languages, such as Arabic, Turkish, and even fictional languages like Klingon, names included, contain glottal pauses within words and names, so in order to show that there should be a pause in the pronunciation without having to leave a space, and confusing others on whether the name after the space is a middle or last name, they put an apostrophe in the English translation. Hyphens create the opposite effect, rushing instead of

pausing, forcing you to read the two sections together as one. Another example of having apostrophes in names is in *DC* comic's Martian Manhunter's human identity as J'onn J'onnzz (pronounced as John Jones), along with other martians who have taken the names B'enn B'urnzz, B'rett, Cay'an, D'kay D'razz, Ma'alefa'ak, and M'gann M'orzz.

It's one thing, a parent respelling an English name to include apostrophes when they are truly unneeded (unless you're a martian of course), it's another when it really is needed to improve the pronunciation to the original foreign sound.

The last complaint that I can think of when it comes to the names of characters, is when they are named after gems, rocks, plants, or are ordinary descriptive words. Go ahead and name characters after gems, rocks, and plants, it's fine! It's been going on for centuries, and there is no viable reason to stop it now. This goes as well as descriptive names like Harmony, Makepeace or Precious. I know some parents who've named their children after famous celebrities or fictional characters. It's completely fine, I promise you. As long as you follow a set of cultural rules, and have the character have some kind of developmental "bond" with their name, whether they like it or not.

What if you can't find the meanings to foreign names? That's a big issue, because if you don't know anything about the country origin, let alone the name, it'll be harder to decide how the character would develop further in that little tweak. Let's take Japan as an easy-to-reach example. -Suke, -taro, and -maru are all masculine or strong sounding. -Suke seems more casual as exemplified in characters like Sagara Sanosuke (*Rurouni Kenshin*), a fight-for-hire street brawler. The way I've been seeing it, -taro makes whatever name that it's connected to it seem stronger in strength, like Yamada Hanataro from *Bleach* . Despite that, "Hana" means "flower" Hanataro proves his strength and masculinity by helping Ichigo and several others on different occasions, despite acting scared and nervous all the time. -Maru is typically given to nobles in royal

families, or elegant-like people, like Sesshomaru from *Inuyasha* . -Ko and -e, on the other hand are quite feminine. With -ko meaning "child", it would seem that anyone that had names such as Nanako or Atsuko acted quite childish, or was extremely petite, and those with -e seemed to just have a mother-like guidance, like Shizue from *Shisho-san to Issho* . So really, you only need to know part of the names to get the gist of the feel for the name's inner meaning.

It's that simple molding of that tiny part of them, which gives the characters another flavor. A rose wouldn't sound as appealing if it was named skunk cabbage, just as it would sound like Romeo married an old bitter hag named Gertrude (no offense to Gertrude reading this). If that were the case, Shakespeare would have probably only changed the title of his play. While I still stand that names aren't a big deal, they do carry some weight of importance, so a few conscious choices would give your story another added connection to your audience.

"A name can't begin to encompass the sum of all her parts. But that's the magic of names, isn't it? That the complex, contradictory individuals we are can be called up complete and whole in another mind through the simple sorcery of a name" (Charles de Lint).

The Eye of the Tiger

Mary-Sues: The Eye of the Tiger

In all of my previous guides, I had assumed that most, if not all characters, were human, or mostly human, instead of thinking of the possibility of main characters, or even minor characters, being animals. Well, it doesn't really matter, because, for the most part, the rules for creating human characters, including names and powers, writing presentation, and even romance would also apply to animals. There would just be a slight variation from humans, and this slight variation can make a world of difference in your writing.

A more common complaint I've seen about writers who write about animals at all, is that the animals, whether they are the main character, or whether they are a human's pet, is that the animal is "too human." While humans are technically animals too, what this complaint is really trying to say is that the animal has too many human-like qualities from having a voice to feeling human-like emotions.

Don't worry about that complaint at all because you can make your animal characters as "human" as you want. The truth is animals do have voices, animals do have feelings, animals do have intelligence, and animals have a lot of "human-like" qualities. No matter what animal you're thinking of, whether it is an ant or a whale, you'll find at least one thing about that animal that's "human."

Ants put their graveyard of dead ants as far away from their food supply as possible (I've noticed that every cemetery I've ever been to doesn't have a food court or a restaurant within at least a block). Most animals that live in family groups or packs have a hierarchy. Prairie dogs have a complex linguistic system for identifying predators. There was a documented report of a lioness taking care of a baby antelope as if it was her cub. Pet dogs mimic their owner's faces, which is where the "owners looking like their dogs" myth

comes from. Crows and ravens can remember an individual human's face and tell their family, their children, and their neighbors to attack that human! (Scary, isn't it?)

I have a true story of my own. One morning as I was walking to school I was attacked by a small brown bird—I thought I was being attacked by a remote control airplane, it was so coordinated! It chased me until I ran around the corner. The next morning, a Friday, I watched the bird attack more students from across the street. I had no idea why the bird was doing it. On Monday, I thought for sure the bird had quit and braved the sidewalk only to be attacked again! Was it possible that a student threw a rock at it and now it hates humans? I wasn't convinced that the bird was an all out racist, but if that was the case, I wouldn't have blamed it if someone did try and hurt it. I told my best friend that I and other students kept getting attacked by the bird, so she and I investigated the site of the problem with me as bait. The problem laid there right in the middle of the sidewalk and I didn't even notice it. It was a dead baby bird. The bird that had relentlessly been attacking students for days was only trying to protect her baby. We decided to at least move it to the grass so people wouldn't step on it—we probably would have buried it if the mother hadn't still been trying to get us. After that, the mother still antagonized the students that walked by for another week, and then disappeared. That experience reaffirmed my thoughts that animals did have a capacity for emotions.

Animals as Main Characters

So if animals are so similar to humans, what's the point of me writing this guide? Simply because this is to give you new areas to focus on so your audience can see through the eyes of your animal-like character. Even if a girly-girl is reading about a totally butch biker girl, if you express the emotions and actions so the reader understands why the biker is punching the snot out of some guy for just looking at her the wrong way, the reader will understand and still enjoy the story. It would be one of those "I would have done it differently, but I get why she did what she did" hopefully enjoyable moments. Think of

animals just as a different kind of human. I'll get to secondary characters that are animals later, but for now I'm focusing on main characters that are animals.

Just as there are different species of humans, from Caucasian to Japanese, Native Americans, Nigerians, and so on, there would be different species of animals. With those differences, you would have to think of the different locations, climate, plant-life, other animals-from prey to predators-their societies, and other necessities to survival. One species of finches uses tools to get insects while another finch doesn't need a tool to eat seeds. Just like you would have to research the culture if you were writing in a different setting, research the animals and learn how they survive.

Maybe a crow from Japan speaks a different mode of language than the crows in the US, or maybe instead of a different language altogether, there is a heavy accent. We don't really know because there haven't been any thorough experimentations or observation on language barriers. Whether you want all animals of the same species speaking one language (whatever language you happen to be writing the story), then take note of the sounds, like the howl of a coyote, or yips and chirps of another animal. Just remind the audience that your character, while an animal who could easily translate the noise, is still a sound that humans don't know. If you translated absolutely everything without describing what's being translated (a bark, howl, yip, etc.) it's much harder to picture the story whether it be the setting or another animal character.

Another way to create the illusion that the main character is an animal, without even having to tell the audience what kind of animal it is, is to describe the story from the animal's point of view (even if the story is written in third person). Just as if a human is blind, you wouldn't describe what color the apple was, you would describe the smooth crisp skin, and whether the apple smelled or tasted sweet or sour, and describe the juice dribbling down the arm. Wolves have great noses and ears, but have a very poor sense of taste (that's why some people treat their own dogs like garbage disposals), so

focus on smells and sounds. In addition, wolves and dogs aren't completely colorblind, so research to see what their world would really look like than it just being black and white.

If your character is a bat, you would describe sounds, and how it bounces off of surfaces. If your character is an animal that is naturally deaf, you would describe the vibrations from the ground more than sight even if the eyes are as strong as touch because deaf humans' sense of touch is stronger than their eyes, even if there's nothing wrong with them. Yes, research the animal, but it's OK to use humans as examples—if anything, it'll help you gain a wide variety of audiences. If the animal isn't completely without sight, hearing, taste, touch, or smell, you still have a chance to describe the settings from the weaker senses, but use vague terms, like it was bright, or there was a dull thud.

Also think of how their family works. Not all mothers love their children endearingly, and it doesn't make them have a dangerous mental disorder for having that quality. Guppies like eating their children. Many birds, like the cuckoo and the cowbird, dump their eggs in another bird's nest expecting the new host to take care of their young; cowbirds are one of a kind because if the new parents reject their egg, they'll come back and destroy the parent's eggs. Nurse sharks eat their own siblings while their still in the womb. While it's odd to have only one wolf by him or herself, and it makes survival hard (make sure to describe that), it isn't unheard of, and there could be various reasons for the wolf to be on their own. Then there's the queen and colonies of bees and ants family situation where one ant is just a number instead of having a name, but you understand. There are various definitions of family in the animal kingdom.

Maybe you want to create your own animal or creature. Good for you. It's a lot of work, but rewarding when you finish. What kind of animal do you want to create? Will it be an insect, mammal, reptile, amphibian, a bird, fish, an aquatic mammal, ad infinitum? Think of the habitat: what kind of weather it has, the seasonal changes, what

kinds of plants there are, any reoccurring natural disasters, tides, etc. After all, you wouldn't put a reptilian animal in an area like Antarctica, would you? Then think about it's temperament along with it's modes of defense or attack. While some snakes are rather docile and would prefer to slither away, there are a few that would chase you if you threatened it. If the animal flies or glides, how? Birds have strong muscles along with light-weight bones, but there are animals, like flying squirrels, or frogs or snakes, that stretches itself out and the skin, or webbed toes, or flattened bodies, act like parachutes. Is the animal more active in its travels, or is it like a jellyfish that goes where ever the current takes them? Does the animal have a migration or hibernation pattern?

I suggest looking into getting an animal encyclopedia book, or looking around online for an animal encyclopedia and get ideas from real animals that are around, or were around, here on Earth. Nothing inspires creativity quite like what you see in your own backyard. Or in this case, the internet. Be careful of hoaxes though. I'm not saying you can't write about mermaids, big foot, moth man, aliens or other creatures where there are huge scientific debates about, it's just if someone is saying that they are a witness (or they are a friend of a friend of the witness), treat it with skepticism. It's amazing what people can pull off with Adobe or Photoshop—even to video. The show *Fact or Faked* is amusing to watch just to see who's created videos as a hoax.

If you are going to write about animals that are based on mythology, folk lore, fairy tales, legends and such, read about all you can about them. Most people assume that Unicorns are just horses with a horn, but there are many different mythologies about them. Some say that Unicorns have the body of a horse, tail of a lion, legs of a goat, and head of a dragon! Even if you're writing about a humanistic species of mythology, like vampires, or elves, or fairies, read all you can about them in many areas of the world. Or you can just stick to the typical horse with a horn, or the modern portrayal of vampires—I like researching so I consider it a personal must.

After you've done as much research as you feel you need to, then you can create your "human-like" additives to your animal/creature. I already described linguistics in the example of crows from two different countries. Maybe animals do have deities to worship, like an ant-equivalent to Gaia, or the wolf-equivalent to Luna. Maybe they do have holiday traditions—telling stories, hunting, singing or even a form of dancing—during a special kind of weather or time period. Maybe they can talk to humans, but choose not to, or they have forgotten.

In *We Have Always Lived in the Castle* by Shirley Jackson, Mary Katherine, the human main character, has a cat named Jonas, and refers to him quite often throughout the story even though he doesn't really do anything except follow her around and keep her company. He's her friend, and that's enough for the story. At one point, Mary Katherine makes him seem more human, but perfectly cat-like, with the passage, "I lay there with Jonas, listening to his stories. All cat stories start with the statement: 'My mother, who was the first cat, told me this,'." Jonas didn't even have a voice except for that one part, and even though Jonas wasn't a big part of the story, this was an example of creating human-like qualities for animals in a form of tradition. Of course it was most likely due to Mary Katherine's imagination taking over the narration, but I still consider it an example.

Like Twain said, "Get your facts first, and then you can distort them as much as you please."

If you are writing in the fantasy genre, and the animal, or the creature you created, has an abnormal ability or powers, just like with humans, please refer to my other guide "How Much Power is Too Much Power." There, you'll learn about different sorts of abilities, weaknesses, the Hero Cycle, and how to balance it all. The only thing I can add onto, or highlight further, is that if every animal of the species has an ability, then it's not a superpower. If it's genetic only within a family of a certain species, then it is a power, but it's a genetic mutation where some have it, and others don't, and there's a

chance another family could get the same genetic mutation. If only an individual animal within the entire species has the power, then it's considered very abnormal, which can raise some flags, but it won't be Mary-Sueish depending on which genre your story is, and how you portray and explain this power. Abilities can have a mix of different explanations.

Whether it's a creature you created, or an animal that actually exists, you do need to explain the abnormalities sooner or later within the story. You basically just need to answer the how, why and maybe when. How did he or she come across this power? If she was born with it, how did he or she learn to control it, and why this individual or his or her family, or why this species of animal? Also is there a time when their powers don't work? This doesn't necessarily have to have an answer at all; it's just something to think about if it pertains to your character. "How Much Power is Too Much Power" would be able to go into depth in figuring out how to answer these questions, but it's ultimately up to you how to answer them.

Animal Secondary Characters

What if your main characters are human, but animal characters, or just animals, play a part? I think this is that complaint of the animal being "too human" really comes from. Has anyone watched those 60's film, *Lassie* ? All she does is bark, but humans seem to somehow understand her. I'm sure most of you have heard this somewhere. "What is it Lassie? Little Timmy's stuck in a well?" It wasn't the dog's fault, Lassie was strictly barking, it was the humans who somehow understood that Timmy was stuck in a well. Dog, cat, or horse whispering is one thing, but fully understanding them? It's instances like these that reflect something awful on animals.

We've seen them. Snow White just sings and the wild animals in the forest are at their beck and call, but that's Disney. It's supposed to be a fairy tale dreamland—everything a girl wishes for. If the animal is supposed to talk, whether it's for a cartoon, or a fairytale kind of story, that should be fine. Remember the Grimm Brothers fairy tales —it's chalk full of animals that talk, dance, sing, and all that jazz, and

that's fine. If you're writing in the fairy tale genre of fantasy, go ahead and write animals talking, dancing, singing, and composing musical pieces that would rival Wolfgang's.

If you're writing more realistic pieces, then you're going to have more rules to follow. First, if you want your character to attract animals, figure out a reason why, whether it's a supernatural special ability within the voice, an instrument, a charm, food, whatever, just figure out a reason and think on why it's important.

Pets are also a common theme as a secondary or minor character. Whether it's a common pet, or a more exotic pet, research them down to the breed. Yes, pets can be weird—one of my cats likes lemonade, and the other cat likes melons—so look on YouTube to see all this weird stuff pets do. Just because a character's pet is a little exotic, like, say, a skunk, it doesn't mean it's impossible for a fictional character to have one. Make sure to look up legal pets, pets you have to have a license for, pets where you pay a legal fine for owning one, and pets that are downright illegal. To be on the safe side, I would avoid pets that you have to pay a fine for or any pets that are illegal. It would be rather anticlimactic if the main character nearly gets killed by the main villain, heals, and ends up getting eaten by his pet tiger.

Lastly, if your character is supposed to have this magical bond with an animal, not counting the "bond of friendship", make sure you somehow explain it all. Personally, I would call this a superpower because if the character was in trouble, it would just call to his animal partner, and it would rescue him or her, so, like every power, there has to be a way to weaken the ability, whether it's merely to block the communicative link, or for it to have no link at all and have the animal be a rogue wild animal again. Do the human and the animal have to be touching in order to be able to communicate? Is there a magical pendant? Is it merely mental, using telepathy? It's your story, you figure it out.

As always, I hope that this was in anyway helpful, if helpful at all. If you feel I missed something, or think I can dive in deeper, let me

know via review, and I'll edit this to hopefully explain further.

How to Write Dreams and Flashbacks

Mary-Sues: How to Write Dream and Flashback Sequences

For once, I couldn't find any how-to guides that I liked so I could reference off of, so I'm on my own for this, otherwise this would probably be longer and probably be more organized. This should actually tell you something: there are practically no definite rules on how to write dream or flashback sequences. There are rules telling you not to write either of sequences, but screw that! If the only reason that having dreams and flashbacks being barred in fiction because they aren't well-written, then keep writing them and get better at it until you get the hang of it. Telling someone not to do it at all because they suck at it is just telling them to give up before they try. In some stories, dreams and flashbacks are important for different reasons.

Dreams

There's no possible way I can tell you the right or wrong way of writing dreams. Some complain that it's too life-like, but if it's too psychedelically weird where whales are flying and the character can breathe lava, then it seems useless to the story. The fact is that dreams can be all over the place from totally life-like to off-the-wall I-can't-believe-I-dreamed-that-am-I-crazy weird.

Some people dream of waking up, taking a shower, brushing their teeth, getting dressed and getting to their car repeatedly as if the CD was on loop before they actually woke up to do those exact same things. My mom had that dream, and did that routine until she got into her car at 5:30 in the morning to realize that it was a Saturday so she didn't have to wake up or go to work (she was mad). When I was seven or eight I dreamed I got up and went to the bathroom, not realizing I was actually *going* in my bed.

There are some who dream in full colors, some who dream in a limited palette, and some who dream in black and white. I tend to dream in color, but they aren't generally bright. Most of the dreams I remember are of something in a horror movie kind of color palette, but I do get a few bright dreams (the bathroom light was bright). One of my dreams in particular had a very limited color palette. I—well, my arm—was black and white, I wasn't in any place, it was just that everywhere was blue and fog-like, and, in my hand, I was holding my bloody left kidney, with and artery still linking it to my body.

Like my kidney dream, some dreams don't have a story or a rolling plot, and others do have stories, or story-like components. Some story dreams run a complete real from start to finish, and some have separate scenes to the same story. I love these kinds of dreams because that's where I get the strangest stories. A few days ago I had two separate story-like dreams, both of which were more of the separate scenes category. The first one was creepy as hell, so when I realized I was lucid dreaming, I forced myself to wake up, and when I fell back to sleep, I had another completely different story-like dream.

Lucid dreaming is when you're asleep, dreaming, but you realize you're dreaming. Some people continue to watch the dream at the pace, some can fast forward especially if they know they're going to wake up soon, some can face the monster and ask it "What's your name?", and some people force themselves to either change the dream completely or wake up if they don't like it.

The first dream, which I titled "Asusa", takes place in a Japanese setting and "I" was a half Japanese and half German boy who just moved to Japan. I moved into the house and there was a welcome party with lots of parents and lots of children (while I was somewhere between thirteen and seventeen). During the party, all the babies, toddlers, and little kids were sitting in a group, and their parents were trying to get them to watch a show, but they kept looking up the stairs. When I looked, I couldn't see anything, but when I looked behind them I saw a girl. She was a friend and was supposed to be

there. When I looked back at the parents for a split second, and looked back at the girl, there was another girl in shadows next to her and startled me. The other girl wasn't supposed to be there. Then these beetles kept making an appearance, hollowing out bananas, leaving the peels perfectly intact. I don't know why that's even relevant—the hollowing out bananas part, not the beetles. In the next scene, I'm in my room and I look out my window to see the girl hanging by her neck looking at me. She mouthed the words "Come outside." I sneak out to see a black cat. When I look away and look back there are several smaller black cats in its place. I find the girl with the noose hanging loosely around her neck sitting on Olivia's, my "mother's", headstone. We talk, and I find out her name is "Asusa". I told her I would help her somehow and we shake hands, but when I talk about the beetles, her rope gets yanked over the fence right behind the gravestone so hard she gets decapitated. I hop over the fence and tear the rope off of where it's hooked, and when she's freed, an eye—not hers—looks at me through the fence. When Asusa recovers she cries that the beetles were her brothers. And that's when I woke up.

Maybe someday I'll actually write the story, but as it is, or as it seemed like in dream-form, it seemed more like a *The Grudge* rip-off. Asusa isn't even a name at all, let alone a Japanese name.

The next dream was more of an anime media, and I wasn't too specific. I wasn't anybody—I was watching it as if I was watching it on TV—but the main character was a young teen boy in the Takao Miyazaki style. He lived in a strange town, and I actually don't remember too much of it, even as I wrote it down soon after I woke up. Basically, one of his best friends died bloody, and when there was a mud-slide, he realized the mud was actually blood. He knew because his best friend's blood felt the same as the "mud." Then the "camera" zoomed out to show me that the town was on the back of a dragon. That's it.

I had two completely different dreams in one night, pretty unbelievable, right? The mind works in mysterious ways, so the best

way to relay it in fiction, is to start writing down your own dreams, and tries to decipher it. Dreams can show what you're worried about —with the kidney dream I was worried about my mom's health because she smokes and drinks a lot, and in a way, I'm scared that I'm going to end up being like her. Dreams can show you solutions to your problems, or what you're subconsciously thinking of—I wanted to use the bathroom, so I dreamt it, but too bad I didn't actually wake up (I dreamt about the cold seat and everything too). Basically, there is a connection from your conscious to your unconscious, so when you're writing your dreams down, try and find the connection.

Dreams can also represent, or show, a memory. Whether the memory be in tact or distorted is up to you and your story.

Also, I love Japanese horror movies, and I love anime, so of course I would dream of a Japanese-like horror movie, and of an anime. In fact, I'm quite passionate about both. So find out what your character's passionate about, whether it is gardening, house cleaning, hobbies, or anything else. It can at least help give you a start.

I recommend actually buying a large encyclopedia of dream symbolism, and if it matters, try and find various dream symbolisms from different cultures. The snake may have been the sign of evil to Christians, but the snake means a sign of wisdom and a cyclic consecutiveness to alchemists. Different cultures have different meanings to different symbols. For Asusa, I would have to find a Japanese dream encyclopedia, and compare it to an American and German encyclopedia to see which makes more sense. You can look online, but I prefer actually getting books, just because I find the organization better, and so I don't have to keep turning on my laptop to see what this or that means. Another thing you might need is to look up dream superstitions. While symbolism and superstitions can be thought as generally the same thing, you'll get a different list of results, at least on the internet.

One strange superstition I've found to be true for one person is that she dreamed of someone dying (that sounds bad!). However, in

dream superstitions, if someone dreams of death, someone or something will be born, but if one dreams of birth, someone or something will die. It turns out she became a new big sister.

There are some occasions where dreams just don't make sense no matter which way you look at it. In your fiction, if these kinds of dreams aren't important, or if the answers won't ever reveal themselves, then you can either lightly reference on it with little to no detail, like:

" *Dude, I just had this really weird dream; you (a guy) were there, but you were in a bikini . . . and really hot too. . . .*"

Or just skip it. Like anything that isn't important, you can either trim it down, or you don't need it at all.

There are some mythical writing rules that declare the words "Never start you story with. . . ." Description is one of them, but I already talked about that in "How to Not Write Like You Have One". Dialogue is another one, but I don't think I need to go into that. You can start off the entire story with "Dude, where's my car?" and you already have the plot. But, yes, dreams and flashbacks also make the cut with this "rule".

Yes you *can* start off the story with a dream or a flashback. One of the Batman movies starts off with a dream. I haven't read any books that start off with a dream, but I'm sure you can find them. Any rule that says *don't* or *you can't* , there will be exceptions for, even in my Mary-Sue guides.

One good example of how dreams work (at least from the nightmare angle) is in a short nine volume manga called *Nightmare Inspector* (Shin Mashiba). It's about a boy who inspects nightmares, helps solve the dream, and then eats the nightmare, but it shows how the nightmares, the solutions, and the identity of the dreamer, can be totally unexpected. One of the dreamers was even a weather vane. Even though this guide is a how-to- *write* sort of guide, I think using manga as examples can still help, especially when they show the

connection between the dream and the dreamer (and I haven't read any books with good dream sequences).

Also, similar to dreams, hallucinations can also be like dreams, whether the character is on drugs or has a mental disorder, and whether the hallucination is life-like or psychedelic. *The Hunger Games* (Suzanne Collins) had one hallucination sequence, and it showed an inner side of Katniss that probably wouldn't have been possible to show otherwise, at least not in the same way with the same mood.

Flashbacks

Flashbacks are generally used to show what had happened in the past, but are important through the present story-telling. This is tricky, just about as tricky as writing dream sequences, because you can do just about anything. Writing non-fiction stories is already basically one big flashback story, and if there is an even further in the past that is important, it could be declared a flashback within a flashback, but for the typical fictional purposes, where only a section of the story is a flashback, let's stick to the purely fictional—not that fictional stories can't have flashbacks within a flashback.

You could write something along the lines of "Here's what happened. . ." skip two lines and tell the flashback as another story, instead of having the character have one huge paragraph of dialogue telling the story. You can dedicate a chapter, or several chapters telling the flashback story. Flashbacks can take up over half the story, or can be as short as one line. You can separate the present narration from the flashback like with the previous examples, or you can even casually insert it within the narration.

" *Oh, you know what I just remembered? John told me to get him some stuff for his cigarettes. He was real stern about it, too, saying I had to get the tobacco and the rolling paper instead of the cigarettes in a box. He acted as if I was a little kid, but I'm his wife for gosh sakes. I know that he likes rolling his own instead of the boxed cigarettes.* "

Fruits Basket (Natsuki Takaya) had a few dream sequences, but they had plenty of flashbacks too. It told separate stories of how Tohru Honda met Arisa Uotani and Saki Hanajima, along with how Kyo Sohma met Kyoko Honda, and how she died. There was also a flashback of how Kyoko met Katsuya Honda. In between the story and the major flashbacks there were mini-flashbacks of how Ayame Sohma met Mine, his assistant, along with Akito, her parents, how Yuki Sohma was hurt by Akito (he also had a hallucination when he was locked in a school closet)—basically everyone had their own flashback. Half of the series was full of flashbacks.

"A Rose for Emily" by William Faulkner is by far the most interestingly formatted story I've read using flashbacks. The story starts off with Emily Grierson's funeral, telling the readers how great of a person she was, and how much dignity she had, making sure to give plenty of examples that could be counted as flashbacks, but as the story progresses, oddly enough going backwards years at a time, showing the different events that happened up to thirty or forty years before she died, you start to get a different sense of what kind of person she really was. Then, in the last scene, after Emily is dead, back to telling the story forward, they find the body of her soon-to-be husband. Basically, the story started, and then it went backwards, then it went back to the first scene to finish the story.

Don't let dreams or flashbacks scare you. It takes practice to master it, so start practicing! I know I do, which reminds me, I still need to rewrite a chapter of one of my fan fictions.