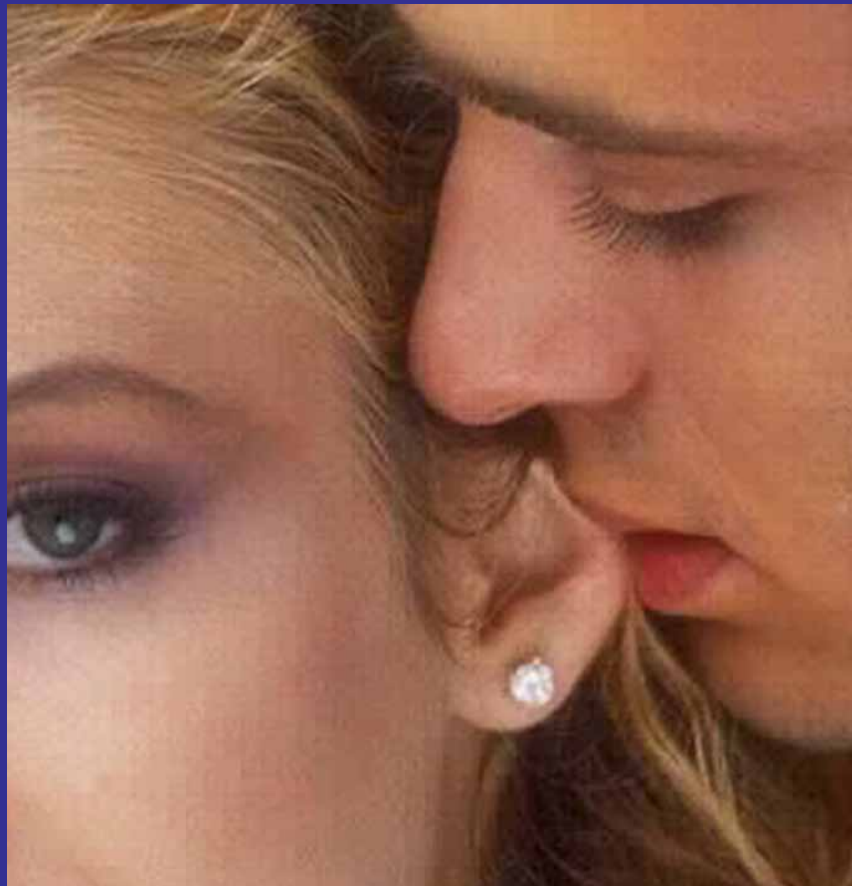


Touch hearts as a published author!

FabJob Guide to
**Become a
Romance
Writer**



LORI SOARD

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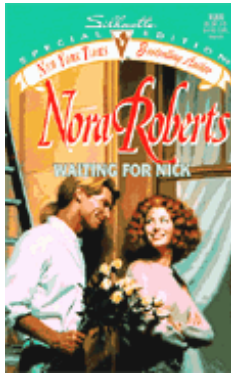
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Welcome

Welcome to the **FabJob Guide to Become a Romance Writer!** In this guide we offer you the tools and techniques you need to break into the satisfying and rewarding career of writing romance novels. If you've always imagined your fantasies worthy of being read by millions, now is the time to start using your runaway imagination to your benefit!



If you are a beginner, this guide will introduce you to the basics of writing romance novels. We'll explain what you'll need to learn in order to impress the editors who'll read your book. We'll also make sure you have the equipment you need to start writing, and direct you to resources to improve your craft as you go along.

If you have already drafted your first manuscript, this guide will help you get it published! The guide explains how to put together a great proposal package and shop your book around effectively, and looks at which publishers are going to buy your book and why. You'll be introduced to agents, editors and publicists, and be given tips on dealing with them effectively and professionally to further your career.

This guide offers you:

- **Ideas** to develop and improve your romance writing skills
- **Ways** to get writing experience *before* you try to sell your manuscript
- **Insight** into what editors and agents are really looking for in their next star writer
- **Options** for breaking into the industry through alternative markets
- **Resources** for learning more about each topic the guide covers

The **Introduction** covers the different types of romance novels you can write and benefits of the career. It also includes a mini-questionnaire you can use to determine if romance writing might be the right career path for you!

The **Getting Ready** section launches you into the craft with sections on writing ability, grammar, creativity, perseverance, and romance writing conventions. Even if you have already started writing your novel, this section will give you ideas on polishing your work into a piece that will really shine. This section also gives you tips about getting the kind of experience under your belt that will impress an editor and move your manuscript to the top of that humungous pile!

The **Getting Published** section starts by whipping your manuscript into shape for submission with correct formatting that editors don't just like—they demand! You are then taken step-by-step through putting together a proposal package that includes a cover letter, a synopsis, and sample chapters of your book. Next, the guide includes an extensive list of current publishers large and small of romance novels, with insider information about what they are looking for and contact information for all. Small and electronic press and self-publishing options are covered thoroughly, then the guide looks at agents and publicists before summing up with some tips on being professional.

Finally, **Being Successful** examines what you can do once you're published to keep your career going and avoid making mistakes. Dealing with editors, networking and conferences, and self-promotion are all a part of this bonus section of the guide.

This guide includes numerous links to online and print resources so that the education you get from it does not end on the last page. In addition, the guide is full of insider tips and expert advice from **more than 75 published romance writers, editors and literary agents** working in the field right now! Their insights and the author's experience are going to save you from wasting time and making the same mistakes everyone does, so you will achieve your career goals more quickly and with better results.

Writing romances is the ideal job. No more long commutes to work, no more office politics. You can even wear your pajamas and fuzzy bunny slippers to work if you want. Work during the hours that you are most productive, not nine to five. Best of all, you can set your own schedule around your family's and be flexible!

So is romance writing for you? Read on. The road to becoming a romance writer is challenging, but this guide will help you navigate the process, enabling you to move from wishful thinking to the realization of your goal. If you are independent, creative, and determined to succeed, you *can* become a romance writer!

1. Introduction

Do you still remember the **first romance** you read? Perhaps there is one special book that speaks to your heart and soul, or a set of characters you relate to. If you love to read romance novels, then you might want to consider writing them. Indeed, most romance writers today were first avid readers of the genre.

Stories of love are as old as time. Indeed, love stories can be traced back to early mythological stories and fairy tales. Why do people feel compelled to write romance? For many, it is a challenge. Romances often are written to very strict 'rules'; not a formula, but at the same time there is a set format of boy meets girl, boy loses girl, boy gets girl that appeals to many.



The appeal of that age-old and very familiar emotion is why romance has a large share of the paperback market. Mass market books, or paperbacks as most of us call them, have a real corner on the market. Romance seems to have taken over paperbacks, too, with **55%** of the total paperback market.

Even with this large share of the paperback market, writing romances isn't easy. Writers must make a real commitment to the genre, and hang in there until they get a book published. The good news for you is that with more than 2,000 books published each year in paperback and even more in electronic and small presses, it is **easier to get published today** than it has ever been in the past!

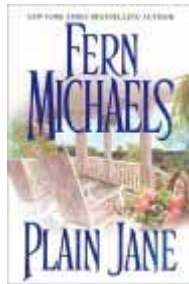
1.1 Types of Romance Novels

“Category provides a smaller canvas for your story, more well-defined parameters, and a tighter focus on the hero/heroine than does a Single title. But within those parameters, there is a wide latitude of story possibilities. I often think of a category book as a

canvas where my editor has dabbled a few drops of paint—a marriage of convenience, a cowboy or an expectant mom. My task is to take those bits of paint — which are never in a straight line and are often unrelated — and incorporate them into a story that is the book of my heart.”

—Charlotte Maclay, author, [Not Exactly Pregnant](#) (Harlequin Duets)

If you haven't read a romance lately, you might be surprised at the **variety and new trends** in this industry. Many writers have become famous because they've dared to break the rules. [Nora Roberts](#) writes cutting-edge characters, [Jennifer Crusie](#) uses wicked humor, [Fern Michaels](#) weaves in a bit of intrigue. What will your niche be? Will you change a young girl's perception of romance or give her the self-confidence to seek out an equal relationship? Read on to learn about the range of sub-genres within the romance classification.



1.1.1 Contemporary Romances

Contemporary romances take place in present day, must have a happy ending, and are usually quick-paced and snappier than historicals (see below), with more dialogue and less description. There are two basic categories of contemporary romances: **single title** and **category/series**.

Category/Series books are shorter and very specific as far as the formula they follow—not that romances are formulaic but they do tend to have certain characteristics in common. You'll find a lot of secret babies and cowboys in Harlequins, for example. They are shorter books between 40,000 and 70,000 words, typically, which leaves room for little more than boy meets girl, boy and girl have conflict, boy and girl fall in love and live happily ever after. Authors to read include [Charlotte Maclay](#) and [Christine Feehan](#).

By contrast, single title books are longer — typically between 85,000 and 110,000 words. This type of romance typically has subplots and more secondary characters, as well as more action than boy meets girl/gets girl. Single title covers many different types of romances. A single title romance can be ethnic, romantic suspense, or edgy, or

almost mainstream but with a focus on the romance, which keeps it within the genre. Authors to read include [Susan Elizabeth Phillips](#) and [Carly Phillips](#).

1.1.2 Historical Romance

Historical romances are typically between 80,000 and 120,000 words, although some will be a bit shorter or longer. They cover various eras, such as Victorian, Medieval, and Regency. There are a few time periods that seem to be harder to sell—for example, anything later than about 1890 seems to be a hard sell to the publishers right now. The best way to get a feel for the time periods covered is to read widely in the historical sub-genre. While there are many fine historical authors, a few to look for are [Iris Johansen](#), [Joan Overfield](#), and [Connie Mason](#).



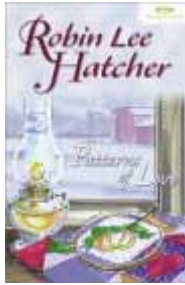
1.1.3 Ethnic Romance

Ethnic Romance is a sub-genre that has shown real growth in the last ten years, and I believe this is an area that will continue to expand. These romances can be contemporary or historical, depending upon the line. There are currently lines for African-American and Hispanic romances. If you enjoy reading these romances, or want to get in on the ‘ground floor’ of building an important new sub-genre in our industry, you might enjoy writing these romances. Some authors to read in this category are [Beverly Jenkins](#) and [Felicia Mason](#).

1.1.4 Inspirational Romance

Inspirational romances range from contemporary to historical, and can be from 45,000-75,000 words. This is a market that is changing and redefining itself rapidly. Once, inspirational romances were published by a few small presses and available only in local Christian bookstores, but are now making debuts in national chains and being published by New York houses, such as Harlequin with their Love Inspired line. Traditionally based upon Christian principles, this market is opening to include other faiths as well.

If you'd like to write inspirational, you should keep in mind that the focus should still be on the romance, but your characters should have deeply ingrained religious beliefs that somehow impact the story. For example, the heroine who struggles between her choice to kidnap her son and protect him from an abusive father and breaking the law — both societal and God's laws. The romance should be sweet — no love scenes unless between married couples — and even then the love scenes are typically faded out and left to the reader's imagination. Some authors to read in this genre include [Robin Lee Hatcher](#), [Charlotte Hubbard](#), and [Jillian Hart](#).



1.1.5 Paranormal and Gothic Romances

While still popular with some readers, publishers have pulled away from publishing paranormal romances, and the market is very limited today. Paranormal romance can cover anything from time travel to ghost stories to vampire and werewolf romances. Writers who choose to write in this sub-genre should be willing to experiment with fresh ideas and consider some of the alternative forms of publishing, since this market is currently so tight. Some popular authors of paranormal romances are [Amanda Ashley](#) and [Constance O'Day-Flannery](#).

Gothic romances (also horror romances or mystery romances) were very popular in the 70s and even into the 80s. Typical book covers depicted a dark, creepy house in the background and a nightgown-clad heroine running from some unseen danger. Gothic romances don't have as much of a market today, unless you look toward some of the new technology, such as electronic books. **Dean Koontz** wrote several gothics under the pen name [Leigh Nichols](#)...you may be able to find copies at your local library or various online auctions.

1.1.6 Anthologies and Seasonal Books

Anthologies are collections of about **three or four shorter romances** or novellas (usually around 30,000 words) with a common theme. For example, an anthology might tell the story of three couples stranded in a seaside resort because of a hurricane: three

writers would tell each couple's story and all three stories would appear in a single book. Although anthologies are normally 'by invitation' to the authors, a few small press publishers will sometimes buy separate novellas and compile them into a book.

Probably the most popular and widely published seasonal books are **Christmas romances**. There have been a few Valentine's Day anthologies as well. The rest of the seasons, for the most part, are neglected. If you have a Christmas story that just has to be told, you should write it with the knowledge that you are limiting yourself to a 'shorter' market. New writers will generally succeed with more general, marketable work until building a name for themselves.

1.2 Who Can Become a Romance Writer?

“Writing is very hard work. Just plumbing the depths of one's own mind can be an awesome feat. But, ultimately the rewards are worth it. Some writers may become published with their first book, or first anything, and other authors who are equally as talented may take years to get published. Don't worry about them. Just make sure that each book you write is the best it can be, that you present it in a professional manner, and that you send it out (and keep sending it out) until it's sold.”

—Diana Kirk, author, [Song of Isis](#)

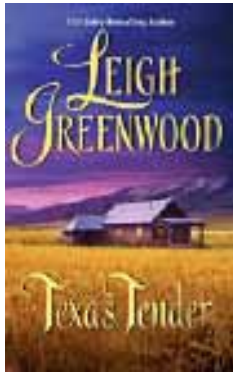
As you can see, there are many niches in the romance genre. The writing life isn't for everyone, though. First and foremost, you have to truly love romance and truly love writing. If you're only in this business to make money, I can assure you that you'll quickly become frustrated, and there are easier ways to make money. On the other hand, if you love to write and love romance, then there are many benefits to being a romance writer.

Romance writers range from professional women to housewives to women with doctorates. They are the woman next door, the lady at the desk next to yours and the waitress at the local restaurant. People from all walks of life have become romance writers, many while holding full-time jobs until their writing begins to bring in more money than the day job and they're forced to make a choice. **Nora Roberts** was the mother of young children when she began writing. **Charlotte Maclay** wrote nonfiction articles. **Diana Kirk** works for a university hospital and writes in the evenings.

Whatever your background, you can bring it into your stories. If you're a nurse, perhaps you'd be best suited to write romantic suspense/medical thrillers. Are you a schoolteacher? Consider making your heroine a schoolteacher. You'll already be familiar with the setting.

Don't just stop at bringing your career experiences into your writing—every part of your life can add to your writing. If you're a parent, it will help you write young characters. If you live in a small town, you're all set to write about small town life. Whatever is unique about you is what gives your story a unique perspective. Don't be shy about using it.

And a career in romance writing isn't just for women. Two-time president of Romance Writers of America, [Leigh Greenwood](#), is a man.



Many husband and wife writing teams have also been extremely successful, such as Judith Barnard and Michael Fain, who write as [Judith Michael](#) (all of their books have become bestsellers), and **Barri Bryan**. While men might be forced to take on a more feminine pen name at the request of marketing departments, they can certainly pursue a career in romance, and can often lend a perspective that other writers can't.

While romance writers are varied they also have some common personality traits. If writing romances is really the career you want, you may want to ask yourself if you have some of these traits.

Are you an avid reader?

“I had always loved books, but discovering romance novels in that little bookstore was a turning point in my life. After skipping school for the first time in my life to read *Gone With The Wind* in one day, I then turned to Victoria Holt, Philippa Carr, and Rosemary Rogers. I took the tube (subway) to school everyday so I always had a nice thick romance to take with me.”

—Karen White, author, [Learning to Breathe](#)

Most writers were once, and usually still are, avid readers. Love of the written word seems to start young in life and continue. For many writers, it is inspiration from the books they've read that leads them to pick up pen and paper (or in today's advanced technological world, a computer keyboard) and begin their first story.

It may be that an author inspires them, or it can be just the opposite and they aren't satisfied with what is available. If you've ever thought *I can write a better story than that*, then you may be a romance writer in the making. If you buy more books than candy bars, then you may be a romance writer. If you'd rather read a book than watch television, then you may be a romance writer.

Have you written for years, even if secretly or in a journal?

Many writers start writing at a young age, in a journal or composing poems or short stories. I began telling stories when I was three and writing them when I was in the first grade, and never stopped. Yet, it didn't occur to me for years that I could actually make a career of writing. For writers, this is so much a part of who we are, the connection isn't as obvious as it might seem. If you keep a journal, you might be a romance writer. If you pen romances and short stories, or make them up in your head or for your children, you might be a romance writer.

Are you a romantic?

"I'm a romantic at heart, so being a romance writer enables me to write and share a love story, one that will ultimately warm the reader's soul. It allows one to believe that there are indeed happily-ever-afters."

—Patricia Rasey, author, *Facade*

Many romance writers are romantics. They believe in those happily-ever-afters that they write. If you feel the same way, writing romances may be for you!

Are you a dreamer?

"I get to sleep with the most wonderful men in creation every night — even though in the morning they turn back into pillows."

—Elise Dee Beraru, author, *The Hero's Best Friend*

Often, writers are daydreamers. If you zone off into your own world or have fantasies in the daytime, or if there are storylines running through your head, you may be a romance writer.

Are you independent?

"I love constantly being challenged. I'm never bored and I love being my own boss."

—Jan Springer, author, *As Big As The Sky*

Romance writers enjoy working for themselves and by themselves. Many romance writers are highly creative. If you enjoy a quiet afternoon or being alone doesn't bother you, you might be a romance writer.

1.3 Am I a Romance Writer? (A Quiz)

After reading through some of the common traits of romance writers, you may recognize many of these traits in yourself. Still not sure? Take the following quiz. Answer **True** or **False** to each of the questions below:

- ___ I often cry while watching movies or sad commercials.
- ___ I enjoy reading romances.
- ___ I daydream or zone out into my own world often.
- ___ I enjoy spending time by myself.
- ___ I often finish projects I start.
- ___ If I had a choice between watching television or reading a book, I would read.
- ___ I am often dissatisfied with what I read and think I could write something better.
- ___ I have written for years, either in a journal (secretly) or publicly.
- ___ I am a romantic.

Give yourself 1 point for each question you answered **True**.

1-3 points: While you may have some leanings toward a career in writing, you might also be just as happy pursuing other things. Then again, this is just a quiz, so if your dream is to write don't let anything stop you. Just make sure you understand the work involved and be patient with the process.

4-6 points: You have a keen interest in romances and in writing. Your personality has many of the traits associated with writers. Make sure you stick with your goals.

7-9 points: What are you waiting for? Read on and then get busy writing!

1.4 Benefits of a Romance Writing Career

“One of the benefits of being a romance writer is being able to give every story a happy ending.”

—Maryann Miller, author, [Play it Again, Sam](#)

“I feel very fortunate to have ‘fallen into’ this career in writing. I didn’t have a happy childhood or young adulthood, but now my life is full of blessings. You just never can tell. You just never know what’s around the corner, so never give up hope!”

—Susan Krinard, author, [Body and Soul](#)

One benefit of a writing career is **working from home**. It’s a wonderful feeling to wake up each morning, dress in jeans and fuzzy bunny slippers, and walk ten feet to your office. If you’re a creative person, the ability to feed that creativity on your own schedule can be invaluable. If I feel stifled, I might take a break and attend a local art exhibit or go see a movie. I’m often inspired by romantic comedies, so these are a must-see.



If you are like many men and women and trying to raise a family while writing, then you probably already know the advantages to **your family life**. You can be there for your children. The only drawback to that is that they expect your attention even when they don’t really ‘need’ you, so it’s important to set firm guidelines as to what is an acceptable interruption to Mommy or Daddy’s writing time. The house is on fire? Then by all means interrupt.

Finally, you have the ability to **set your own schedule**. You’re working for a publisher but as a sort of independent contractor, with the ability to set your own hours and work environment. How rewarding to do something you love when and where you want and get paid for it!

Also, romance authors will generally receive **higher pay** than many other genres (when you ignore the ‘superstars’). A typical advance for a new author in romance ranges from

three to six thousand dollars, then royalties will be added to this amount. More established authors often command higher advances (unless you write for a house that has a standard contract, such as Harlequin, but often increased royalties will offset this).

How many books a year you can write will depend on what length novel you're writing, how many hours you're putting into writing, your publisher and how many books they want to put out each year. Many authors write for several lines or across genres to increase their output and thus their yearly salary. If you sold three books a year, you would make approximately \$25,000-\$30,000 per year. Then there are the writers who have either gotten lucky with a bestseller or spent years building their salaries into six and seven figures.

Who knows, the **next rising star** might be you!