

The Process: Beginning a WIP

- Decide on the genre and sub-genre.
- Decide on the approximate word length, basic market aiming for the manuscript.
- Decide on the working title.
- *Build a working notebook for the story.* My notebooks are arranged in this order: Photos of Characters, Character Grid, Character Contrasts Chart, Story Progression & Outline spreadsheet, setting details, clothing details, occupation details, vehicle details, etc., and printed copies of each chapter.
- Create a basic storyline theme in 100 words or less.
- Choose names for the main characters and most important side characters.
- Fill in the *Character Grid* for the heroine, hero, and villain (if there is one) with information as it pertains to each character under each of their columns. The information includes the Inciting Incident, Long Range Goal, Short Range Goal, Character Flaw, Relationship Barrier/Conflict, Black Moment, and Realization.
- Find photos of all characters, particularly the main characters to visually refer back to for details. I scan the photos into my computer, use Publisher to create a sheet with all the characters, save that to my manuscript's file, and print it out for my story's working notebook.
- Fill in the *Character Contrasts Chart* with very basic details for each of the main characters: name, nickname, age, height, hair color/style, facial unique features if any, color of eyes and anything unique, unique body details, sound of voice or accent, some personality details (birth order, family, education, work attitude, strengths, weaknesses, favored style of dress, occupation, marital status). Sometimes I fill it all in to get a "feel" for the characters. Sometimes I fill in part of it and maybe add to it as I write and the characters reveal themselves to me.
- Set up the *Story Progression & Outline* spreadsheet and fill in basic plot elements to aim for in specific chapters, remembering that anything can be changed and moved to another spot. I use a basic spreadsheet set up for what I commonly write, 5-7 chapter novellas of 25,000-35,000 words or 12 chapter novels of 50,000-60,000 words. I refer to the spreadsheet for the basic plot flow elements that might occur in a specific chapter, and I fill in the chart as I finish each chapter with what actually happened, who was involved, setting(s), and when (my story timeline). Since I work on more than one storyline at a time, I can not only read the previous chapter to get my head back into the story again but also I can use the basic summary of each previous chapter to do the same thing.
- Decide on basic setting details and find photos for visual referencing; such as sample ranches with building layouts, the main characters' places of residence (house, condo, etc.), offices involved (actual main buildings in a particular city for details, office furniture, etc.), scenery details (mountains, beaches, particular details to an area), vehicles (pickup trucks, cars). I'm a very visual person and having pictures helps me with descriptions. Sometimes I scan in the detailed photos and print them out, sometimes I just put the pictures from magazines, etc. into my notebook, and sometimes I just write down the details I might need and put that in the notebook. Maybe I use the information and maybe I don't, but it helps to have a basic idea of details before I begin. And I add to these details when necessary as they come up while actually writing the story.

- Do basic research for specific information I will deal with in the storyline: occupation details and appropriate lingo (cowboys, ranching, common lingo; fraud investigation, how it's done, what is involved, terminology), time period details (type of dress, furniture, inventions up to that time period, social manners, language, etc.).
- Sometimes I add a spreadsheet that details specific items for this manuscript such as overall deadline and chapter deadlines, because most of the work I write and sell is sold either as a whole finished product, or as a whole product but published by chapters. If the manuscript is submitted somewhere else with the hopes of a sale, I list where it was sent, when, and any responses. And for my business records, I list the type of payment or amount to be received (or received).
- WRITE. Actually sit down and plant your hands on the keyboard and let them fly as you write the story.

NOTE: The charts I use are all available as pdfs or Word or Excel documents on my website www.starlakayeromance.com

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