

ROMANCE NOVEL
BLUEPRINT

writing template



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a note from Lauren Layne



Hello there! I'm assuming if you've purchased this template, you're a romance writer, either aspiring or experienced. And as a longtime romance reader and author, I could not be more thrilled to know that you get the same thrill out of happily-ever-after that I do.

If you're new to my world, here's a quick introduction: I'm a *New York Times* and *USA TODAY* bestselling author of more than thirty contemporary romance novels. Which means that I've done what you're doing, or are aspiring to do.

I've stared at the blank pages. I've muddled through the pre-writing process. And while I use *all* of the templates on my website, this Blueprint is the one that I consider the most vital to my process.

The following pages are truly the "heart" of everything I've learned about crafting a page-turning romance novel, and I hope you find it helpful in your own writing journey.

how to use this workbook

First, and most importantly, please be sure to save this file somewhere on your computer, as the download link from the Lauren Layne Shop expires within 24 hours!

While the PDF you're reading now has 19 pages, you don't need to print all of them unless you want to. The actual workbook pages that you'll want to print begin at **page seven**.

This template was specifically designed by the Lauren Layne team to be printed and filled out by hand, not by typing on a computer. That's deliberate. I'm all about technology, but I also know the good old-fashioned pen/paper route can be extremely rewarding. Not to mention, I've always found it extremely helpful to separate my pre-writing tools (like this template) from my writing tools (my computer). It signals my brain that when the laptop is open, it's writing time. When I've got a pen in my hand, it's brainstorm time.

Don't have access to a printer? You can also fill out this template electronically using a tablet, stylus (such as Apple Pencil) and compatible software.

history of the romance blueprint



I've been a writer for as long as I can remember. I was *absolutely* that kid who used my crayons to write poems and short stories, not draw dogs and houses for the refrigerator. And throughout my schooldays, I was always geninely thrilled when the teacher assigned essays over a test.

But it wasn't until my early twenties that I seriously considered writing a book "for real." And when I sat down to try for the first time, I jumped in with both feet, awkwardly, but determinedly writing word after word. And then ... I got Chapter Four or so, and realized ... I was stuck. And I learned a crucial lesson:

Having an idea for a story is one thing. Learning how to sustain a story for 200+ pages is a whole other skillset.

So, I set out to learn fiction-writing. I read just about every "on writing" book I could get my hands on. And while I'm sure they all contributed to the final product in some way, it's actually the *screenwriting* books that were the most helpful. The novel-writing books were all fine and good, but the screenwriting books focused on *story*, not necessarily the art of written word. It was an important lesson that nobody cares about beautiful writing if the story is boring!

Here's what I was *most* surprised to discover: the very same hero's journey that I learned about my sophomore year of high school english was, *gasp*, actually hugely relevant to writing a contemporary novel.

There was just one problem: As I studied every iteration of the hero's journey and traditional storytelling, I discovered that every interpretation focused on *one* protagonist—the story of *one* hero. Odysseus. Luke Skywalker. Harry Potter.

And I was writing a romance. And in romance, most often, there are *two* protagonists: the two characters falling in love.

history of the romance blueprint, continued

Figuring how to shoe-horn two characters' journeys into the traditional hero's story arc took a lot of practice, and was often frustrating. Adding to the difficulty, conflict also looks a bit different in romance. Infrequently does romance have a traditional antagonist; a tornado, a Darth Vader, or a Lex Luthor standing in the way of our hero's goals. And yet, a story with *no* conflict is no story at all, which meant I had to figure out how to translate all that "antagonist" stuff into a romantic plot. Lastly, emotional, tug-at-the-heart-strings scenes are a pretty darn big deal in romance, and yet aren't accounted for in most traditional storytelling templates.

But it *is* possible to fit romance into traditional storytelling structure. It's just a matter of finessing the traditional template a bit to accommodate two protagonists, as well as to understand how to layer conflict into your story even when there's no traditional "bad guy."

This template is the result of hundreds of hours spent studying the craft of storytelling, and plenty of trial-and-error over the course of 30+ published romance novels.

The Romance Blueprint contains everything you need to capture a high-level view of your story. It breaks down traditional hero's journey elements and classic story structure in a way that applies to a romantic plot-line. It incorporates key scenes that are crucial to romance, but may not be applicable to other genres (first kiss, the meet cute, etc). It's also written in "real language," so you don't have to decipher what the heck "inner journey" means for your heroine's messy backstory, or remember exactly what "belly of the whale" refers to.

Fair warning: The Romance Blueprint provides guidance, not a rigid structure. It's not a cookie-cutter "paint my numbers" template that will tell you exactly what needs to happen during every single chapter of your story. It's deliberately flexible, providing just enough prompts to ensure you have all the most crucial storytelling elements in the right spots, while leaving plenty of room for you to develop your own storytelling style.

I absolutely believe this template will help coax that amazing idea out of your head, and flesh it out so that you have enough content to sustain your story from Chapter One through The End in a way that showcases your amazing writing voice.

Romance Blueprint Structure

The Romance Blueprint is divided into six sections, each with various prompts.

- (1) Story Overview - Identifying what your story's *about*.
- (2) Character Exploration - What do your characters *want*?
- (3) Key Scenes - The 6 scenes every romance novel should have.
- (4) "First" Moments - The crucial romantic moments—first kiss, love scene, etc.
- (5) Flavor Scenes - Adding depth and fun/danger/emotion to your story.
- (6) Storyboard - Putting it all together in a "quick view" map.

You may notice that there's not a *ton* of room to write on the pages. That's intentional. I know from experience that we writers are in danger of using templates like this one to avoid the actual writing. I've spent months on extremely detailed outlines, with pages and pages of notes. The outline was fantastic. The book? Never got written. Your goal should be to write a *brief* summary of scenes in order to save the creative energy for the writing itself. If I could offer you one piece of advice, it would be to use the heck out of this template; **but don't let it become a procrastination tool.**

Lastly three logistical notes:

- (1) This outline *intentionally* doesn't take you through every scene in chronological order. This allows you to see the story in terms of the wonderful *emotion* that romance is known for, rather than a chronological timeline of events. But don't worry, there's a place at the end of the template to put it all in order!
- (2) The Blueprint prompts you on both *scenes* (ie, the midpoint) as well as *moments* (ie, the first kiss) As a result, there may be some overlap on the various prompts (perhaps the first kiss *is* the midpoint!), which is to be expected! My goal here is to ensure you're taking into consideration all the important storytelling events *as well as* the crucial romantic moments, while giving you enough flexibility to weave them together in a way that works for your style and story.
- (3) I write M/F romance, and yes, I use those pronouns and reference hero/heroine throughout this template, but please know that The Romance Blueprint is absolutely applicable to M/M, F/F, and *every* wonderful love story.

part one - story overview

WORKING TITLE

TARGET WORDCOUNT

THE ELEVATOR PITCH

In one sentence, what is this story about?

THE CONNECTION

What brings the hero/heroine together at the start of the story? Are they after the same job? New neighbors? Long-time best friends?

THE CONFLICT

Who or what is in the way of the hero and heroine's happily-ever-after?

part two - character exploration

heroine

hero

GOAL

What is he/she trying to achieve in the story?

OBSTACLE

What is preventing him/her from achieving the above goal?

BAGGAGE

What is keeping him/her from going "all in" emotionally?

"MOMENT"

In which scene does he/she realize they're in love with the other person?

DECLARATION

In which scene does he/she show or declare their love to the other person?

part three - key scenes

THE MEET CUTE

In which scene do the hero and heroine first appear on the page together?

THE SET UP / CATALYST

In which scene is the "hook" of the story revealed? In other words, what is the reason the hero and heroine are brought together? It may or may not be the same as the Meet Cute scene. For example, maybe Chapter One, the heroine runs into an aggravating man in the street (meet cute), only to find out in Chapter Two that he's her new client for a career-crucial project (catalyst).

TURNING POINT | ONE-THIRD OF THE WAY THRU STORY

What new development occurs that raises the stakes beyond the characters' original expectations and forces them to realize things might not go as originally planned? Examples: a complication to their joint project that will extend their time together, the introduction of a shared enemy that brings them together in a new way, or a newly-realized (and inconvenient) attraction.

MID POINT | HALFWAY THRU THE STORY

What new development upsets the course of events and forces the characters to regroup and reevaluate? This is often, but not always a first kiss or sex scene. It could also be the appearance of a competing love interest, a secret to be kept, etc.

part three - key scenes, continued

THE PRECIPICE | TWO-THIRDS OF THE WAY THRU THE STORY

What new development raises the stakes to their highest point in the story? This should be the threat to happily-ever-after that's looming in the near future. Perhaps the seeds for a misunderstanding being planted, a betrayal threatening to be exposed, an emotional setback, a secret that grows ever-more toxic ...

DARK MOMENT

What happens to tear your characters apart in the most gut-wrenching scene of your story? This should be where the threat of the Precipice is realized: the secret is revealed, a lie is exposed, the hero refuses to put it all on the line and lets the heroine walk away, etc. The hope of happily-ever-after should seem lost forever.

THE HAPPY ENDING

How is the damage of the dark moment undone? How do they come back together and make it work after all? This is generally the "grovel" and/or "grand gesture" scene!

[OPTIONAL] :: EPILOGUE

How will you give readers a glimpse into what happily-ever-after looks like?

part four - the "first" moments

FIRST MOMENT OF ATTRACTION

In which scene does the hero/heroine realize that he or she is attracted to the other person? Is it an at-first-sight attraction that irritates them from the start, or a slow-growing attraction that catches them by surprise later in the story? Note that that this may be two different scenes for each character; your hero might be attracted right away, but it could take your heroine awhile to realize how drawn she is to the hero (especially in a beauty-and-the-beast story or Pride & Prejudice style story!)

FIRST KISS

FIRST SEX SCENE (IF APPLICABLE)

part four - the "first" moments, continued

FIRST "GUARD DOWN" SCENE

In which scene does your heroine/hero reveal a different side of her/his character to the other person? It could be a vulnerable or soft side not yet shown, or perhaps a playful, teasing side of an otherwise uptight character. Note that depending on your pacing and characters, this may be two different scenes; one for your heroine's "other side" and one for your hero's.

FIRST GLIMPSE OF HAPPILY-EVER-AFTER

In which scene will you show readers a glimpse of the hero/heroine's connection beyond the events of this story? It should be a moment that reveals what happily-ever-after might look like for these characters after the events of the story have concluded; a quiet dinner scene, a shared love of a sporting event, a movie night, etc. This scene should convince readers that these two will stay together even when they're no longer "forced" together by the plot of the book.

part five - the "flavor" scenes

Here's your chance to list those scenes you can't get out of your head that maybe don't fit exactly into the usual storytelling structure. If the Key Scenes you brainstormed in Section Three are the bones of the story, now it's time to flesh out your story and bring it to life.

If you're writing a romantic comedy or lighter romance, the scenes listed below may be fun and flirty, with plenty of playful banter. If your romance is more angsty, intense, dark, or suspenseful, these flavor scenes might come in the form of adventure, mind-games, or almost-explosive sexual tension.

Not sure where to start? Try imagining your book as a movie. Your "flavor" scenes would be the trailer moments; ie, those scenes in the movie trailer that convey the tone of the story without giving away too many of the key plot points.

part five - the "flavor" scenes, continued

part six - the storyboard

- OPTIONAL -

Congratulations! You've done all the hard work, and if you're anything like me, all your brainstorming in the preceding pages has you *dying* to start your story and make it come to life. If you're ready to dive in, go for it!

However, if the above notes are feeling just a little too "jumbled," and you're still struggling to figure out how all of those amazing scenes you've envisioned fit together, I'd recommend putting together a quick storyboard using the template on the following pages.

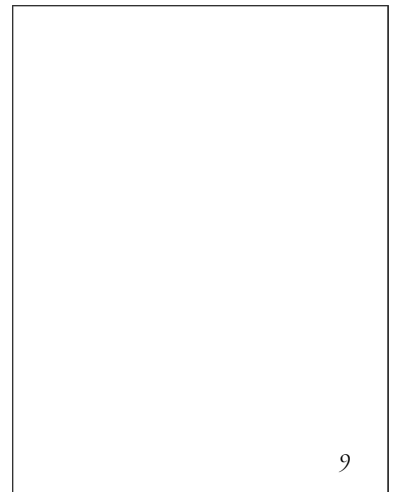
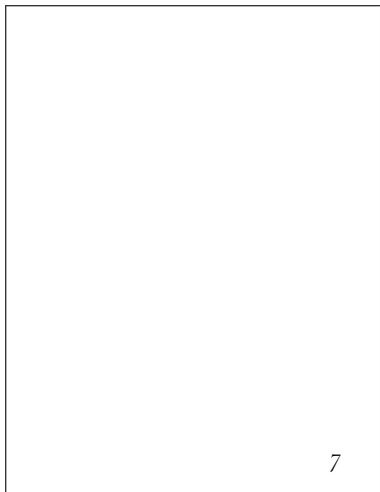
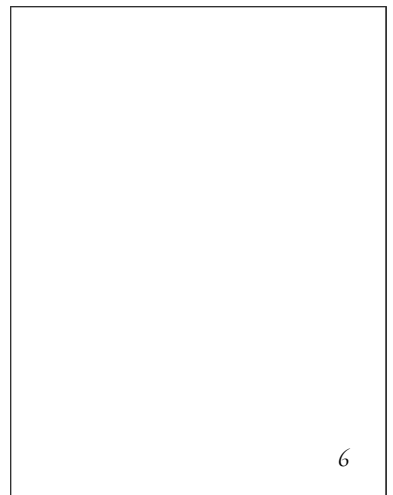
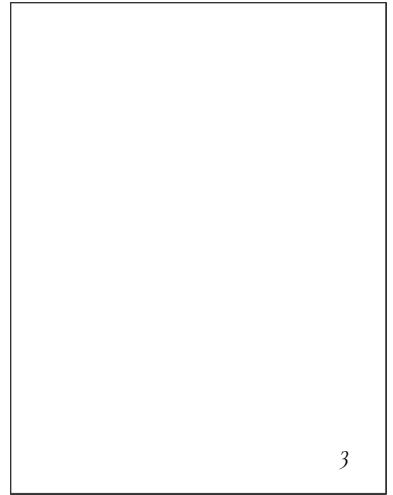
Here's how: simply take a look at all those scenes you've brainstormed on the preceding pages, and as best you can, put them in order as they occur in the story. Each scene summary should be only a sentence-or-so. The purpose of a storyboard is to be a quick-reference map of your story, not a full-detailed outline!

Lastly, *please* don't stress if you find that your storyboard doesn't hold up "exactly" once you start to write. That's normal! I'll often complete as many as five different versions of a storyboard for a single book as I make my way through the various drafts and realize I need to insert, re-order, or remove certain scenes. Let yourself be flexible. Storytelling is an art, not a science!

The storyboard has 27 numbered scenes distributed on 3 pages, plus an additional blank page for stories with more than 27 scenes/chapters, to be printed as needed.

storyboard

WORKING TITLE



storyboard

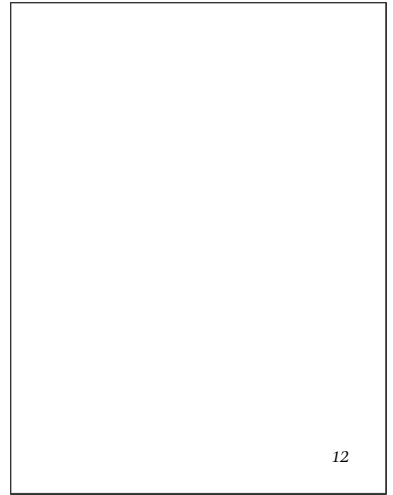
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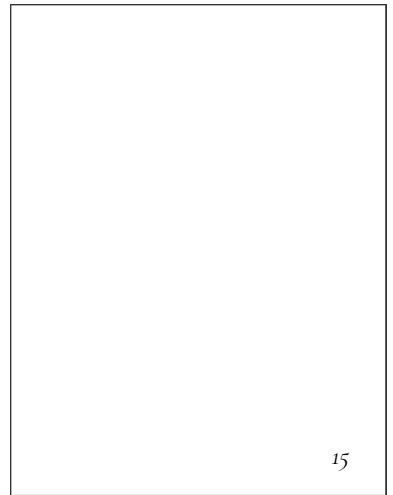
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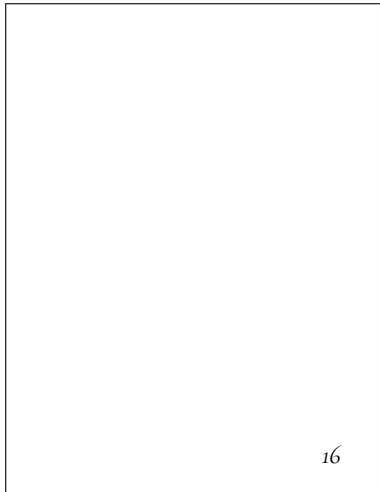
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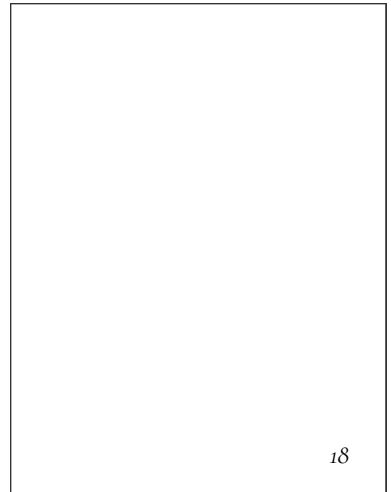
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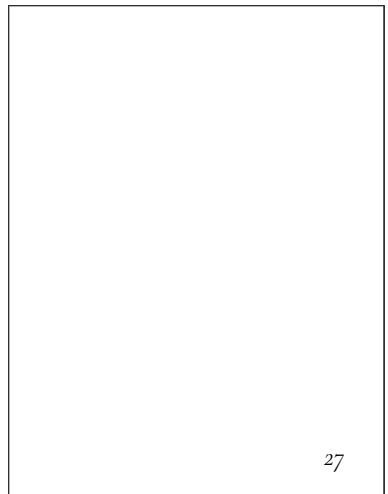
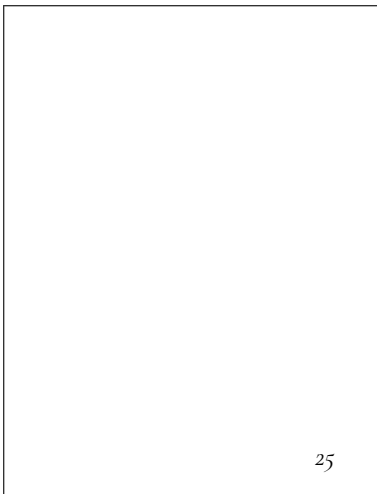
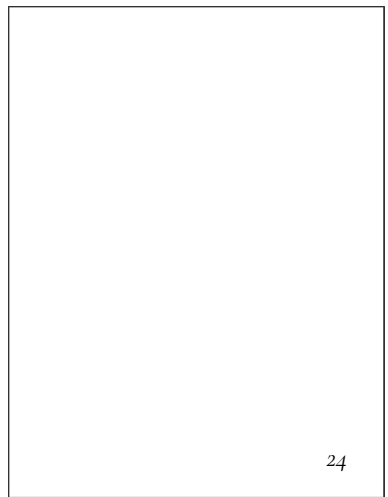
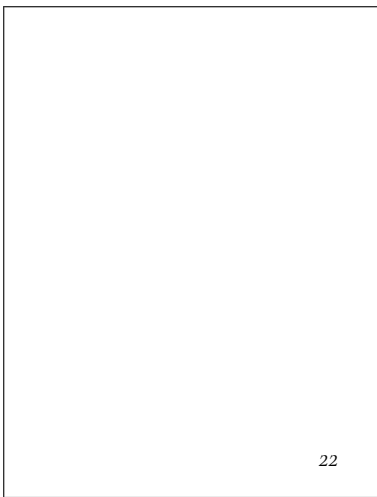
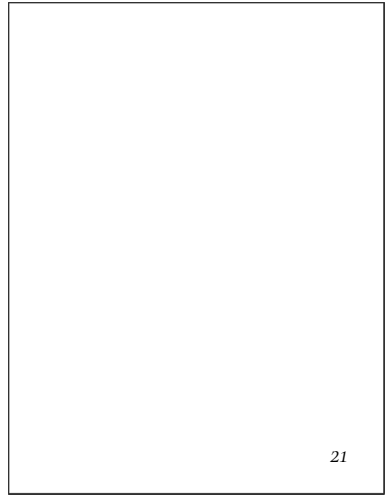
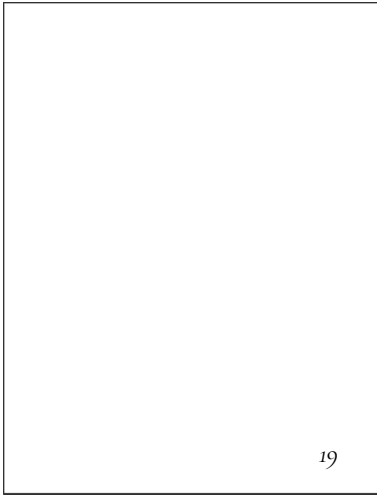
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storyboard

WORKING TITLE



storyboard

WORKING TITLE

