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# Planning and Rewriting--Two writing extremes that work hand-in-hand

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Join Romantic Times Award-Winning, Best-Selling Superromance author Anna DeStefano as she discusses the connection between planning and rewriting, and how the dynamic between the two can take your work-in-progress to the next level. This is a two-hour workshop.

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## 1. Where you come from is half the battle

Add more punch to a character's present. Motivate and plan from the past.

Researching a character's backstory frees them (and you) to move forward. Each scene must build on the last, and on the past.

No one needs to understand your character's past as much as you.

## 2. Scenes (and characters) are built, they don't just happen

The best way to be a successful "organic" writer, whose characters rip the story out of your hands and run with it, is to have a game plan.

Your characters must change with each scene. Always keep the beginning, middle, and end of their journeys in mind. Then torture them with your plot ;o) Get good at recognizing your characters' turning points, and they'll surprise you every time.

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### 3. Work hard for those surprises--revisions are good for your spontaneity

Your characters are reborn each time you learn a bit more about what they need.

- Give yourself credit for learning as you go along. Bang out that first draft, then go back for some intuitive, spontaneous character revisions.
- **Interesting characters may emerge organically in your first draft. Character depth can take a trip or two back to the well to conquer.**

An important tool if your goal is to become and remain published (and to publish stories readers love), is the ability to revise a manuscript until it's ready for production.

In *A Creative Approach to Writing and Rewriting Fiction*, **David Kaplan tackles the question "Why Revise."** And he suggests that, **"You need three things to be a good fiction writer...talent... a knowledge of craft... and just as necessary, a devotion to revision, to a merciless re-working of your writing until it is the best it can be..."**

Talent and craft will only get you so far. If you're content with our first drafts (if you want to go no further than celebrating reaching The End), you're sacrificing what the audience might read and experience if you were willing to put in the hard work required to make the story better.

If you say you don't like revisions, but your characters and stories aren't where you want them, it's time to bite the bullet.

**Planning is great. Being an organic, spontaneous writer is an awesome gift. But there's work to be done in your stories, so get busy.**

### 4. The work that comes after The End.

We're very much in an on-demand industry that requires prolific and timely production. **But what if we carved out time to do whatever revising we can?** What if we consider revision part of the drafting process, not just an afterthought, "nice to have," if we every get around to beating a deadline?

**What if dedication to revisions is what makes the differences between okay writing and good writing?** Between a good read and can't-put-it-down storytelling?

The purpose of a story is to engage the reader, and the best way to achieve that is to rewrite until each part of your story is doing the job you need it to.

Kaplan suggests something that forever changed my concept of my role as a creative writer. **"The purpose of writing a story is to rewrite it,"** he tells us.

**There are two steps in the revision process:**

- **Revisions before an editor sees your work.**
- **Revisions done at the editor's request. We'll spend the rest of this workshop exploring both.**

## 5. Get busy coming up with your own plan

**Let's get specific. Here are some planning and revisions tips.**

Plan your characters' beginnings, middles, and ends--See Character Planning Handout.

Mapping your character and plot-threads through the beginning, middle, and end of your story highlights weak areas that need fleshing out.

Know where your characters are going--this frees them to get there in some amazing ways.

**This chart, once you've worked through it can become the basis for your proposal/synopsis, as well as a roadmap to refer to when it's time to begin revisions--so you can compare where you were going to where you actually ended up.**

Self-editing: Revising with both your first draft and your plan in mind.

Whether a new author revising on your own, or a published author revising before submitting a project for editorial review, revision can be an affective part of your process. Here are some suggestions for what to look for as you rewrite:

- Revise openings.
- Revise secondary character journeys and arcs.
- Move plot points and secondary plot devices to build pacing and heighten conflict.
- Revise and smooth out primary character arcs.

- Cut what's not essential--particularly, backstory.
- Add what is essential--particularly, backstory.
- Rearrange the plot to focus your characters on their goals--the plot should drive external and internal conflict, as well as propel the character towards what's at stake.
- Revise endings for impact--beyond the hook.
- Revise prose for punch.
- One final read, to pull it all together.

### Tips for working with Editorial Revisions

- See revisions as opportunities--embrace the change you know will make your work better.
- Read your revisions, take a mental-health break, then read them again, once you've gained a little perspective.
- Identify the "quick" fixes. Check some things off the list. It does a body good.
- Read the heavier revisions for overall theme--try to understand what the editor's looking for.
- When you have your plan of attack, get editorial feedback for issues for which you're still unclear.
- Work through one revision point at a time. Don't overwhelm yourself--tackle each change, THEN step back and look at the big picture.  
In the end, remember everything in your story is connected. Plot cannot be seen in isolation from the character, etc.

## 6. Understanding Your Process Better

You have to write what you plan, and revise what you write. Do it your way, but know what you're doing. Have a plan, and understand how planning plays into revising the finished product.

Know your patterns, know your weaknesses, then put them to good use in your next project.

Understand how planning frees your creativity as you write your first draft, then how rewriting takes all your hard work to the next level.

## 7. Planning and Revision Fear

What is it about planning and revising that has us running scared? Why do we avoid the very processes that will turn our first drafts into gold?

- **My creativity is stifled by over-planning and over-revising.**

Yeah, you can overdue, and over-planning and revising are the way many of us procrastinate... but, these are tools that will make your drafts better. Planning gives you a roadmap for where to go, and revisions help assure you've reached your story and character goals.

- **Frozen in Love.**

***I'm an artist, and I work best when I let my stories flow freely.***  
**Sound familiar?**

As much as I see the drafting process being about art and letting story flow organically, I've learned that **planning and revisions are about the reader's experience.**

**Does the reader see what I'm trying to convey? Do she experience the emotions I'm trying to paint, or are the words getting in the way?** If the way I tell the story isn't working, if I don't put enough thought into planning the story structure and then rewriting the result, my reader's experience will suffer.

- **But I have a deadline.**

Talk to any prolific writer, and you'll get an earful about deadlines. How tight they are, how quickly you have to write to build a reader following, and how long it takes to get a finished book through production and onto the shelves.

But does that mean you have less time for planning and revisions? Is your goal to finish the first draft right before your delivery deadline? Or is it to make sure you're leaving yourself time in your tight schedule to do the kind of planning and revisions you know need to be done? Basically, what's more important to you--finishing draft 1 in time, or planning as carefully as possible and leaving time for draft 2? Or perhaps, for the really ambitious, draft 3?

## 8. Questions and answers

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### Suggested Reading

#### The Complete Writer's Guide to Heroes & Heroines; Sixteen Master Archetypes

Tami D. Cowden, Caro LaFever, Sue Vidars

#### The Screenwriter's Workbook

Syd Field

#### Techniques of the Selling Writer

Dwight V. Swain

#### Revision: A Creative Approach to Writing and Rewriting Fiction

David Michael Kaplan

#### The Complete Guide to Editing Your Fiction (Writers Digest)

Michael Seidman

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### Bio

Anna DeStefano is a Romantic Times Award-Winning, Best-Selling author of long contemporary romance for Harlequin Superromance. Her workshops on plotting through character and rewriting attract standing-room-only crowds wherever she speaks, including at the 2005 RWA conference in Reno. She's been asked to give half-day workshops at various RWA chapter meetings, to share her insights into the creative writing process.

In addition to writing fiction, Anna is a Senior Technical Writer and a technical trainer. She contributes to the Georgia Romance Writers newsletter, *The Galley*, penning motivational articles that explore the ins and outs of why writers write. She also does volunteer work in field of grief and crisis care. Visit her at [www.annawrites.com](http://www.annawrites.com) for more information about her projects, appearances, awards, and for a daily affirmation in her online journal.

General issues:

Up front, show each character securing their own "safe" place, through different, opposing means.

Hero		Heroine			
Beginning	Middle	End	Beginning	Middle	End
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Chief</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Chief with a big distraction at home.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Chief using his success to make it possible for his family to be his priority.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Nurturer and spunky kid (protecting herself).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Nurturer who's failing. Can't give grandmother the security she needs.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>She's trusted again, and is burned. Will she fight back, or fight to believe?</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In control of the world and his lost soul. He's a good provider/protector for those who are important to him.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>He has to modify his approach to work and his job. His new world must accommodate Daniel.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>His money and success are now working for him, giving him the freedom to enjoy/discover the rest of his life.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Has learned to hide her disappointment/personal dreams and goals behind laughter, hard work, and her sunny personality.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Can't hide behind her sunny personality with Nick and Daniel.</li> <li>They break through her defenses every time</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Is she ready to choose Nick/Daniel (dream of family vs. dream of career). The "safe" way out no longer gives her her dream).</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Daniel's schedule forces him to change (protective, rather than attaching).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>He reasserted control, yet has found another part of life he wants/needs (for himself and Daniel?).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Control is not as important now as the happiness he finds as he lets go</li> </ul>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>He begins to notice a yearning for his new life with Daniel, when he returns to his own "world" of business.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Admires/resents how natural nurturing is his for his neighbor(s).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>He's learned to let himself nurture--not just provide and protect.</li> <li>It's left him open to being hurt, but he's no longer closed off and alone.</li> </ul>			

General issues:

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<b>Hero</b>			<b>Heroine</b>		
<b>Beginning</b>	<b>Middle</b>	<b>End</b>	<b>Beginning</b>	<b>Middle</b>	<b>End</b>