

# The Mo Siewcharran Prize 2026



## Love and Secrets

Romance: A genre guide for writers

## Romance: A genre guide for writers

The romance genre is defined by a couple facing an obstacle to their romance. Books in the romance genre can feature characters of any sexuality, and often contain varying levels of spice (from clean and wholesome to very spicy). The genre contains many sub-categories with the largest sub-genres detailed below.

### Contemporary romance

Contemporary romance novels are swoon-worthy, addictive and heart-warming, telling the story of how two people overcome obstacles to fall in love. They are set in the modern day and usually told from the female protagonist's point of view (or a dual POV), and can be wholesome (closed door) or spicy.

#### How do readers expect to feel?

- Positive and hopeful
- Satisfied by a happy ending

#### Plot and story

- A clear set-up that introduces two characters early in the story, posing the question of *will-they-won't-they*
- Hurdles for our protagonists to overcome before a resolution and happy ending

#### Common themes, tropes and elements

- Love and longing
- Enemies-to-lovers
- Love triangles
- Grumpy sunshine

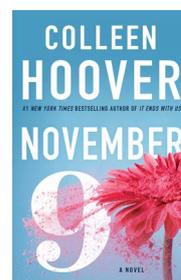
#### Setting

A recognisable world such as a city or small town, or a specific place such as a coffee shop, workplace or bookstore.

#### Main characters

- Often defined by a small-town setting and their job
- Typically they have a positive outlook on life, and are looking for a new beginning

### Examples



### Romantic comedy

Romantic comedies fall under the umbrella of contemporary romance and include many of the same elements. These stories are laugh-out-loud, swoon-worthy and fun, telling the story of two lovable people overcoming obstacles to fall in love, with comedic moments along the way.

### Examples



## Romantasy

Romantasy combines romance and fantasy, with romantic relationships driving the high-stakes plot. The usual fantasy world-building, magic systems and mythical beings (who are sometimes also the love interest) form the backdrop.

### How do readers expect to feel?

- Emotionally invested in the characters and the love story
- Craving resolution and waiting for the HEA (Happily Ever After)

### Plot and story

- Focus on fast pace with lots of tension between the love interests
- A breakup or separation of the main character from the love interest to create conflict

### Common themes, tropes and elements and setting

- Marriage of convenience
- Enemies-to-lovers/rivals-to-lovers
- Fake dating/marriage

### Setting

The setting could be:

- Lush and glittering (fae palaces/courts/balls)
- Desolate and deadly (war-torn battlegrounds)
- Beautifully magical (think fairytale forest landscapes)

### Main characters

- Our (typically) female main character will go to extreme lengths to defend their loved ones or kingdoms/clans
- Our female main character is defined by their status within the social hierarchy

### Examples



## Historical romance

Historical romance combines historical and romantic fiction. These stories contain the same defining features as the rest of the romance genre but are set against a historical backdrop with clear world-building.

### How do readers expect to feel?

- Immersed in the historical period in which the story is told
- Emotionally close to the characters, rooting for them throughout

### Plot and story

- Clear sense of historical time period, with strong world-building
- A conflict that drives our characters apart, followed by a resolution and a happy ending

### Common themes, tropes and elements and setting

- Love and longing
- Conflict and resolution
- Enemies-to-lovers/friends-to-lovers
- Love triangles

### Setting

These stories should be set in clear historical time periods. It is crucial that the reader is swept away into the world you are creating.

### Main characters

- Generally narrated by a female main character (although some may alternate between POVs), defined by her status within the social hierarchy
- They should have a complex backstory that influences the outcome of their story

### Examples

