

HOOKING YOUR READER ADVICE FROM LORI FOSTER

Quick Bio and latest news from Lori:

Since Lori's first publication with Harlequin in 1996, she has routinely had 6 to 10 releases a year. She's a Waldenbooks, USA Today, Publisher's Weekly and New York Times bestselling author with over 50 titles published with a variety of houses, including Kensington, Berkley/Jove, St. Martins, Harlequin and Silhouette.

Lori has received the prestigious Romantic Times "Career Achievement Award" for Series Romantic Fantasy and the "Best Contemporary Paranormal Award" for her title Jamie.

Lori's book Too Much Temptation was the top-selling romance title for Amazon. Say No To Joe was the second "Bestselling Original Contemporary" romance for Waldenbooks, and The Secret Life of Bryan was the "Bestselling Original Contemporary" romance for the BGI group.

Lori recently signed a new contract with Berkley publishing for three single titles.

Q: What advice would you give to budding authors on this subject as we develop our craft?

A: Never do a "set-up." Start the reader in the thick of it. Readers are smart; they'll figure out what's going on if you do your job in character development. The "thick of it" can either be action, internal dialogue, conflict... whatever is the crux of the story. It can even, imo, be a prologue, if the real trouble began some days/months/years ago. If something happened that altered the hero or heroine, and that's where the story really began, go with it. (I tell people to "go with it" a lot!)

Q: What do you use when developing the opening hook of your story? Do you prefer to open with dialogue, narrative, or action?

A: I open it wherever it opened in my mind. That kernel of an idea that started my brain plotting is good enough for me. Whatever that might be varies from book to book. But I like to be in the head of a main character, someone who will play heavily in the story – so that's usually one of the protagonists: the hero or heroine.

Q: Do you put a good deal of emphasis of opening line/ paragraph/ chapter? If so, do you write the beginning first, wait until later to write your opening, or re-write as new ideas come to you?

A: I write from the first sentence to the last. I can't jump scenes or chapters without confusing myself. I'm easily confused. ;-) I don't actually do a lot of rewriting – at least not in the way that I think you mean. I do go back and tweak scenes or characters or dialogue to make things clearer, or flesh them out.

Naturally, you want to put emphasis on how you start a book. If you lose the reader on page 1, you've really, really lost. But if you grab her with both fists, so that she has to find out what's going on, then you've done your job.

Q: Do you feel every chapter should end with a hook?

A: Yup. If it doesn't, the reader might put the book down and never pick it up again. Ideally, you want her to be rushing through the laundry or her phone call so she can get back to the book.

To keep readers hooked, don't worry a ton about transition scenes. It's okay to skip them. If they're getting ready to have dinner, but nothing important is going to happen at dinner other than food being chewed, skip it. Stop the scene there, and do a chapter break or a scene break and pick it up right after the dinner. (I'm using dinner as an example. But anything that isn't compelling to the reader, that doesn't in some way develop the characters or forward the plot will only be tedious – to the author writing it and the reader reading it.)

Trust your instincts. If a scene is best portrayed in the hero's pov, go with it. If the heroine needs to better express herself, go with the heroine's pov. Far too often we fall back on rules instead of going with our guts. Guts don't lie. ;-)

When you open your book, show what's at stake. Is it a possible broken heart? A kidnapping? The loss of a life? Whatever it might be, draw the reader in immediately by showing the importance up front.