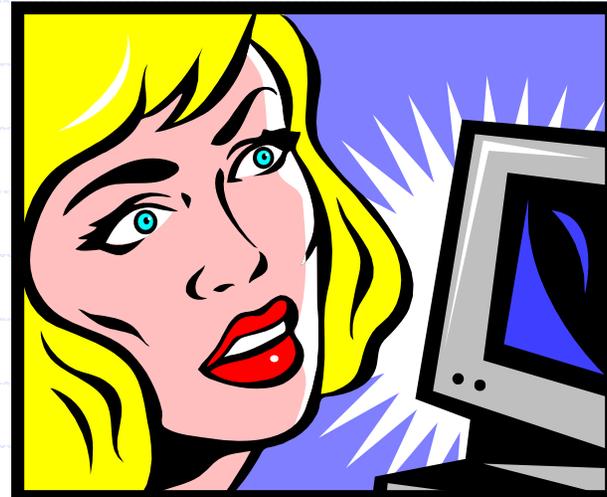


THE 3 Cs OF NOVEL WRITING

**Characters, Conflict
and Construction**



Bay to Ocean Conference,
February 23, 2008

Melanie Rigney

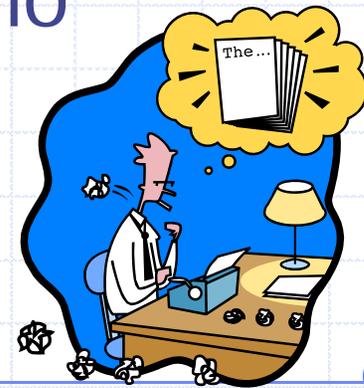
editor@editorforyou.com

THE \$90K QUESTION

- ◆ This is the investment a traditional publisher will make in a book before hits the shelves.
- ◆ Publishers are looking for authors they can build into brands within a category.
- ◆ Still, new authors get published every year in every genre. Midlist authors like Dan Brown and Barry Eisler break into the best-seller lists.
- ◆ Novels entertain. Memorable novels either inspire or educate as well as entertain. Classic novels do all three.

CHARACTERS

The folks—good and bad—who populate your world.



CHARACTERS:

Things to Remember

- ◆ Even in genre fiction, which is frequently plot driven, we must have strong, empathetic, believable characters.
- ◆ All storytelling comes down to four words: SOMETHING happens; SOMEBODY changes. If nobody changes, the “something” doesn’t matter.
- ◆ Choose your narrator based on who is changed most by the story’s events.

CHARACTERS:

Things to Remember

- ◆ Every character, minor or major, moves the story forward to its logical, satisfying conclusion in some way.
- ◆ Great protagonists and antagonists are multifaceted. They're like us; not unbelievably good or unbelievably bad.
- ◆ Sketches or other means of getting inside your character's skin are essential. But only include the details relevant to the character's journey in this book.

CONFLICT

Why your characters do what they do and what's stopping them from reaching their goals



CONFLICT:

Things to Remember

- ◆ Plot. You've got to have one, even if you're writing literary fiction, just as you need characters in genre fiction. You need a story, which is conflict shown in scene.
- ◆ *In media res*: start with the action. Grab them with the first paragraph or at most the first page.
- ◆ Your protagonist needs to be in one place when the story begins and in another—mentally, emotionally, physically—at the end.

CONFLICT:

Things to Remember

- ◆ A plot is a series of scenes arranged by cause and effect to create dramatic action filled with tension and conflict to further the character's emotional development and create thematic significance.
- ◆ Scenes show outward action in the now, moment by moment, using dialogue and action.
- ◆ Scenes move the story forward to its ultimate, LOGICAL, satisfying conclusion. If they don't, cut them.

CONFLICT:

Things to Remember

◆ The principle of pacing

- The beginning of your book—where the reader gets to know your protagonist, what he/she wants and what is preventing him/her from obtaining it—accounts for 20 to 25 percent.
- The ending—how the protagonist does or does not get what he/she wanted at the beginning and how he/she has grown either way—accounts for 15 to 20 percent.
- The devil resides in those 110 to 120 pages in between. This is where plot and scene development are crucial.

CONFLICT:

Things to Remember

- ◆ Don't tell us everything that happened; just tell us what we need to know. Alfred Hitchcock said drama is real life with the dull parts left out. Make sure you leave them out.
- ◆ Raise the stakes. Then raise them again. If there's nothing for the protagonist to fight for or against, if there's no one or no force trying to stop him/her, there's no story.

CONFLICT:

Things to Remember

- ◆ Subplots with your protagonist and secondary characters are important. Typically, two to four per book will do. Make sure they tie back to the central conflict.
- ◆ The protagonist doesn't have to get what he/she wanted at the beginning (in many genres), but the ending has to be logical and satisfying.
- ◆ The book ends shortly after the climax.

CONSTRUCTION

All the other stuff.



CONSTRUCTION:

Things to Remember

- ◆ Point of view is who's telling the story. Skilled writers sometimes mix POV; first novelists are typically advised to stick with one.
- ◆ Dialogue. Each major character needs to have his/her own unique voice. This can be done through sentence length, use of adjectives, choice of verbs.
- ◆ Use setting to move the story forward, to provide backstory for your characters.

CONSTRUCTION:

Things to Remember

- ◆ Show, don't tell. • If you choose to employ flashbacks and flashforwards, consider using a "home base" place in time to which the story returns periodically. Make sure the scenes/chapters are ordered in a way that is clear to the reader and escalates the tension throughout the work.
- ◆ Every chapter closing should propel the readers forward "just five minutes" more to find out what happens next.

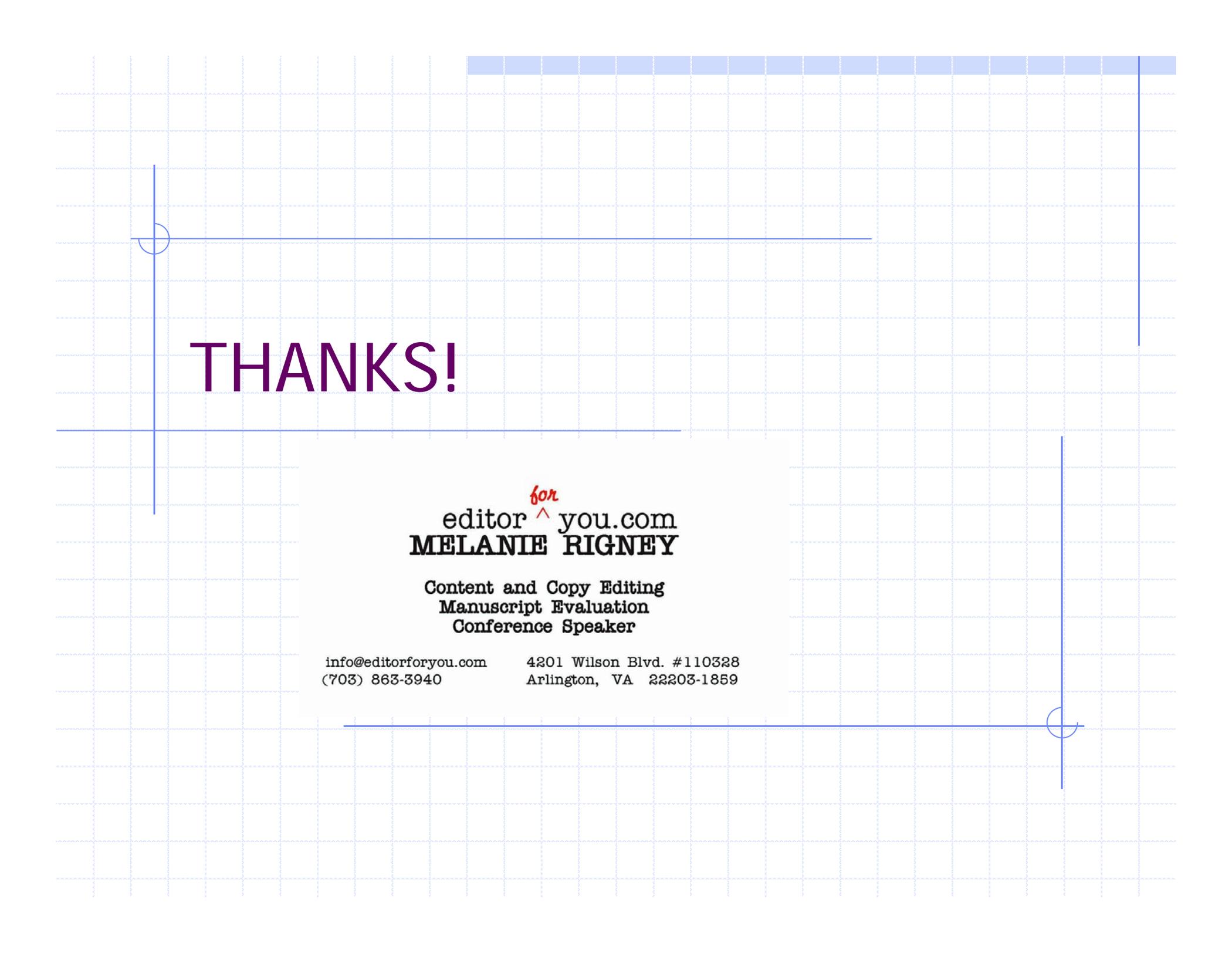
CONSTRUCTION:

Things to Remember

- ◆ Melanie's Pet Peeves
 - Pop culture/brand references
 - Song lyrics and quotations
 - The publishable first draft

Helpful Writing Craft Books

- ◆ *Writing the Breakout Novel* and *Writing the Breakout Novel Workbook* by Donald Maass
- ◆ *Blockbuster Plots Pure & Simple* by Martha Alderson
- ◆ *On Writing* by Stephen King
- ◆ *The Writer's Journey* by Chris Vogler



THANKS!

editor ^{for} ^ you.com
MELANIE RIGNEY

Content and Copy Editing
Manuscript Evaluation
Conference Speaker

info@editorforyou.com
(703) 863-3940

4201 Wilson Blvd. #110328
Arlington, VA 22203-1859