

Historical Fiction Tips & Tricks

- 1) **Research, don't panic:** There are countless resources on any given time period. If you're feeling overwhelmed, it can help to think of yourself as a storyteller first. You only need the right research to tell your particular story. Start writing and let the story and the characters tell you which resources you need to explore next.
- 2) **Watch documentaries:** If you're starting to go cross-eyed from sifting through books and websites, documentaries can help you step back and explore your topic through a different medium. Also, visuals always get the creative juices flowing!
- 3) **Embrace writer's block:** I tend to do a lot of research when my story has stalled. If you're stuck, don't despair. Step back from your manuscript and pick up a new source on the time period. Dive in. It's the best way I've found to jog new ideas.
- 4) **Paint with both broad and narrow brush strokes:** When you're weaving research into your text, you want to focus on broad issues like the politics of your time period, but also the day-to-day details that make your story sound authentic. With any given scene, ask yourself what people are wearing, eating, how much things cost, etc. Not every detail will make it in, but it's good practice to always be on the lookout for areas to weave in new research.
- 5) **Reveal important research through your characters' eyes and experiences:** This is what helps your book not sound like a textbook. If you want to share a main historical event or detail, try to connect it directly to something your character has seen, felt, or experienced. Also, even when explaining something complex (a timeline, for example), try to do so in a way that is both creative and loyal to the tone/voice of your narrative.
- 6) **Don't be afraid to cut material:** This one's a toughie, but not every anecdote and detail will (or should) make it into your final manuscript. If historical details are starting to interfere with your story's flow or derail your plot, don't be afraid to highlight and delete. Sometimes it means losing a favorite bit of research, but your story will often be stronger and tighter because of it.
- 7) **Decide which details can be fictionalized and which details can't:** In some cases, you might have to take minor liberties with history for the sake of your story, but first you have to ask yourself if the changes you're making are plausible and/or necessary. Sometimes you'll have a question about your time period, and you won't be able to find research to back you one way or the other. Strive for accuracy whenever possible but remember that making educated guesses on how things *might* have been is occasionally part of the fiction territory.
- 8) **When in doubt, add a historical disclaimer/author note at the end, explaining any crucial changes:** These can wiggle writers out of tight spots!