

Tips for Writing Erotica (or even writing in general)

A while back, I slammed the Scipio_Forum (http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Scipio_Forum/) with a barrage of questions about how to improve my writing. I chose this board for several reasons:

1. It's very active.
2. There are some great writers on there.
3. My questions were prompted from something Nick Scipio mentioned.
4. I only actively participate in this board.
5. Did I mention that it's very active?

Anyway, the responses to my questions were excellent, and have already improved the writing of this fledging eroticist. Since I found it hard to keep track of all the great tips and thoughts, I decided to put it in this document. Several folks requested a copy, so I tried to organize it. (This is organized, at least in my mind.) Here's how it works:

- Items in **Bold** are questions that were asked (by me or someone else as a followup).
- Items in *Italics* are my summaries of the responses to the questions.
- Items in plain text are the responses themselves.
- I've separated each set of questions and their responses with a double rule like this:

- I've separated each responder's response with a single rule like this:

- I've separated each of my original posts (and **Orblover**'s spin-off post) with a triple rule like this:

- A responder's name is in **Bold, Red** text after his or her response.

Speaking of responders, let's give them a hand (since this is primarily Erotica, maybe that should be a hand job...). Most if not all of these folks (including me!) are writers and/or readers who congregate at www.storiesonline.net, www.beyondthefarhorizon.com, and/or www.asstr.org.

**Big Ed, Steveh11, Orblover, Lady G, Wine Maker, Turbo,
Bruce B, Onagerian Surmise, Dan Lyke, Jamie,
and TERB himself: Nick Scipio**

So without further comment, read on folks, read on...

Jonas

1. Nick mentioned somewhere (a chat, maybe?) that he usually forms the characters personalities and backgrounds before he really gets into the story. Is that pretty common for the other writers? How "formal" a process is this? Do you actually write out a bio for them, or do you just have most of it in your head?

Jonas' Summary: The consensus seems to be that some form of written character sheet is good, whether it be to really flesh out the characters' personalities and bios or just to keep track of what tidbit of information is released in the story. How detailed and how formal depends on not only the writer, but on the length of the story and how large a role the character plays. Longer stories usually mean more detailed character development, as do major characters.

My process varies. I always have a mental image of the major characters--looks, personality, etc., before I begin, but I only rarely write out a bio. I've done it a few times, mostly as internal notes, because it can be a pain to have to go back and skim your own story to remind yourself whether the character drinks coffee or not. (Big Ed)

Not a full bio, but usually more than just a line, especially for the main characters. Physical description, some sort of indicator as to personality (which I flesh out as time passes) and a line or so about what the characters *does*, both in-story and in plot terms. That's not a hard-and-fast rule, though. Some have started off as a one-liner - but see below. (steveh11)

It depends. For long stories, like R&L, I spent a fair amount of time developing my characters before beginning the writing process. For short stories, a few minutes and a notion in my head. Right now, Rebecca and Luis have, each, about 5 typed pages of "bio" in the story bible. (orblover)

Mine depends on the story. If I know I am going to have the chance to just sit and write I usually don't have to write out characters. If it is going to be a long story then yes I do write out a character sheet, just so I make sure I keep track of who is who. (Lady G)

I form enough of a personality to get my creative juices flowing and start writing. I have no formal process and hold them in my head. (Wine Maker)

2. Speaking of characters, do you find that your characters tend to evolve as the story progresses? I mean evolve in a direction you didn't to intend for them to go? Do you try to stick to the original character concept, or do you just let it go where it takes you?

Jonas' Summary: Some differences of opinion here. Some writers find that the characters will really evolve as they write, often in unexpected ways. Others find that good character development up front

means unexpected character evolution is at a minimum. Also, most writers control this unexpected evolution by keeping the characters within the confines of the developed plot.

Oh, absolutely, they evolve. Usually it's a case of them revealing hidden depths or quirks that I hadn't originally intended. I rarely force characters to stay in the original concept, though. Unless one's already released chapters of a serial, you can go back and clean up the earlier sections to maintain consistency. What I *do* tend to do is force characters to do is stick to the original plot. (Big Ed)

Oh, yes, the characters grow. In particular I've had minor characters grow from walk-on parts to much fuller roles. So far I've not had *major* characters change in ways I haven't intended, because if they did it would affect the story endpoint. (steveh11)

Not if I've done my homework. I will say that some traits do emerge that I was unaware of and don't discover until they are in certain circumstances. (orblover)

For the longer stories, yes they basically just "take over." For the shorter ones I already have them all fleshed out and it's just a matter of putting my fingers to the keys and getting the story down before they DO take over. (Lady G)

I go where the character leads, but I keep in mind the plot proceeding around the character. The reactions to external stimuli need to be realistic. (Wine Maker)

3. I'm the kind of writer who knows how the story will end, but I'm not sure how I'll get there. Is that pretty common, or do most of you just have the journey all mapped out, too? Do you outline your story before you write?

Jonas' Summary: Most seem to know the starting point and the destination before they begin. And many also plot the various waypoints of the journey. As the journey progresses, the future waypoints are adjusted accordingly. Seems for most that the waypoints don't always remain as intended. That said, some also only know the beginning and the destination, preferring to let the journey take care of itself as they go.

Most writers are different here and there's no "right" way. I appear to be more organized than many. When I sit down, I have the major scenes plotted out for the entire story. So it's an outline that basically has 1 bullet for every ~5k words. That said, I write the minor scenes and transitions organically, and sometimes they surprise me. For example, the scene where Billy gets John out on the ice for skating and dancing in The Ugly One just showed up. As a result, I tend to habitually overshoot my expected word count by 20%. (Big Ed)

Laugh! I suppose you could call it an outline. I know the start point, the destination, and various places it'll visit in between. Some of the other places it meanders to may surprise even me... but it'll go there if the characterisation supports it. (steveh11)

I have the concept of the story mapped out. I know, for instance, how many more chapters there are to write. What each chapter, in concept, is supposed to achieve. Sometimes the writing even stays on plan! As writing progresses, the next few chapters are developed more in detail (down to the scene level). Sometimes chapters combine, sometimes new chapters are born. (orblover)

My have something mapped out before I start it... LOL no. I have an idea in mind and can get through it (usually) but it doesn't always go the way I want it to. (Lady G)

Outlines are the work of Satan. I know the end, usually, and keep an eye on it in the distance as I make the journey. (Wine Maker)

4. My longest story is like 16 chapters so far. I had intended it to be only about this long, but now I'm really deep into this and it'll probably be another 16 before I'm finished. Does this happen to anyone else, the story taking on an unexpected life...?

(Let me interject here that I realize now I'm really driven by character development and story arcs. I've twice tried to write a one chapter "stroke" story, only to have the first one end up as three chapters (A Time to Love) and the other (unpublished) probably that long; neither would be what I would classify as "stroke" stories. I also tend to prefer realism, and I don't like to make the reader have to suspend disbelief, as least not too much.)

Jonas' Summary: Again, a split on this point. Some try hard to keep on track and others seem to allow for the explosion. What does appear to be agreed upon is to stay true to the story arc. Don't let yourself add more plot lines just for the sake of adding more plot lines. It's OK for a story to grow, but keep it within the framework of your pre-developed plot.

Yes, see above. However, since I'm forcing the story to follow my outline, my 'unexpected life' is pretty limited. I've never doubled a story. (Big Ed)

Suspension of Disbelief is still necessary: There's seldom a truly, truly 'realistic' story, if only because what we (as readers) are there for is the fantasy. A middle aged guy having two beautiful women love him at once? Don't be silly! :-D

On your other point: Twice now I've found the story taking a route I wasn't expecting to start with, but only as an alternative route to the eventual ending. (steveh11)

R&L started out as a typical 7 chapter NiS story. As I developed it, I realized it needed to be much longer. The current projected chapter count is 45. So, stories do grow. But, they grow during development. Once I start writing, I try to stay within the story "budget." (**orblover**)

For me personally, ALL the time. I can intend on writing only a few pages and it end up in chapters. (**Lady G**)

It sounds natural for you. I don't try to pin down how long I'm aiming for too closely. But, don't let yourself meander. (**Wine Maker**)

5. Since my longest story (Finding Bathsheba) has become considerably more complex than I had anticipated, I sometimes find it hard to stay true to the story and characters and write compelling copy. Sometimes I feel like I'm writing just to progress the story, as opposed to concentrating on telling the story. This means I find it hard to focus on the story. How do you folks remained focused as you write these longer stories?

Jonas' Summary: A couple of tidbits of good advice on this point: 1) take breaks as needed, or at least breaks from the compelling writing (focus on the mundane like transitions); 2) avoid unnecessary scenes or plot lines—if they are superfluous, they can be cut; 3) talk to others—writers, editors, readers—about your ideas, as they can be a great source of inspiration.

Well, I take breaks as needed. Sometimes I force myself to write stuff that doesn't need to be compelling (like transitions). Sometimes I bounce my ideas off of other authors to see if I can find some inspiration. (**Big Ed**)

My editors tell me I don't... (**steveh11**)

By developing the story first. That way each scene has meaning to the overall storyline. If a scene doesn't add to the story in some positive way, then it is either rethought or eliminated. (**orblover**)

LOL Umm I DON'T stay focused (which is why my "working file" is huge") (**Lady G**)

I stay true to the characters and modify the plot as needed. (**Wine Maker**)

6. Speaking of focus, sometimes my mind get consumed with a new story idea, and I can't focus on existing stories until I pen a few pages of the new idea. (I run in the mornings; gives me too much time to think.) Subsequently, I have the beginnings of a half dozen stories. Does this happen to anyone else? How many stories have you begun writing and then abandoned?

Jonas' Summary: Seems most writers do have the beginnings of other stories jotted down on paper. Some focus only on one story at a time, and will not touch others until that one is done. Others may have a couple primary stories, and then others that they revisit from time to time. Interesting to me was that none of the respondents admitting to throwing away a story. They always just put them in hibernation.

Sure. Right now I have 3 stories in my "in progress" folder and 14 in my "unfinished and inactive" folder. (Big Ed)

So far it hasn't happened to me. In that respect (if few others) I'm quite disciplined, once I start a story I'll write *that* story, and I *will* complete it. (steveh11)

I don't like abandoning stories. I prefer to think of them as boxes I've put in the attic to be rediscovered in the future. When a story starts to grow in my head (driving long distances and showers seems to be my genesis points) I have to get something on paper before I can come back to the one I'm working on. A year ago, between Part I and Part II of R&L, the story in my head was so strong, I developed it into a dead tree novel concept and actually wrote about half of it. I spend time every few weeks now rewriting and polishing it with the plan of shopping it out within a year. (orblover)

I have... oh about 10 stories already in the making, so for me, yeah it's common. LOL I can't say I have absolutely abandoned any of my stories (they are a lot like my children and just can't seem to let them go, but I will put them on the back burner for... years LOL) (Lady G)

I have a few, but I try not to do more than jot down some notes. If I turn my attention from my current project, it throws me off. (Wine Maker)

OK. That's it. I've turned your proverbial ear long enough... Thanks for any feedback, folks!

Jonas' Summary: A couple of good nuggets here...

No problem.. So far as I can see from similar question-and-answer sessions previously, there's no set Right or Wrong way of writing - there's only the best way for *you*. (steveh11)

Jonas, join in the weekly chats. The process of writing does come up often. In the meantime, the best way to learn to be a better writer is to read (with a critical eye) and write (and share with trusted advisors). (orblover)

My follow-up post:

Wow. I'm sitting back now trying digest all that you guys have said. Good stuff. Thanks so much for the feedback. It has, of course, prompted other questions, but I need to reread what you've said here just to be sure I don't ask something that has already been answered.

One more set of questions, though. How do you find a decent editor, you know someone who you can bounce ideas off of, someone who will give you honest and constructive feedback? When you have an "editor", do you always run concepts by them before you write or a chapter by them before you publish, or do you just use them when you feel you need feedback?

***Jonas' Summary:** This set of questions spurred some good dialog. Here are the primary points I gleaned: 1) Everyone needs an editor of some sort, even if it is just for a sanity check. 2) It helps to have a 'team' of editors and proofreaders. 3) Be clear when you ask someone to review your work what you want from them—just proofing or reality checking or editing suggestions. 4) Select folks that you seem to “mesh with”. 5) When you present to the editor depends on your method of writing and what you are looking for. Throw ideas out to editors prior to writing for reality/sanity checks. Send completed chapters/sections for proofing and story suggestions. 6) Important Note: the story is yours, as the writer. All feedback is just suggestion.*

I write non-fiction and fiction. In the non-fiction world (which I publish under another name and actually do receive compensation for some of it) I have an agent and a group of trusted friends I use to vet ideas before I write. Plus, they give me feedback before I submit for publication. I've written columns on a deadline. Then I relied heavily on the editor of the periodical for story ideas (amazing how her advice always followed the editorial calendar!). In the fiction world, I'm a relative newbie (it was a year and a half ago that I was badgered into writing by some other members of this group - thanks guys! I'll get even, somehow). I have built a team of people that I rely on. I use different combinations of this team for developing story ideas, editing and rewriting advice, proof reading, and sanity/reality checking. My bride is a major part of this process. I'm seeking an agent (not really pushing the issue at the moment, don't think I'm quite ready, but if one fell out of the sky...) and will be seeking an editor in the future (through a publisher, of course). (orblover)

Well, I've only used one editor, and I found her through an online dating site. Of course, I married her shortly after she became my editor, but the two are really unrelated. ;-)

That said, I am thinking about expanding and having a 'team.' I've not gotten far enough on my current story to actually take that step, but have been thinking about many of the same questions as you.

One conclusion I've come to is that the fit is really important. That's both a skill set and a personality mesh. For me, I write well enough that I don't need grammar and spellcheckers (though they're always useful) nearly as much as I need sanity checking. When I started, I needed someone who was very encouraging instead of blunt/in my face, but that may be

changing. There are times when a drill sergeant is useful, but not for me, thank you very much. This is my hobby, not my vocation.

That said, I think one key element of any editor is explaining why. The comments feature in Word is invaluable: "I don't think this passage works because...."

Now, as for your question on running ideas by your editor--why? It's my story and it often evolves when I'm writing. I might run an idea by occasionally as a sanity check, but generally I prefer to give my editor the completed section so she evaluates what's written and not what I told her. Writing Devil, I bounced more than my usual number of ideas through Nick, but that was because I was playing in his universe. In my own, I don't. (**Big Ed**)

You'd be surprised what a good editor/adviser can do in the development of a story. I've found having a sounding board hitting me with questions I sometimes forget/won't ask myself is a real benefit. This is true for fiction and non-fiction (really helpful for peer reviewed papers!!).

I write to the online space for pleasure (yep, got the virus) and to learn. The more people I have willing to help me grow, the better! (**orblover**)

Oh, I understand that. I do edit for other writers, after all. I've just found that I'm better than most people I've used as a sounding board pre-writing. I've only had a couple of conversations either in fiction or non-fiction, that have led me to go "oh, I hadn't thought of that." Which can also be interpreted as: I haven't found the right editor/advisor yet.

Now, readers after I've completed the first draft... very valuable so far. The check of 'did this really come across like I intended it to' is priceless. (**Big Ed**)

Adding to what Orb and BE have said, dont be afraid of asking for recommendations based on what tyoe of editing that you are looking for.

Be specific in what you want, i.e. simply grammar/spelling, comments on readability, keeping track of the details, insight into the reader's perception of the characters, and whatever else there is that writers use editors for. (**Turbo**)

MY (used the wrong word in the last post... where ARE me editors when I need them LOL) experience is that I just asked in this forum for an editor. I'm telling you quite a few people with JUMP at the chance. For me though I didn't use everyone that offered. I sent them my story and they sent me their responses. The ones that I could work with, I stayed with, the ones that I just didn't mesh with, I "let go."

You have to be able to communicate with your editor as well (and use what ever source is easiest for the both of you). It really IS like a relationship, in that you do have to be able to communicate and understand each other.

As far as when do I contact my editor (I actually have more than one so it's a bit easier) but it depends on if they are available, or how stuck I really am. Usually I will write something out and if it doesn't seem right I will send them something saying, "What doesn't seem right" or "How can I make this better." One piece of advice that I was given is that it is MY story. If I don't like the editors suggestion then don't change it. (Lady G)

I was stuck at a certain point in FB and received some much appreciated help from a duo of readers. They really helped me begin to add depth to my characters and work through some plot holes. How do you go about asking someone to be your editor, knowing full well that they are busy with lives of their own and you have no way to compensate them for their time?

Jonas' Summary: No summary needed. Big Ed handled it well.

You ask. And you learn how to deal with their schedules and time. Nick's posted in the past that he's had to wait for his team to get stuff back to him. And I know his team has turned over since he started. So an email that starts off, "would you be willing to..." is probably a good way to get going. (Big Ed)

Spin-off post from Orblover:

Here's a question back to you and to the other writers. If you span both fiction and non-fiction, what differences and similarities have you seen between the two worlds?

Jonas' Summary: Interesting add-on question from Orblover. Non-fiction seems to involve at least as much pre-writing as fiction writing, but most likely more. Outlines, research and drafts are important. Also, accuracy, while important in fiction, is critical in non-fiction. Not only that, but you have to use your creative juices in a different way to provide compelling copy. You can't fabricate events or conversation in non-fiction writing, so you need to use what you've been given, but make it as compelling as possible.

My non-fiction isn't quite the same as Orb's. I do a lot of non-fiction writing for my job, but not freelance for pay, though I'm starting to think about it (a result of reading some magazines and going: "I could write better than this!")

The major similarity for me is in how I tackle organization. The process of outlining, researching, writing the first draft, etc. is all pretty much the same. The major difference is in dialogue. Non-fiction requires very little. ;-) I've also noticed that, in fiction, leaving some i's not dotted is

actually superior to making sure they all absolutely are. Of course, that's where an editor/reader is most useful to me--did I dot enough without dotting too many?

That doesn't mean I don't need to know all the i's. I just don't show them all, like I would in a scientific paper. Fex: in Devil, you really don't know what happens after Jessica leaves some of the parties. I know, and one can infer, but the story is weaker if I were to add in a scene with Gina explaining exactly what happened. **(Big Ed)**

In all seriousness, I have attempted more than once to write non-fiction (I'm not counting feature articles for regional newspapers when I was student writer), and kept going back to advice from an unlikely source. Chuck D, lead MC for Public Enemy, said on the inside of the cover for the album "It Takes a Nation of Millions to Hold Us Back" that we should stay in school because "you can't rap about what you don't know". Taking that into consideration, I know most about my own life, but two attempts to begin my life story made me realize I'm just a boring sap...

That said, I found it to be considerably different working as a newspaper reporter (my only real non-fiction writing, other than marketing and technical writing) than writing fiction, largely because the topics are usually mundane and of little interest to me, but also because of the need to stick solely to the facts. Conversations have already taken place, events have already happened, and you have no control as the writer over the actual story. That doesn't make it harder or easier than fiction, just different. (jonas)

My third—and final—post:

1. Any tips for getting through dialog without it sounding like crap? Along those lines, how do you know if it sounds like crap or not? I write it, then leave it for a day or two, then reread. I can usually spruce it up some, and I'm usually satisfied. But how can I tell if it is natural?

Jonas' Summary: The key: read it out loud. That might be the only real way to see it sounds natural. Also, be sure to take into consideration a character's personality and quirks. Not every character should talk the same way.

Don't record dialogue and try to write it from real life. Real life dialogue wanders all over the map. The advice I was given was to find some plays and study how the playwright did it. After you write it, go back and ask yourself (constantly) how this furthers the story. And primarily use 'said'. But you can skip using 'said' if you put the piece of dialogue in a contextual situation. **(Bruce B)**

Read it out loud. Several times. If it sounds like crap, you'll figure it out. The hard part is not letting all your characters end up talking like you. **(Big Ed)**

I think dialog is either a talent you have or a skill you can acquire with lots of effort.

Dialog is one of my talents. I just hear it in my head, and it comes out naturally. Now, I still have to edit and tighten it, and occasionally punch it up to make it more realistic, but it just flows for me.

If you don't have the talent, you'll have to work hard at the skill. Listen to people. Have conversations in your head. Have arguments, even. Roleplay if you have to.

Dialog has a rhythm and flow. It's like water: it follows the path of least resistance. People use words like "gonna" and "kinda," and multiple contractions like "wouldn't've." They use "lay" instead of "lie," sloppy grammar, and lazy word choices. Your dialog should reflect that.

Also, dialog can reflect personalities. For example, Kendall never used the word "yeah." Go back and check if you don't believe me. She said "yes," which fit her character.

Professor Joska is a little formal and passive. He says things like, "class standings will be posted..." instead of being active and saying, "I will post..."

Other characters have dialog quirks, which give them depth. Luke has his little Cajun sayings, like "mais," and Jeff is pretty foul-mouthed ("What the fuck does that mean?").

Other dialog is more generic, like people saying "I mean," as a mental pause, or "like" for modern conversation or Val-speak. I mean, like, totally. You know?

If you want to improve your dialog, listen to the people around you and take mental notes. Read good dialog writers. You'll know them when you read them, because you'll hear it in your head. Or watch good dialog movies, like most anything by Quentin Tarantino (who's from Knoxville, BTW) or Elmore Leonard ([here's a good essay by him in the NYT](#)). (**Nick Scipio**)

Dialog is key to writing great prose. A year and a half ago, I felt the same way. I was not comfortable with writing it. I see my characters in my head, I hear their dialog, yet I had blocks about getting it on paper. What I did was study. My study actually goes back further, but this is when I got serious.

I reread stories with what I considered great dialog. I studied screenplays (there are a wealth of them available online). Two years ago, a friend asked me to create a story that a screenplay could be developed from. I used that to write my first screenplay. Talk about a medium where dialog is critical! I would take each scene and sit down with a trusted friend and we would read the parts to each other. Or I'd have two friends read it while I listened. More importantly, I got their feedback on what they thought was happening in a scene. I'm proud to say that screenplay is in preproduction with an independent film producer.

With prose, while I'm doing rereads/rewrites and feel a scene isn't flowing, I close my eyes and listen to the scene as someone else reads it. I can spot the problems in a heartbeat. Well, most of them.

At the end of the day, I'm still a student of writing myself. (orblover)

Having friends read what you write can point out if it sounds natural or not. One thing that has been said to me over and over again is to get a good editor or a group of people to work with your story. After you write your story, send it off to these people. They can point out where the story sounds false, and maybe even give you some good ideas to improve your story. (Jamie)

2. And how can I stay on track? My characters have a tendency to wander in their dialogue, getting off track of the primary purpose of the conversation. I realize this mirrors real life somewhat, but it doesn't make for very coherent prose. How can I keep my characters on track without sounding like I'm forcing them to have a unidirectional conversation?

Jonas' Summary: Most agree that you should let your dialog go where it wants, since that's kind of how things happen in real life. However, be sure to reread what you've written to tighten the conversation. And if you don't make the original point in the dialog, you may need to initiate another subsequent conversation.

Throwing in an occasional piece of off-direction dialogue can actually help, but only if used sparingly. Let them play out their dialogue and get it out of your system. And then go back. Don't stop in the middle. And who knows, sometimes characters will introduce a whole new part of the story for you. (Bruce B)

One thing, try to follow the "show, don't tell" principle, meaning you provide information to the reader through the character's actions and dialog. If you find your dialog is wandering, it could be that you are conveying too much information to the reader via author narration. If you make the characters do that instead, it can make the dialog more focused. (Onagerian Surmise)

If it mirrors real life, why worry about it?

A good general recommendation is to let them wander, and then tighten it in the revisions. It's often much easier to see how to cut a few lines of dialogue after the fact than to force the characters to get to the point in the shortest route. Another is to not worry too much about the order of what gets said when. I find that I was thinking the character would go point A, point B, point C, but then they wander to point C first and double back to A later. It still works. Like I said, let 'em wander and clean it up in the revision. (Big Ed)

Either be more flexible with your purpose, or more rigid with your conversation.

I know the feeling of dialog going off track and losing the original point, but that's also been some of my best writing. If you really need to make a point, have another conversation, or steer the current conversation back to the original point.

The beauty of most real-life conversations is that it's okay to say, "Hold on, that's not what we were talking about. What do you think about so-and-so?"

People do it all the time in real life. Why shouldn't your characters do the same? (**Nick Scipio**)

In my first drafts, I don't stop the characters from doing anything. I let them wander all they want to. It is in the rewriting process that I tighten scenes. I think you also need to look at why the characters are wondering. Some of it adds realism to a scene, yet, more often than not, it takes the reader out of the scene. Are they wondering because you didn't understand the plot lines well enough and they're exposing it to you? Anyway, that's why I don't don't reel them in in the first draft. Hell, most of the time, I have trouble getting them to talk enough in the first draft!! (**orblover**)

3. They say sex sells, and so it is with Erotica. Which means poorly written sex scenes can really detract from the narrative. How do you find the right mix of conveying emotions/feelings and describing the actual physical acts during a scene? How about adjectives? How can you know if the frequency of use is becoming distracting? (FEX: "Abigail felt Allison's hands go around her neck, her fingers weaving into her thick mane of hair. She let her arms wrap around Allison's waist and pulled her close. She noticed the two inch height difference when Allison's small, perky breasts pressed against the underside of Abigail's larger mounds." Are there too many adjectives used here to describe the various body parts? Too few?)

Jonas' Summary: Again, keep the scene appropriate for the characters. Allow them to describe the scene through their dialog and expressions. When you (the narrator) does the telling, keep adjectives at to a useful level (long slow scenes can handle more than short quick ones) and appropriate for the setting.

There are only so many adjectives to use, unfortunately. You'd think there were more. Use them, but very sparingly. I was given Mark Twain's advice: "when you need an adjective, kill it." You can't do that so much in a sex scene as you have to give some imagery and feelings. But remember, a lot goes on in the head, and concentrate on impressions and feelings. One of the differences between erotica and porn is that the mechanical details in erotica are hidden by the feelings. Other than that, read, read, read. Consciously try to mimic the good ones. You'll find several of them contribute to this forum. (**Bruce B**)

Best sex scene I've seen recently, from a comic strip published in major newspapers called "9 Chickweed Lane":

http://comics.com/9_chickweed_lane/2008-11-07/

(Catch it fast, I don't know how long they keep their archives up) (**Dan Lyke**)

Concentrate on what's unique about the characters, how they feel about each other, at what point in their life is it happening, etc. Have the scene reflect that and deepen the definition of the characters through the experience. And how does the scene advance the plot? If the story before and after the scene would be the same, regardless of the erotic scene being in the middle or not, the more likely the scene will be forced and focused on physical stuff. (**Onagerian Surmise**)

This is really a pacing/rhythm thing. Most sex scenes should be tight. Go read ones you like by other authors and see how many words they use to describe the actual sex scene. Often, it's very few--the words are in the build up, but the actual intercourse is less than a paragraph. But sometimes it's really important to linger (particularly in voyeurism scenes). You basically have to develop a feel for the rhythm.

Now, that said, it's still a fricking challenge. Finding other ways to say "I thrust into her" is one of my constant challenges.

As for adjectives, a general rule of good writing is to have the verbs do the major descriptions. Most adjectives are unnecessary to the scene and just slow the pacing down for little benefit. (**Big Ed**)

I once had an editor tell me that the best erotica is like the best pussy: hot and tight.

Tight here is the operative word. You want to give the reader enough idea what's going on so they can construct a mental image, but you don't want to bog them down with details.

Too many adjectives spoil the soup. Use them when you want to slow the pace of your narrative (which is a legitimate goal sometimes). Toss them out the window when you want things to move.

Long, romantic moments when characters make eye contact? Go wild.

Hot, fast, up-against-the-wall sex? Um... keep it simple, stupid.

Remember, words are tools, not the end unto themselves. Use them to affect your pace and flow. Set the scene with more words, but let the action flow with less.

Seduction is scene-setting. Fucking is action. (**Nick Scipio**)

As a wise man once said, what can be exciting in reading about a blood engorged bit of flesh sliding monotonously in and out of a mucous membrane? From my personal perspective, sex is kinda boring if you ain't taking part in it (and, with some past lovers, even then!). So, I try to invite my readers into share what is going on. It is fucking for the sake of pleasure? Then let the reader share in that animalistic moment - the energy, the physical feelings, something new,

something old. The goal being release. Is it the joining of two souls in a deeply intimate act? For me, this is handled through communications with the eyes. The single touch that is far more intimate than sexual. It is not about individual release as it is a growing closer and sharing something incredible.

Now, as to adjectives... Are you Hemingway or Dickens? Somewhere in between (yet leaning towards Hemingway) works for me and my style. (**orblover**)

4. In the same example above, is the use of slang like "mounds" for breasts hokey and distracting? I remember in one of Kendall's fantasies she said something that caused both her and Paul to laugh, effectively breaking the mood for them. (Great scene, BTW, Nick.) I don't want to do that in my writing. I want to keep the readers in the mood.

Jonas' Summary: Slang can serve a purpose, but can also detract if used unwisely. Make sure the use of slang fits the character that is using it. Also, make sure it is consistent throughout the scene (see Big Ed's response for a great example).

Unfortunately it's what we have. But again, use sparingly. And maybe put it in dialogue rather than in description. Writing "He grasped her mounds" is one thing. Having her say, "Grab my mounds!" would be better because you convey the same information, but as it's dialogue it feels like action and helps set the mood much better than just describing it (this is a form of "show, don't tell"). (**Bruce B**)

Totally agree with your suggestion to put this in dialog, it can be a fantastic characterization tool. "Fuck me" and "I want you inside me" can be two entirely different people. (**Dan Lyke**)

Yes, I think so. (**Onagerian Surmise**)

Slang sets a mood too. Use words that turn you on, and you'll generally be fine with your audience. The issue is not the words but the consistency. If you've got a hot nasty "fuck my cunt, you bitch" scene, you don't want to slide into "the curve of her breasts beckoned" either. (**Big Ed**)

Yes, it's hokey, but you can also use slang to good effect.

Fex: Gina and her sisters don't use the word "fuck." They say "screw" instead. (Don't believe me? Look it up.)

Also, men and women have different slang. Most men say "tits," while most women use "boobs" or "breasts."

But as you pointed out, slang can detract from the story and break the scene. I try to keep things simple, stupid. If you mean breasts, say breasts. (Nick Scipio)

You have to use words that fit the character. A Neandertal Male might use words like cunt, flesh bags, and such. Two gentle lovers, exploring for the first time, are going to find a shared language. If mound fits, use it. Personally, I can't see Luis ever referring to Becca's breasts as fun bags, except in jest (and he's probably going to sleep in the sofa for a couple of days after). (orblover)

5. Lastly, first person vs. third person. I've written using both. Which do you find easier to write in? If using first person, how can you effectively convey the emotions and actions of others? If using third person, is there a limit to the number of people whose perspective you can tell the story from before it becomes, well, stupid? I noticed in Nereids, Nick told from Beth's and Jack's perspectives, and didn't stray from that. I already know enough to try to write a scene from only one person's perspective.

Jonas' Summary: There isn't an easy way to sum this up. Depends on a lot of things: author, story objective, reader preference. Several did recommend taking a few pages that have been already been written in one POV and rewriting them in another POV, and see which works best for that story. With either method, try to "show" something (emotions, action) instead of "telling" it with narration.

That's a toughie. It depends on the story. There is no hard and fast rule. Some stories tell better in 1st, others in 3rd. It depends on your view of the characters. I've found that each has its virtues. 1st Person is limited in so many ways because you're stuck in someone's head and have to infer what's going on in the heads of everyone else. Third Person limited means you focus on one person with only a limited excursion inside them. Third Person Omniscient means you're getting everything from them.

Examples: I did Devlin's Story and Three Valleys - Sammi as 3rd Person because it let me step outside the character's head to give background and description, directly telling the reader. This way I didn't have to have some "artificial" activity such as looking in a mirror to see what the character looked like. I did the Kalliste's Storytime stories in 1st Person because these are Kalliste's reminiscences.

Other examples: read some of the stories by people on this forum and ask yourself how they would be told in some other way.

Whatever you do, don't mix the two. Now I know someone will say that the Kalliste stories mix them, BUT I put in page breaks and work on the transition. It's called a frame, and with reasonable transitions and an over-riding narrative you can do it.

My advice to people is to try both 1st and 3rd and see what you feel tells that particular story better. I suggest people try to stay away with 1st unless they have a high level of skill. As an

example, how would Summer Camp be if Nick had chosen to tell it in 3rd. My opinion is that it wouldn't be anywhere near the same. We would have a much better idea of what would be going through other character's heads, and Paul's actions might be different. It's like playing Texas Hold 'Em by watching TV, and in real life. It's different when you can't see the other cards. **(Bruce B)**

Ages ago someone suggested that I rewrite a few pages that I'd done as present tense in the past tense. Reworking it so it didn't sound stupid in the past tense did *incredible* things. I'd guess that taking a few pages and doing the same with first versus third person would probably do a whole lot towards making a writer conscious of "showing versus telling". **(Dan Lyke)**

I've done both... This would be one to buy a book for. Its primary difference is how and what information is provided to the reader. If you're struggling with dialog issues, writing in the first person would force you to work more on your dialog to be focused and advancing the plot. So you might use that form starting out as a learning exercise. **(Onagerian Surmise)**

The biggest problem is that people often shift POV. The story will be in first person and they'll write: "Tony was mad." Well, that's a conclusion, not an observation, and it's third person. "Tony looked pissed" is a first person observation. It's really important to stick to whatever your POV is and be consistent.

I write first person POV mostly, because I like to write what a character is thinking. I've done some limited omniscience 3rd person POV which allows the same thing. In first person POV, you have to convey other people's emotions and thoughts through what the first person observes. It takes practice. **(Big Ed)**

Each has its own uses.

First is good for internal dialog and a limited PoV. It's also more intimate and personal. (But it can be a turn-off for people who aren't remotely like the PoV character.)

Third is better for creating a sense of detachment, or giving a God's-eye view to the plot.

(Regarding conveying actions of others in 1st person) Dialog. Body language.

Just remember, show don't tell.

Fex: Paul rarely says, "I got angry." Instead, he balls his fists, or feels his face go hot.

For Nereids, I had to have a PoV with each couple, but I didn't want it to be all-female or all-male. Besides, it was a good chance to write from a woman's perspective. **(Nick Scipio)**

The big answer: it depends. I write in various forms. The first person POV switching I'm doing for an NiS story is challenging. Particularly when the two main characters tell about the same scene.

That takes a lot of work to keep the dialog consistent, the movement in sync, and such. The way you have to tell the story in your head is how the story should be told.

I was walking down the street the other day...

There was this crusty, old Etruscan walking down the street yesterday... (**orblover**)

Other Tips from Big Ed (and one from TERB):

1. No one's a villain in their own mind. Yeah, they might be selfish, or working to some standard of 'good' that is rejected by the rest of the world, but people don't see themselves as evil.
2. Along those lines, people usually see the world as either black and white or grey. That can influence a lot of how a character speaks or reacts.
3. People are habitual creatures. A good way to improve characterization is to show their habits, be they spoken (like Nick's mentioned about some of his characters) or actions. For example, watch the alcohol use in my story F&B, or note what time the characters get up in the morning in my Holiday series.
4. Along those lines, people tend to be dominantly visually oriented or auditory. "I see what you're saying" vs. "I hear what you're saying." A character will be consistent here.
5. A similar habit is in how people react. When something happens to us, we react at three levels: think, feel, and act. The trick is, not all at the same time. Most people will react in the same order every time. Hamlet is think first, act last. Paul has been feel, act, think (think of the fights he's picked). Note that this can change--one of the great ways to show character growth is to show them learning how to break this habit.
6. Similarly, people make decisions through intuition, impulse, or reason, and they tend to use the same way most of the time. An engineer who uses reason all day is unlikely to switch just because he's home. Again, it's a habit--not unbreakable, but one where consistency will help the characterization.

I'll give this final piece of (stolen) advice: good writers borrow; great writers *steal*. (**Nick Scipio**)