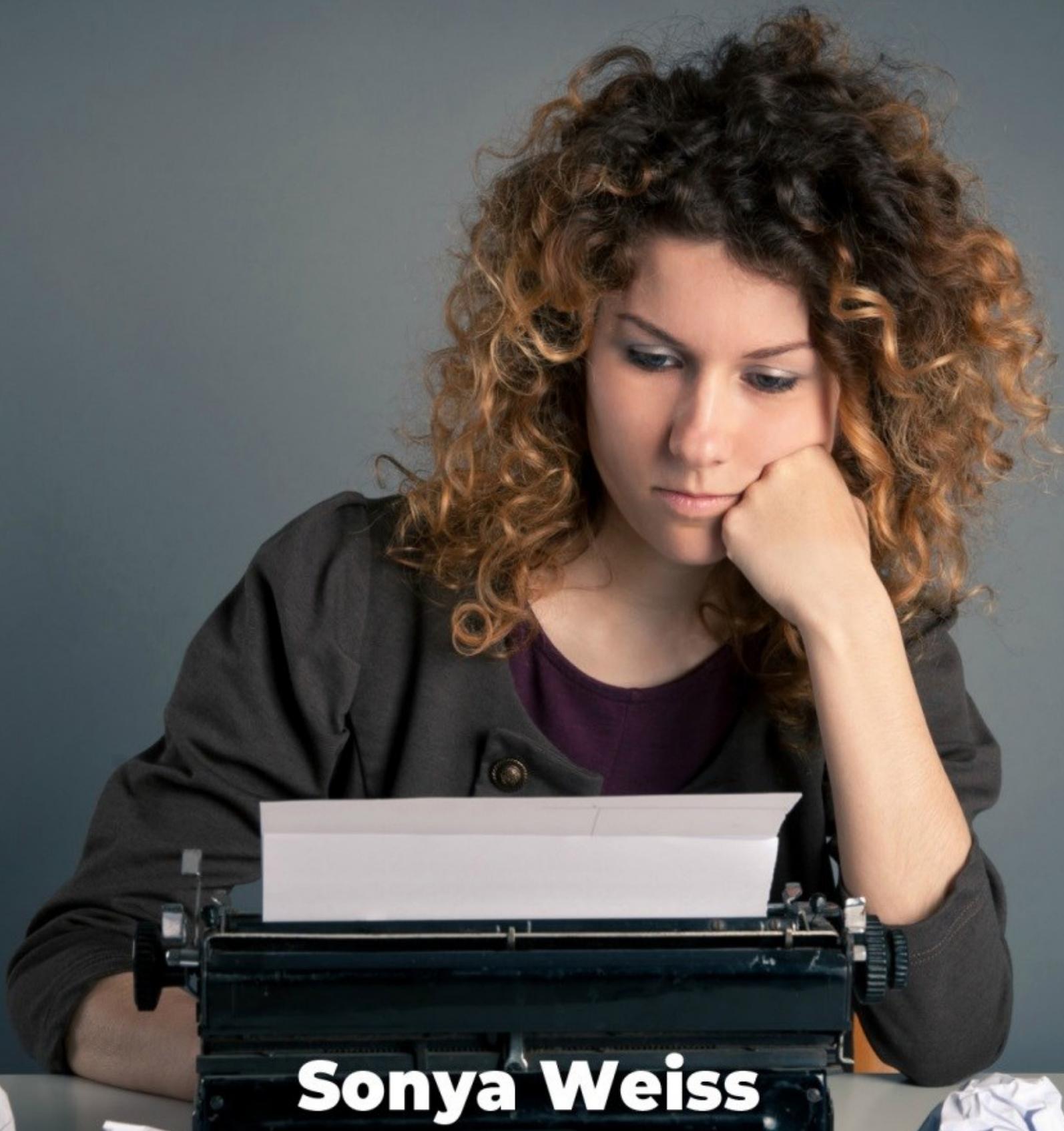


5 Reasons Your Manuscript Keeps Getting Rejected



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A beginning tip: always make sure you send out your manuscripts as polished as they can be. A lot of editors get flooded with Nanowrimo manuscripts in December and January that haven't been edited. Which is why just seeing the words "This is my Nanowrimo novel" in a query makes many of them cringe.

Writing the story is only the beginning. No one writes a perfect first draft. You have to edit and if you don't know how to do that well, then find someone who does.

Maybe you're someone who polished up your manuscript and sent it out to an agent only to receive a rejection in return. Or no response at all.

You work on it some more and send it out directly to publishers only to experience the same thing. So let's take a look at five reasons why your manuscript may have been rejected.

The Reader Didn't Connect with Your Character

A story always begins with a character. They're the driving force of your plot. They're what makes a reader remember the book long after the end.

Maybe the feedback on your rejection said something like "I couldn't connect with the character." You're puzzled because you know that your character is well developed.

You've filled out character charts. You know that character's likes and dislikes. You know his backstory, his pain, his joy, so what's missing?

What that can mean is that the reader—in this case the agent or publisher—didn't feel what the character was going through. It's a sign that there was no connection. The writing didn't convey the character in such a way that the reader could tune in with what the character was feeling.

When that's missing, the reader isn't pulled into the world. Characters must be created in such a way that the reader can't help but feel connected. So how do you do that?

You tap into an identifying emotion in the reader. Feelings are universal. Everyone knows what it's like to experience anger, grief, joy, fear, doubt, humiliation, remorse, and so on.

If you struggle with showing emotion in your characters, a good resource for this is [*The Emotion Thesaurus: A Writer's Guide to Character Expression*](#) by Angela Ackerman & Becca Puglisi.

Readers can root for characters when they feel empathy for them. Even tough-as-nails characters that act like jerks need to have something that makes a reader feel for them.

An example of this is found in the show *The 100*. The character Bellamy comes across as a jerk. You think that he's no good and his actions all seem to point to his belief that he lives his life by a what's-in-it-for-me creed. Then you find out that some of his actions were done because he loves his little sister and he's trying to keep her safe and alive. Readers connect with a character like that because they too, love someone and want them to be safe.

Another example is found in the book [*Daughter of the Pirate King*](#). The heroine is tough and her actions are a little rough, but when you find out what she's gone through, the reader connects because he feels empathy for her.

It's okay to have a tough character who appears to be strong enough to handle anything that comes his or her way, as long as you show that the character does have vulnerabilities. No one likes a character who doesn't have any flaws. Why? Because readers can't connect with perfect characters.

What's the Character's Goal?

There's something known as the GMC. That stands for goal, motivation, conflict. Let's break these down one at a time.

A goal is something that your character wants. It's his purpose in the story. This goal must matter to the character. It has to cost him something if he doesn't get it. In *The Princess Bride*, Wesley's goal is to rescue Princess Buttercup. If he doesn't, it'll cost him the woman he loves.

Some goals can be simple. For example, it's storming, and the character is driving through the storm because he wants to get home and out of the bad weather. A goal like that doesn't have a lot of teeth to it or excitement for the reader. Plenty of people drive in a storm.

But if you add that the character is a high school senior who knows his girlfriend is in danger and he's trying to get to her, then his goal becomes deeper. Add that the storm has knocked out cell phone service and he knows that if he doesn't get to her in time, the supernatural creature will have her for dinner, then his goal suddenly becomes more urgent.

Now make that character run over something sharp in the road and it slices his tire. It goes flat. His new but smaller goal is to fix the tire and get back on the road to help the girlfriend. Smaller goals feed into bigger goals.

If in this same story, you've shown this high school senior and his girlfriend overcome great odds just to be together, then the readers are already rooting for them. They care what happens and are invested in the goal just like the character is.

One of the emotions that you're using to connect with the reader while the goal plays out is fear. They're feeling the hero's fear that he won't get there in time.

What's the Character's Motivation?

A character's motivation is simply the reason behind him wanting the goal. A character going to the bank to borrow money is a goal. He wants it to save the family farm. That's his motivation. A motivation is the why behind the goal.

In everyday life your goal of going to the grocery store is motivated by the need for food so that you won't go hungry or have to eat that questionable pack of noodles at the back of your pantry.

The motivation for your character has to be clear cut. It must be compelling. It must carry a sense of urgency. For example, a character who wants to find shelter for the night because he doesn't want to be cold may have a sense of urgency, but not necessarily a strong one. But if the temperatures are going to drop below freezing and he wants to find shelter because he's leading a group of children and knows they won't make it if he doesn't, then his motivation becomes urgent.

You should be able to say about your story, "My character wants ___ BECAUSE" and that because is his motivation. For a character to want something for no reason won't be a very compelling story.

Your Character Needs Conflict

You know that your character needs to have a goal. You know that he needs to have a reason (the motivation) for wanting that goal.

Now you have to give him conflict. Conflict is the thing or person that prevents the character from achieving his goal. If you don't have any conflict, or your conflict isn't strong enough, then your story will be weak.

When reading query letters, agents and publishers are looking for the goal, the motivation, and the conflict. What qualifies as conflict?

It's the things or people your character struggles with to get what he wants (his goal.) Think of conflict as a tug of war between a good outcome and a bad one.

Your characters must hurt. They have to face difficult situations, and make difficult decisions. Otherwise, nothing's at stake for them and if nothing's at stake, you don't have any conflict.

Conflict throws a glitch into the hero or heroine's path. In *The Princess Bride*, Wesley's conflict was everything keeping him away from Princess Buttercup. It was the Fire Swamp, the Cliffs of Insanity, Inigo Montoya, Vizzini, Fezzik, and Prince Humperdinck. If no conflict had existed, Wesley could have simply found Princess Buttercup and then the story would have ended. It also would have been boring and not nearly the iconic movie that it is.

Conflict must be real. The outcome of resolving the conflict must matter to the characters. Strong conflict also can't be explained away.

If your character's conflict can be resolved by simply having a conversation with someone, then the conflict isn't strong enough. For example:

"I saw you at the café with that guy. You're cheating on me."

"No, that was my cousin."

"Oh."

You'll want to be careful that you don't overload your story with too much conflict. Your conflict should be one that can carry the story, but is focused. An example of this is seen in the movie *The Mountain Between Us*.

Two people who live through a plane crash have to rescue themselves. The conflict in the story is man against nature. The couple must survive a mountain lion, a fall through the ice, hunger, and injury. All of that is conflict but feeds into the main conflict of struggling to survive.

Unfocused conflict can cause plots to become as convoluted as balls of yarn that dozens of kittens have played with and unraveled. An example of this would be a hero wants to tear down a building in a town to make room for a mall. The heroine owns the building but won't sell. He doesn't want to talk to her because she reminds him of his ex-girlfriend who cheated on him.

The heroine is friends with his ex-girlfriend. The hero once dated the heroine but didn't recognize her because she changed her appearance. She gave up his child for adoption without telling him. She had to change her appearance because she's hiding

from bad guys. He's friends with one of the bad guys. It's actually his brother. She has to testify against his brother.

The above conflict should be focused on the hero wanting something he can't have that belongs to the heroine. This pits them against each other and that's your conflict.

Why Pacing Matters

Recently, I saw an editor announce on Twitter that she'd rejected most of the submissions she'd received due to pacing issues. A story with pacing that's too slow means you risk an agent or publisher quickly losing interest. So let's go over that.

Pacing is the speed at which your story moves. Think of writing your story like you would taking a trip in your car. There will be places you'll slow down. There will be places you'll speed up, but you should always be moving steadily toward the goal.

That means that each scene in your book should feed into your character's goal. These scenes have to count. If you can remove a scene from your manuscript and it doesn't change or impact the story in any way, then that scene is unnecessary. Cut it and move on.

You have to get the pacing right because one that's too fast doesn't give the reader time to absorb the story. It's go-go-go with no slowing down along the way. Even action stories shouldn't have go-go-go pacing all the time.

Think of the movie *The Bourne Identity*. In the movie, when Bourne is fighting or running, the pacing is fast. Things are happening left and right that create an edge-of-the-seat experience for the viewer.

But there are also times in the movie where the pacing slows. Like when he's at the heroine's brother's place. Or he's in the motel room with her.

The conflict and sense of urgency are still there despite the slowed pacing. You know he's being hunted and one wrong move will end his life and the heroine's.

In your manuscript, if your pacing is fast but you slow it because your character has to eat something, you'll kill your pacing if you use several pages to describe that character preparing a meal. Don't waste a lot of time on mundane things.

A clue that your pacing is too slow can be found by looking at your manuscript. See if you have long blocks of text that focus on description, backstory, or meandering dialogue.

Pacing problems can be fixed.

To speed up pacing: cut back on description, use shorter sentences or fragments. Show the action. Use quick dialogue.

To slow down pacing: add details—but not long, uninterrupted paragraphs. Weave in the details. Use longer sentences. Let your characters take a breather. Slow dialogue but not to the point that the dialogue is meaningless.

If you're someone who's dealing with rejection, and you're feeling discouraged about your manuscript, I urge you not to give up. If you have a question about something writing related, feel free to reach out to me on [Twitter](#) or contact me through [my website](#).

About Me

I'm a freelance writer, ghostwriter, and author. My published clips include feature newspaper articles, magazine articles, essays, children's short stories and writing projects for business clients.

In 2014, my debut novel, *Stealing the Groom* was released through Entangled Publishing and became an Amazon Best-Seller. You can find out more about that book as well as my others on [my website](#).

