

ProWritingAid
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5 Pro Tips

for Research that Will Bring Your
Historical Romance
to Life

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What We'll Cover

01

What do historical romance readers want?

02

How much research do you really need to do?

03

5 ways to focus your research on what matters

04

A quick look at the beats and research

About Susanne



- Award-winning author of over a dozen historical novels
- Author Accelerator Certified Book Coach
- PhD from Yale in Music History
- Lives in a historic converted mill in Biddeford, ME



Why do readers choose
historical romance?

Rather than contemporary
romance?



The clothes

The manners

To learn something

A simpler era

The pace of life

The gowns

Escape to
another time

The gowns

Well-defined roles

The gowns

Think about what *you* love
about historical romance.

How do your favorite books
make you feel about the
historical world?



Creating that world so that
it's believably habitable is
almost as important as the
romance itself.






But you have to strike a delicate balance between the world building and the storytelling.




Which requires not just
the right research, but
understanding what's
actually relevant,
meaningful, and
necessary.





How do you accomplish that
without getting lost down a
bottomless research rabbit
hole, or having to become
an expert in the period?





By paying attention to these 5
simple tips *as* you plan, write,
and revise.



TIP #1:

Use the obvious sources—
the history police will not
come after you.





TIP #1:

Use the obvious sources.

- The Internet is your friend!
- ChatGPT can also be a great resource, but double-check any facts that seem suspicious.
- For a general feel, art of the time can be invaluable.





TIP #1:

Use the obvious sources—Example

From ChatGPT:

Answer to kinds
of carriages used
during the
Regency.

2. **Landau:** Similar to the Barouche but with a hood that could be folded down at both the front and back, converting it from an enclosed to an open carriage. It was used for both city and country travel.
3. **Phaeton:** A light, open, four-wheeled carriage, often driven by the owner rather than a coachman. It was considered sporty and elegant, ideal for younger people.
4. **Chaise:** A two-wheeled carriage, usually with a folding hood, accommodating one or two people and often pulled by a single horse. It was used for travel over long distances.
5. **Curricie:** A light, two-wheeled carriage drawn by a pair of horses side by side. It was fashionable among young, wealthy men who prided themselves on their driving skills.
6. **Gig:** A light, two-wheeled sprung cart pulled by one horse, used for short distances and often for business travel.
7. **Tilbury:** A light, two-wheeled carriage with a springy suspension, suitable for use by one person and a groom.
8. **Brougham:** Introduced towards the end of the Regency period, a Brougham was a four-wheeled, enclosed carriage, often used in the city for its maneuverability.
9. **Coach:** A larger, enclosed four-wheeled carriage for long-distance travel, offering more protection from the elements and comfort for the passengers.
10. **Post Chaise:** Similar to a Chaise but used mainly for postal services and long-distance travel, often rented along with horses and a postilion.





TIP #1:



Use the obvious sources—Example

From ChatGPT:

What happened when I asked for a picture of a Tilbury, a 2-wheeled open carriage...So wrong!



But Google gives you plenty of good images.

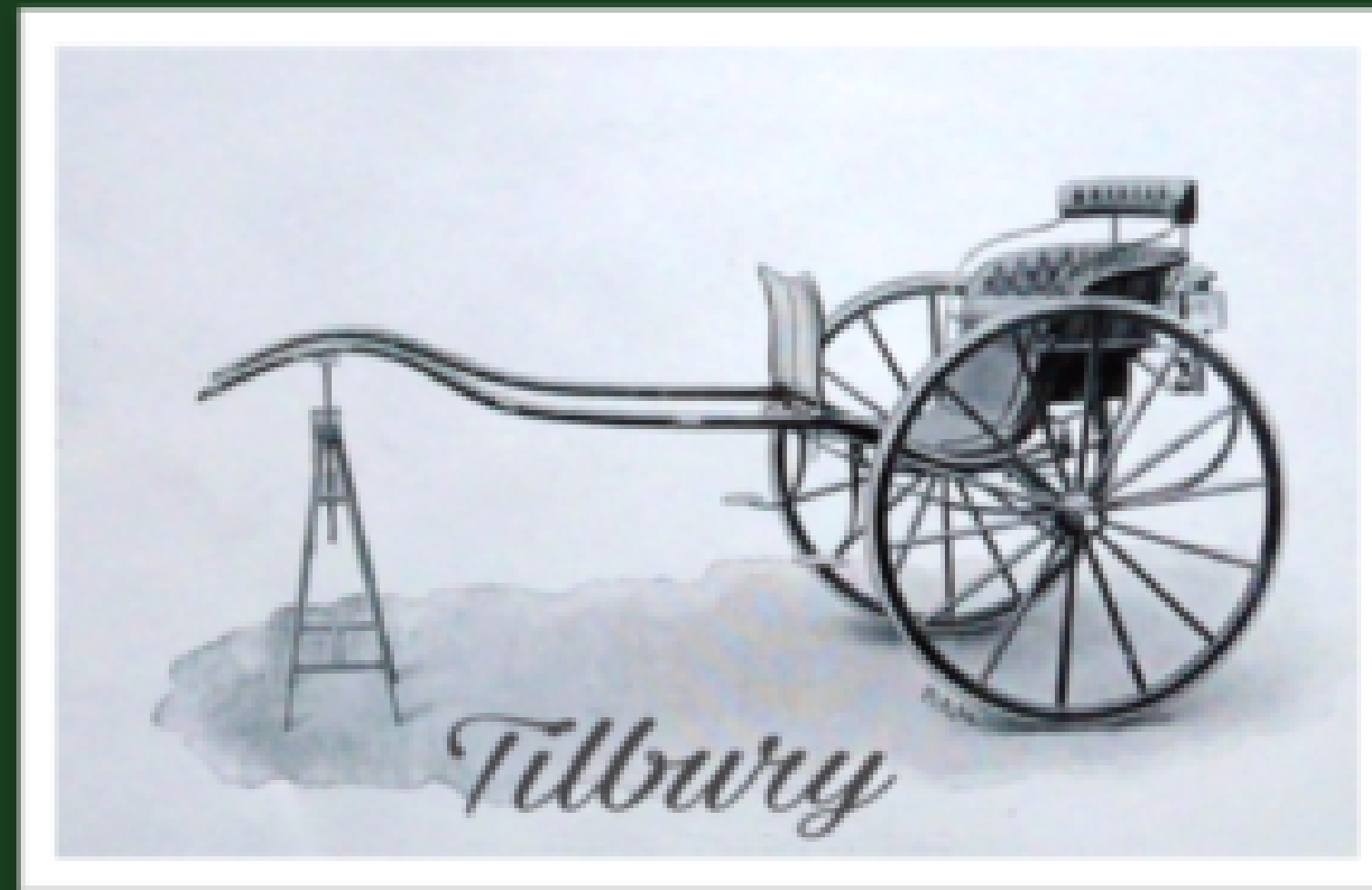




TIP #1:

Use the obvious sources—Example

An actual Tilbury (web search):





TIP #1:

Use the obvious sources.

- Historical romance author sites!
- Authors are passionate, and generous about sharing their knowledge gained through research.





TIP #1:

Use the obvious sources.

- Some good, informative sites:
 - General—Historical Hussies
 - Regency
 - Rachel Knowles
 - Jane Austen
 - Kristen Koster
 - The International Heyer Society
 - Victorian—Mimi Matthews





TIP #1:

Use the obvious sources.

- Wikipedia is a good place to start.
- If you get to a good article, the bibliography can be helpful too—but you might not need to go that deep.





TIP #1:

Use the obvious sources.

- If you're writing Regency, consider joining Regency Fiction Writers.
- They have classes and resources that are incredibly helpful to writers!





TIP #2:

Focus, focus, focus
on what you actually need
for your story.





TIP #2: Focus, focus, focus

- Remember it's romance first.
- Map out your beats, or decide on your trope, then research to support those story elements.
- Narrow down to your exact story present and exact locations and important characters.





TIP #2: Focus, focus, focus

- If you feature any historical characters, exactly how do they interact with your protagonists?
- Could you use a type instead of a historical personage—which will mean less necessary research?





TIP #2:

Focus, focus, focus

- Historical events: Do they affect the plot, or are they just dinner-table conversations?
- If your female protagonist takes an unladylike interest in politics, then you need to know what and why.
- If your noble protagonist has to go to London for the House sitting, you have to know when and what for.





TIP #2: Focus, focus, focus

- Don't add details just because you've done the research.
- Choose the details that add depth and texture to your story.





TIP #2: Focus, focus, focus

- For instance: if your heiress is in love with a blacksmith, you'd better know about his work and how it affects him physically, mentally, and emotionally.
- And you should have a clear idea of the exact repercussions on her if she runs away with the blacksmith!





TIP #2:

Focus, focus, focus

- But if the blacksmith is just window-dressing, generalize or leave him out.
- Don't add details just because you've done the research.
- You may find it fascinating, but if you could leave it out without affecting your story, it doesn't belong there.



TIP #3:

Prioritize your research
based on your protagonists





TIP #3:

Prioritize your research

- Everything starts with your protagonists.
- Making them real, believable, and historically true should be your first research priority.
- What they want, what they fear, what they believe or misbelieve—should all have their roots in the period.





TIP #3:

Prioritize your research

- Go back to your beat sheet or Inside Outline.
- Make a list of the facts and historical details your story can't live without, or that are essential to bringing your protagonists to life.





TIP #3:

Prioritize your research

- Put those facts into buckets for easier researching.
- Keep adding to the list as you write, and use “TK” liberally if you need to insert a description or a fact you don't have at your fingertips.





TIP #4: *Mind your language!*





TIP #4: *Mind your language!*

- It's not just manners and customs that make a period feel authentic.
- Anachronistic words and ideas disrupt your historical setting and throw your reader out of the story.





TIP #4: Mind your language!

- Beware of words and ideas related to modern technology (*rewind*, *fast forward*, etc.) and changed usages—such as “impact” as a verb.
- If in doubt, Google it!





TIP #4: *Mind your language!*

- BUT: don't burden your prose with obscure words, even if they're correct (unless they serve a story purpose).
- If you're writing Regency romance, you can find just about everything you need to know about language of the period on the web.





TIP #5: Stick to the basics





TIP #5: Stick to the basics

- These are the things you have to get right if you're going to provide details.
- Choose them carefully to make sure the level of historical detail is appropriate to your story.





TIP #5: Stick to the basics

- **BASIC 1: Clothing**
 - Not just the type of garments, but how they fasten, how easy or difficult they are to get in and out of, etc.
 - It's better to generalize than to get something wrong.





TIP #5: Stick to the basics

- BASIC 1: Clothing
 - YouTube is your best friend!





TIP #5: Stick to the basics

- **BASIC 2: Transportation**
 - Make sure the transport is appropriate to both the distance to be covered and the environment—as well as the class of passengers.
 - Again: It's better to generalize than to get something wrong.





TIP #5: Stick to the basics

- **BASIC 3: Money**
 - It's not always necessary to know precise specifics (unless relevant), but you should know what constitutes a fortune in the time and place you're writing about.
 - Also good to know: An average workman's wages.





TIP #5: Stick to the basics

- **BASIC 4: Ranks, titles, military roles**
 - Obviously, you need to know who ranks where among the nobility.
 - Duke
 - Marquess
 - Earl
 - Vicount
 - Baron





TIP #5:

Stick to the basics

- **BASIC 4: Ranks, titles, military roles**
 - There is a preponderance of dukes in historical romance, but in actuality there are only 24 non-royal dukedoms today.
 - Compare that to today's 979 earldoms.
 - Viscounts are often subsidiary titles, and baronets are even more common.





TIP #5:

Stick to the basics

- **BASIC 4: Ranks, titles, military roles**
 - Debrett's Peerage is a great resource—and it's online now.
 - Don't forget that titles and their roles changed in different historical periods and regions (attention those who write medieval romance, or Scottish romance).





Bonus Tip: *Less is more*

- Remember the reasons people read historical romance!
- Don't provide details for the sake of providing details.
- All your research should serve the story itself, not just evoke the period.



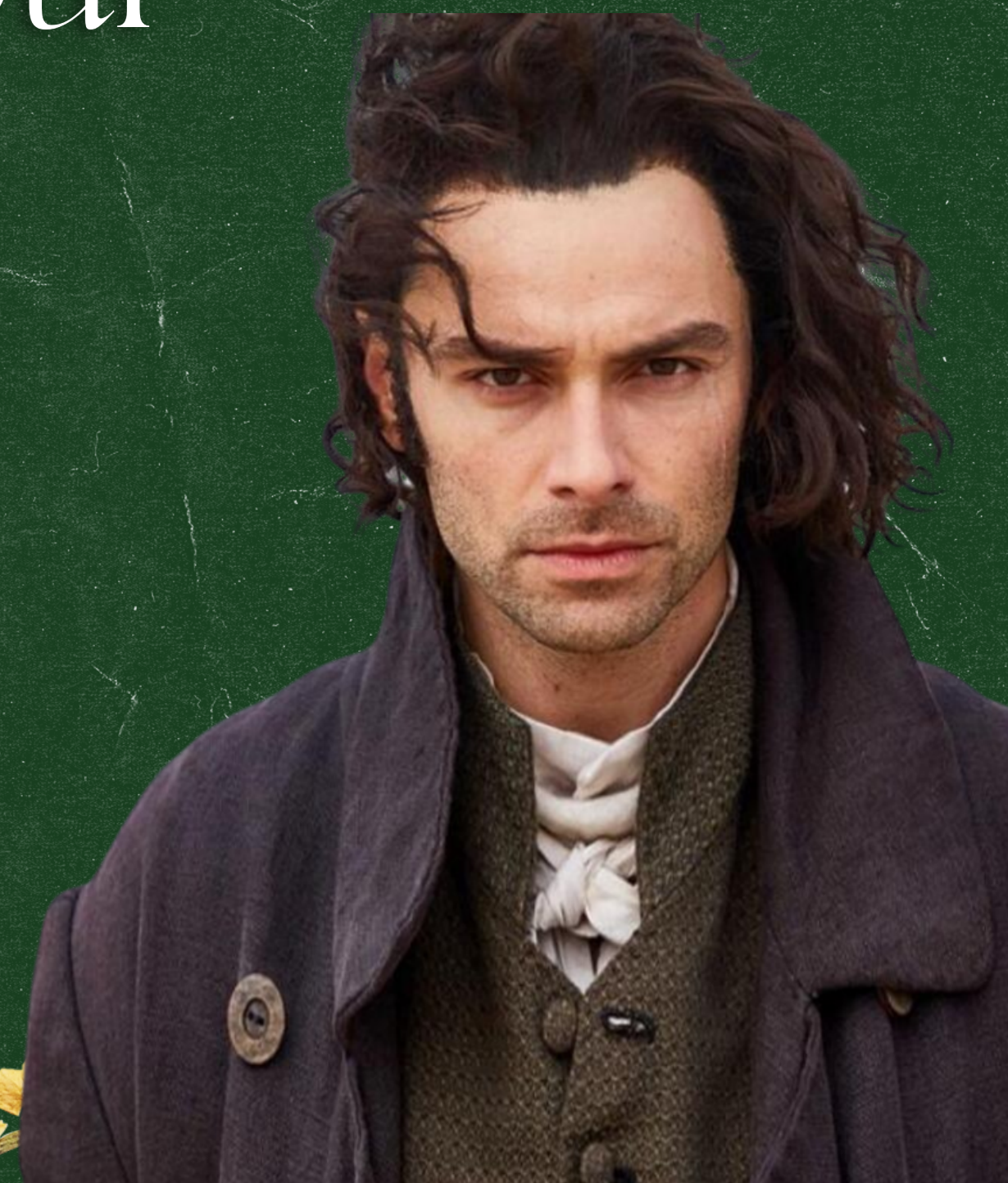


Bonus Tip: *Less is more*

- Know when it's all right to generalize or be vague.
- Keep your research and details in proportion to the scope of your story.



Research and Your Story Beats







Historical romance is
romance first and foremost.
The historical part adds
dimension and atmosphere.



You need all the same story
beats and you'll use the
same tropes and
conventions—with historical
twists.





BIG BEAT 1: Set Up

- Don't be tempted to overload the beginning with world building and backstory.
- Nonetheless, you must instantly give your reader a clear sense of when and where they are.
- Choose your historical details carefully to work as hard as possible. (See beginning of presentation!)





(Small beat.) MEET CUTE

- Look to the historical environment.
- The situation (obvs) needs to be particular to the time period.
- Make sure it sets up the coming complications.
- Carriage rides, balls & assemblies, hunts, political rallies, etc.





(Small beat.) MEET CUTE

- Don't forget, for instance, that in the *ton*, everyone was known to everyone else—which means consider something more akin to a “re-meet cute.”
- Some authors introduce previously reclusive figures, or foreigners (e.g. Julia Quinn), or someone with a dodgy past who might be reformed.





BIG BEAT 2: Falling In Love

- Make sure it's realistically rooted in your historical period.
- Be sure to set up some good complications.
- Although this often happens near the beginning of the story, there are exceptions (Georgette Heyer *Cotillion*, e.g.)



BIG BEAT 3: Retreating from Love

- You'll probably have a feast of choices for making your protagonists resist their initial emotions—from financial considerations to dynastic ones and much more.
- These impulses can come from both internal and external causes—either of which must be period-appropriate.





BIG BEAT 3: Retreating from Love

- If you've done your research and world-building, it can furnish plot inspiration as well.
- Physical barriers were real in previous times—distance, travel, no possibility of communication.
- This should all be set up through your protagonists' wants, needs, beliefs, and misbeliefs.



BIG BEAT 4: Fighting for Love

- 
- Here's where your protagonists have to get inventive and daring.
 - Your feisty heroine can find a way to break out of a guardian's stranglehold, for instance.
 - Your buttoned-up noble hero can discover he has a heart after all—despite the generations of repression.
- 

BIG BEAT 4: Fighting for Love

- Whatever you do, the ending the reader knew had to be coming must in some way surprise and delight.
- How your protagonists overcome the obstacles must also be rooted in the period and their personalities.



A large, vibrant pink flower with five petals and a dark center is positioned in the top left corner of the slide.

BIG BEAT 4: Fighting for Love

- Be careful not to end your book sometime after its actual ending.
- Leave your reader hungry for more, even if your book isn't part of a series!





You are invited...



Join me for the
Historical
Romance Virtual
Intensive!



You are invited...



4 Saturday mornings in
April, 9:30am-12:30pm
Eastern

Coaching, sharing, co-
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<https://www.susanne-dunlap.com/romance-week/>

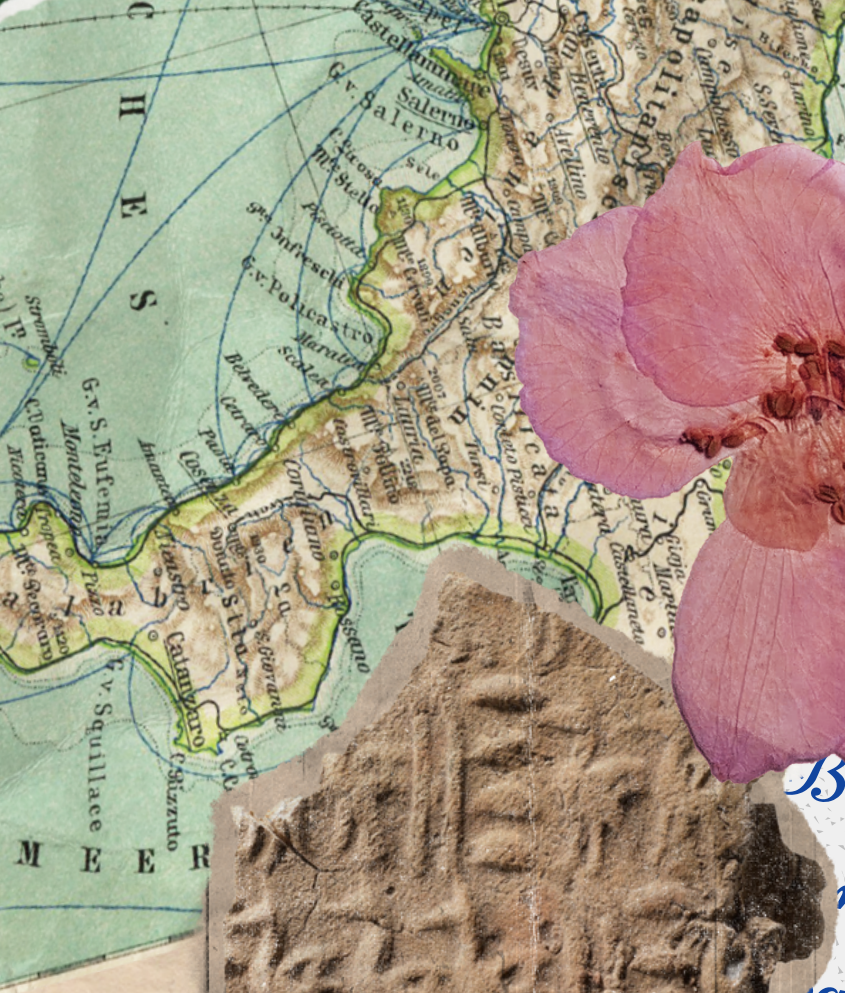
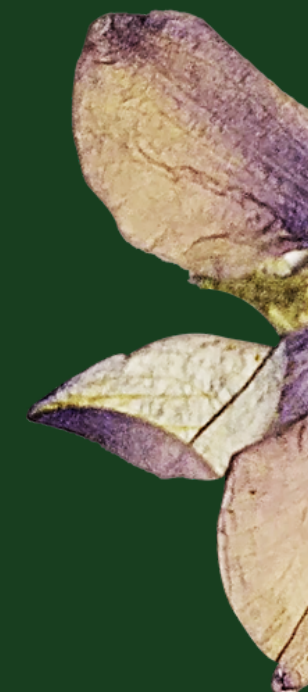
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