M/M ROMANCE TROPEs
WHAT THEY ARE AND HOW TO USE THEM TO PLAN, PLOT, AND MARKET YOUR BOOK
INCLUDES 60+ TROPES WITH DEFINITIONS AND EXAMPLES TO INSPIRE YOUR NEXT BESTSELLING GAY ROMANCE
LYSS EM
M/M ROMANCE TROPES
What They Are and How to Use Them to Plan, Plot, and Market Your Book

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M/M Romance by Lyss Em
About the Author
In 2015, I set out to write my first M/M romance novel, and it was way more difficult than I could have ever imagined. Though I had written M/M fanfiction for years, trying to write a full-length romance book was like stumbling in the dark with no idea where I was going or how to get there.

That first book, like many writers’ first books, was a disaster I will never show to the world. And it took a few years of deep study and practice to finally get a handle on novel structure and, in particular, romance novel structure.

During my time of study, I sought out craft books about M/M romance, my subgenre of choice and one I will always read and write. Though there are a handful of romance how-to books on the market today, precious few existed when I was starting out, and M/M-focused ones were practically nonexistent. The general romance-centered craft books failed to explain to me in a simple way how to write an M/M romance novel. I had to purchase and read tens of craft books and hundreds of romance books before I started to get it.

It has become my mission as of late to help those writers in the place I was a few years ago to achieve their dream of writing their romance novel faster than I did. So, I am presenting the simple methods I use to come up with ideas, plan my books, and write them. As a bonus, some of my methods can also help with marketing.

In this book, I will specifically discuss M/M romance tropes—both the
ones that arose in M/M and broader ones that often show up in M/M. Along the way, you will learn:

- What M/M romance is
- What a trope is
- Why you should care about tropes
- The definitions of 60+ tropes found in M/M romances, along with examples of books that use them
- How to use these tropes to come up with story ideas, plan characters, plot scenes, and market your finished book

Tropes are only one facet of romance writing, but they are one of the easiest—and most fun—places to start. I hope you will enjoy learning about them.
What is M/M Romance?

M/M romance is a genre of romance in which the two main characters identify as male. There can of course be more than two main characters; such a story would be an M/M/M romance, M/M/M/M romance, etc.

You may already know what a romance is, but I’ll go ahead and define it. Here is the “official” definition from the Romance Writers of America:

“Two basic elements comprise every romance novel: a central love story and an emotionally satisfying and optimistic ending.

A Central Love Story: The main plot centers around individuals falling in love and struggling to make the relationship work. A writer can include as many subplots as he/she wants as long as the love story is the main focus of the novel.

An Emotionally Satisfying and Optimistic Ending: In a romance, the lovers who risk and struggle for each other and their relationship are rewarded with emotional justice and unconditional love.”

Basically, a romance is a love story with a happy ending, and in an M/M romance, the lovers are both men.

M/M Romance vs. Gay Romance

If you’re unfamiliar with this genre, you may be wondering why M/M
romance isn’t just called gay romance. Well, it often is. But there is a slight
difference between the two (which gets more and more blurry as time goes
on). The difference is that M/M romance has an audience that is primarily
heterosexual ciswomen, and gay romance is a genre name which some feel is
more welcoming to gay men and gay male authors.

Personally, I don’t see much of a difference between the labels. Though I
am an AFAB person (AFAB = Assigned Female At Birth), I identify as
nonbinary and will happily read any book categorized as M/M OR gay
romance. I also know several queer authors and readers of M/M.

The only issue I have personally with the label of “gay” is that it sort of
implies that the characters will identify as gay and not bisexual, pansexual,
etc. For me, the label M/M allows for more variation in identities. But you’ll
find that the gay romance label doesn’t always exclude these other queer
identities, and both of these labels—M/M romance and gay romance—are
less restrictive than you might think.
A trope is a story convention or plot device commonly used in fiction. They are not limited to books but exist in all forms of fiction—movies, television shows, comic books, etc.

TVTropes, a tropes wiki which can be considered the definitive resource on the subject, defines a trope (on their Tropes main entry) as “a shortcut for describing situations the storyteller can reasonably assume the audience will recognize.” The entry goes on to say that “Tropes are not the same thing as clichés.” This is because there are infinite ways to reimagine a trope and put a so-called original spin on it. One may encounter several books and TV shows featuring the same trope, yet each story will be different.

Within every genre of fiction, some readers will avoid certain tropes, claiming they are overused. But other readers will specifically seek out those same tropes. Some tropes become very fashionable and marketable only to fall into obscurity a year later, but that doesn’t mean the readership for those tropes has dried up. For example, many say that vampire romances are old news now after the whole Twilight craze, yet every other week, I come across tweets and Facebook posts asking for vampire romance recommendations.

Tropes usually have catchy names, though these can vary depending on who’s talking about them. For example, the fanfiction community, Romancelandia (i.e., the romance reading and writing community), and TVTropes might all have a different name for the same trope. So, if you’ve heard a different name for a trope than what you see listed on a webpage or in this book, that’s why.
In the second part of this book, I provide a list of several tropes that often come up in M/M romance, but for now, here is one example.

**Second Chance**

The main characters dated in the past, and the story follows them as they reunite and give their romance another shot. The circumstances of the initial breakup will vary. One or both of the characters may have initiated the breakup, or outside forces may have pulled them apart.

**This trope in action:** *Chaos Station* by Jenn Burke and Kelly Jensen
WHY YOU SHOULD CARE ABOUT TROPES

Tropes can be helpful in many stages of the writing and publishing process. They can help you to:

- come up with story ideas,
- delight and entertain readers with your plot, and
- market your book to the right audience.

Later in this book, I talk in detail about how you can take full advantage of these benefits (see How to Use Tropes.)
Some of the tropes listed in this book are controversial. Some people believe that a few of them are so harmful that they should not exist.

But the fact is that they do, and each of these tropes has their readership. This is why I have decided to include them.

It’s up to you which tropes you read and incorporate into your own writing.
Almost all of the tropes listed in this book can apply not only to couples but also to triads and other closed polyamorous relationships as well as open polyamorous relationships. Any tropes that can be doubled such as **Double Out For You** can also be tripled, quadrupled, etc., depending on how many main characters are involved in the central romance.

Even so, in this book, I have chosen to define each trope with regard to couples only for simplicity and ease of reading.
With each trope listed in this book, I have included the title and author of at least one story that utilizes that trope. I have read some of these books, but definitely not all of them. I know some of the authors, but most of them, I have never spoken to. Listing a book as an example of a trope is not an endorsement as to the quality of that book, nor am I getting any type of kickback for listing it. I have also made a concerted effort to include books from many different authors.

I have gathered the information about which books feature which tropes through online research of book databases like Goodreads and QueeromanceInk. I hope the examples help clarify the trope definitions for you.
The following tropes are either specific to M/M romance or found more often in M/M as opposed to romances with some other pairings (such as M/F).

**Bi For You**

One of the main characters discovers that he is bisexual or otherwise queer as a result of the central relationship. If both main characters start out believing they are straight or are otherwise unsure of their sexuality, this is a **Double Bi For You**.

**This trope in action:** *Personal Secrets* by K.C. Wells

**Bottom For You**

One of the main characters is exclusively a sexual top, but when he meets the other main character, he discovers a love for bottoming only for that character.

**This trope in action:** *Breaking* by Barbara Elsborg

**Everyone is Queer**

All or almost all of the characters in the story are gay or otherwise queer. This often occurs in series of standalones in which each book features a
different M/M couple in the same friend group, shifter pack, etc.

**This trope in action:** *The Village* series by Darien Cox

**Femme Bottom/Masc Top**

The main character who most often bottoms sexually has an effeminate demeanor, while the main character who most often tops sexually has a masculine demeanor. Almost always, these characters have strict top and bottom roles. Frequently paired with **Size Difference** (see Other Tropes Often Seen in M/M) and **Smartass Twink** but can work with a variety of tropes.

**This trope in action:** *Better Than Good* by Lane Hayes

**Gay For You (Turned Gay)**

One of the main characters is 100% straight, but when they meet their love interest, they become gay only for him. Sometimes, a character will become 100% gay as a result of the central relationship. If both main characters start out straight, this is a **Double Gay For You**.

**This trope in action:** *Just a Bit Twisted* by Alessandra Hazard

**Homophobic Hero (Toxic Masculinity)**

At least one of the main characters experiences internalized homophobia. He is usually stereotypically masculine and is very concerned about being perceived as such. Oftentimes, he is paired with an out-and-proud love interest for maximum conflict.

**This trope in action:** *And So Is Love* by Scarlet Blackwell
Mpreg

Male pregnancy. In an Mpreg universe, cisgendered male characters can become biologically pregnant and birth children (usually through the anus, but this can happen in a variety of ways). The origin of this ability may or may not be explained within the story. Frequently occurs in shifter or other supernatural stories, but the characters may also be human. Often paired with the A/B/O, Fated Mates, Heat/Rut Cycles, Knotting, and Secret Baby tropes. (See Other Tropes Often Seen in M/M.)

This trope in action: Changed: Mated to the Alien Alpha by Robin Moray

OK Homo

All of the characters in the story are accepting of the central relationship characters being gay or otherwise queer and in a gay/queer relationship. This most notably occurs in historical fiction. In many historical time periods, being gay was criminalized or otherwise stigmatized, but in an OK Homo historical romance, this stigmatization and homophobia does not exist. Also pairs well with closed-minded, present-day communities.

This trope in action: The Actor and the Earl by Rebecca Cohen

Out For You

One of the main characters accepts his sexuality (which he already knew about) and/or comes out of the closet as a result of the central relationship. If both main characters start out closeted, this is a Double Out For You.

This trope in action: You Can Leave Your Boots On by Irene Preston

Prostate Makes Him Gay (Gay Button)

A character does not enjoy gay sex or is reluctant to enjoy it until he has
his prostate stimulated, usually during anal sex. At that point, he becomes gay and/or suddenly adores gay sex. Frequently paired with **Dubious Consent** (sex is nonconsensual beforehand), **First Time** (sex is painful beforehand), and **Gay For You** (character is straight beforehand). (See **Other Tropes Often Seen in M/M**.)

**This trope in action:** *Up for the Challenge* by Riley Hart and Devon McCormack

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**Smartass Twink**

One of the main characters has the attributes of a twink—small size, young age and/or appearance, effeminate demeanor—as well as a general pain-the-ass personality which he showcases especially around his love interest. He may play pranks, throw tantrums, and otherwise cause trouble for the other main character. Almost always occurs in pairings with strict bottom/top roles (with the Smartass Twink as the bottom). The top character may display annoyance at the bottom’s behavior but will secretly find it endearing or grow to find it so.

**This trope in action:** *Redesigning Max* by Pat Henshaw, *Scar* by Dee Aditya
The following tropes are not specific to M/M romance and can be found throughout the romance genre in general. Nevertheless, they often show up in M/M romance stories.

**Accidental Marriage**

The central couple gets married “accidentally”—usually when they are drunk. An example of this would be a whirlwind Vegas wedding.

**This trope in action:** *Will & Patrick Wake Up Married* by Leta Blake and Alice Griffiths

**A/B/O (Omegaverse)**

Written out, this trope is **Alpha/Beta/Omega**, and it refers to a complex worldbuilding convention in which characters have strict social and sexual roles. Some are Alphas, and some are Omegas, with Betas, Gammas, Sigmas, etc., being optional. In an A/B/O world, Alphas are dominant sexual partners and Omegas are submissive sexual partners, with these biological drives affecting romantic relationships and familial structures. Where procreation is concerned, Alphas do the impregnating, and Omegas do the childbearing. Oftentimes—but not always—A/B/O involves **Mpreg** (see **M/M-Related Tropes**). Due to its primal nature, A/B/O also often involves werewolves or other shifters; in this case, it is frequently paired with the
**Paranormal/Human** trope. Also often incorporates **Fated Mates** and **Knotting**.

**This trope in action:** *Obey* by Piper Scott

**Age Difference (May/December)**

One of the main characters is significantly older than the other. If the age gap is extremely large, this can veer into **Taboo Love** territory.

**This trope in action:** *Crossing Borders* by Z.A. Maxfield

**Alien Hero**

At least one of the main characters is an extraterrestrial creature, i.e. from a planet other than earth. The alien character will sometimes be paired with an earthling for maximum conflict.

**This trope in action:** *Taken* by M.A. Church

**Alpha Male**

One of the main characters has a forceful, dominant nature and exerts control or attempts to exert control over the other main character. Frequently paired with **A/B/O, Billionaire Hero, Bodyguard/Charge, Boss/Employee, Mpreg, and Paranormal/Human**. Alternatively, both main characters have dominant natures, and the conflict comes from neither one of them desiring to submit (sexually or otherwise) to the other.

**This trope in action:** *Among the Living* by Jordan Castillo Price, *The Mark of an Alpha* by Kim Dare

**Amnesia**
At least one of the main characters has experienced significant memory loss. For example, the main characters may already be in a relationship, but one of them has amnesia that has caused him to forget his lover.

*This trope in action: Please Remember Me by Jacob Z. Flores*

### Android Hero

One of the main characters is an android, robot, or other artificial intelligence being. Usually, this character has been created within the story world to be nothing but an object, but he has either possessed consciousness since his creation, has developed it before the story starts, or develops it over the course of the story.

*This trope in action: Evolved by N.R. Walker*

### Arranged Pairing

Other characters and/or external circumstances force the main characters into a romantic relationship. Examples include forced or accidental bonding in paranormal stories and arranged marriage. Almost always includes **Forced Proximity**. Can also take the form of **Master/Slave**. Pairs well with **Enemies to Lovers**.

*This trope in action: King’s Conquest by Valentina Heart*

### Athlete Hero

At least one of the main characters is an athlete. This trope became so popular in recent years that it has its own subgenre: sports romance. Common sports featured include hockey, mixed martial arts, and football.

*This trope in action: Him by Sarina Bowen and Elle Kennedy*
**Best Friend’s Dad**

As the trope name suggests, one main character becomes romantically involved with his best friend’s father, who is the other main character. May also be **Taboo Love** if presented as such within the characters’ inner monologues and/or in reactions from outside characters. By necessity, this trope is also **Age Difference**.

*This trope in action: Arrows Through Archer by Nash Summers*

**Best Friend’s Sibling**

As the trope name suggests, one main character gets romantically involved with his best friend’s sibling, who is the other main character. Usually the sibling is younger than the best friend, leading to the best friend being protective and creating conflict in the relationship.

*This trope in action: Floodgates by Mary Calmes*

**Best Friend’s Son**

As the trope name suggests, one main character becomes romantically involved with his best friend’s son, who is the other main character. Similar to **Best Friend’s Sibling** in that the best friend is likely to be protective of his son and thus create conflict in the relationship. By necessity, this trope is also **Age Difference**.

*This trope in action: Permanent Ink by Avon Gale and Piper Vaughn*

**Billionaire Hero**

One of the main characters is extremely wealthy. Almost always a **Class Difference**. Oftentimes, the rich character will treat his lover financially—pay for his meals, take him on expensive trips, etc.
This trope in action: *How to Bang a Billionaire* by Alexis Hall

Blackmail Love

One main character blackmails the other. Oftentimes, the blackmailing character is coercing the other into dating him and/or having sex with him.

This trope in action: *The Heart of Texas* by R.J. Scott

Bodyguard/Charge

One main character is tasked with guarding/protecting the other main character, usually in a professional capacity. Sometimes, the bodyguard character chooses on his own to take up this role. As the story progresses, the relationship between the bodyguard and his charge becomes romantic.

This trope in action: *Zero at the Bone* by Jane Seville

Boss/Employee

As the trope name suggests, one of the main characters is a boss, and the other is his employee. Usually takes place in a contemporary setting, oftentimes an office. Workplace fraternization rules can provide extra conflict.

This trope in action: *Broken* by Nicola Haken

Childhood Bully/Victim

One of the main characters bullied the other when they were in school. As adults, a romance develops between them. Pretty much always Enemies to Lovers.

This trope in action: *Depth of Field* by Riley Hart, *Kyle & Nick* by M.A. Innes
**Class Difference**

One main character is from a different social class than the other main character. Usually, one is wealthy, and the other is impoverished. Sometimes, one is a member of royalty, and the other is a commoner. Frequently used in historical settings.

**This trope in action:** *The Gentleman and the Rogue* by Bonnie Dee and Summer Devon

**Cowboy Hero**

At least one of the main characters is a cowboy/rancher/farmer. Consequently, often takes place on a ranch or farm.

**This trope in action:** *Touch Me Gently* by J.R. Loveless

**Disguised Hero**

One of the main characters must pretend to be someone else over the course of the story. At some point, he will divulge his true identity to the other main character.

**This trope in action:** *Auctioned* by Cara Dee, *A Knight to Remember* by Anne Barwell

**Dubious Consent**

In erotic scenes between the main characters, at least one character’s willingness to participate in the sex is ambiguous. For example, he has not explicitly consented, he has said no but is secretly happy about participating (not the same as rape play, though, which is explicitly consensual), he is reluctant but ends up enjoying the sex, and/or external circumstances mandate
that he participates in the sex, which has removed his ability to consent. Dubious Consent lends itself to darker, angstier romance stories.

**This trope in action:** *Strain* by Amelia C. Gormley, *The Wrong Side of Right* by Nya Rawlins

**Enemies to Lovers**

The main characters start out hating each other. Usually, this hate will be based on an experience or experiences from the past, but the enmity may also come from being on opposite sides of an external situation (for example, they are the heads of two warring mafia families). The characters may reconcile, become friends, and then become lovers (often called **Enemies to Friends to Lovers**), or they may go straight from being enemies to lovers, the latter often involving hate sex.

**This trope in action:** *Watch Me* *Break You* by Avril Ashton

**Fairytales Retold**

The plot of the story is based on a fairytale, with the main characters being based on characters from that fairytale. Retellings vary in their faithfulness to the original story.

**This trope in action:** *Duck!* by Kim Dare

**Fake Dating**

Outside circumstances motivate the main characters to pretend to be a romantic couple. For example, one character might pay the other to pretend to be his husband in order to satisfy a legal or financial requirement, or one character might ask the other to pretend to be his date to a special event. Over the course of the charade, the characters develop real romantic feelings for each other.
**This trope in action:** *Fake Out* by Eden Finley

**Famous/Not Famous**

One of the main characters is a celebrity of some kind, and the other main character is not. Pairs well with the **Rockstar Hero** and **Athlete Hero** tropes. **This trope in action:** *Law* by Jess Buffett

**Fated Mates**

The main characters are destined to be together. For example, their partnership may have been foretold in a prophecy. Or the story world may include predestined soul mates for everyone. Sometimes, only certain species will have fated mates; examples include vampires, shifters, and other supernatural creatures. Often paired with **A/B/O** and **Paranormal/Human**.

**This trope in action:** *Cyrus* by Frey Ortega, *Casey’s Love Bite* by Charlie Richards

**First Time (Virgin Hero)**

At least one of the main characters is a virgin at the beginning of the story. Alternatively, he is not a virgin, but he has never had sex with a man. In the latter incarnation, often paired with **Gay For You** (see **M/M-Related Tropes**).

**This trope in action:** *Sex Ed* by Z.B. Heller

**Forced Proximity**

External circumstances trap the main characters in the same location for an extended period. Examples include being snowed-in or held hostage as well as being confined to one another’s side due to a school assignment or
supernatural spell.

**This trope in action:** *One Perfect Wish* by L.M. Brown

**Friends to Lovers**

The main characters start out as “just friends” before falling in romantic love with each other.

**This trope in action:** *As You Are* by Ethan Day

**F*ck Buddies Fall in Love**

The main characters start out as strictly friends with benefits. As the story progresses, however, their relationship develops into a romance.

**This trope in action:** *My Partner the Wolf* by Hollis Shiloh

**Geek/Jock**

As the trope name suggests, one character is a geek or nerd and the other is a jock. Their respective social statuses cause conflict in their relationship.

**This trope in action:** *Sporting Chance* by Alexa Milne, *Frat Boy and Toppy* by Anne Tenino

**Great Sex Heals All**

The central relationship is so good for the main characters that it causes at least one character’s mental illness, addiction, or other complex problem to disappear. For example, one character may be battling suicidal thoughts but then no longer experience them after becoming romantically and/or sexually involved with the other character. Alternatively, the characters use BDSM to cure the problem.
This trope in action: Temporary Mark by Kim Dare, Exposure by Elizabeth Lister

Heat/Rut Cycles (Biological Urge to Mate)

At least one of the main characters experiences an uncontrollable urge to have sex which is driven by his primal instinct to procreate/breed. Very frequently paired with A/B/O. Usually, it is the Omega/receiving partner who experiences the heat, but the Alpha/giving partner can also experience it; in the Alpha character’s case, it is sometimes called rut instead of heat. Typically, the consequences for not giving in to the urge to mate range in severity from physical pain to death. In Mpreg stories (see M/M-Related Tropes), the Omega’s heat often ends when he becomes impregnated. In stories with Knotting, the Omega character may be desperate to receive the knot, and the Alpha character may be driven by his heat or rut to prioritize burying his knot in an Omega. The trigger for a heat/rut cycle varies; examples include time of year, meeting a fated mate (Fated Mates trope), being in the presence of an Alpha, and more.

This trope in action: Omega Reclaimed by Tanya Chris, Accidentally Omega by Samantha Cayto

Hurt/Comfort

One of the characters is physically and/or emotionally injured at the beginning of the story, and the other main character nurses him back to health or otherwise cares for him.

This trope in action: Not His Kiss to Take by Finn Marlowe

Instalove (Love at First Sight)

The main characters are in love from the moment they meet.
Alternatively, they fall in love very quickly such as over the course of a day or a few days.

**This trope in action:** *Loving Sarajevo* by CL Mustafic

**Knotting**

At least one of the main characters has a knot at the base of his penis similar to that of a wolf or dog. Pretty much always paired with A/B/O in which the Alpha character has the knot. The knot swells during sex and, during penetrative sex specifically, “ties” the Alpha/giving partner and the Omega/receiving partner together for a certain period of time. For the Alpha/giving character, orgasms in which a knot swells typically last longer than the average human orgasm. Like A/B/O, often occurs in shifter settings alongside the Fated Mates, Heat/Rut Cycles, and Mpreg tropes (see M/M-Related Tropes). With Mpreg, knotting is usually evolution’s way of facilitating conception and may not occur outside of a heat/rut cycle.

**This trope in action:** *Pretty Poison* by Kari Gregg

**Love as Redemption**

One main character is a “bad boy” or former bad boy who becomes a better person due to the central relationship. Sometimes, he will give up negative behaviors for the relationship. For example, he may start out as a criminal but at some point in the story, stops committing crimes in order to be a good partner for the other main character.

**This trope in action:** *A Better Man* by Jaime Reese, *Love It Like You Stole It* by Ki Brightly

**Marriage of Convenience**

The main characters decide to get married for reasons other than love. But
over the course of the story, they develop romantic feelings for each other.

**This trope in action:** *Marriage Most Convenient* by Amberly Smith

**Master/Slave**

As the trope name suggests, one of the main characters is a master, and the other main character is his slave. This does not refer to the consensual BDSM relationship of a Master to his slave but instead to nonconsensual slavery. Often seen in historical fantasy fiction but may exist within any setting. Over the course of the relationship, the master and slave will fall in love. Sometimes, the master will free the slave at some point in the story.

**This trope in action:** *Captive Prince* by C.S. Pacat

**Ménage or More**

The central relationship follows a polyamorous triad, quadrangle, etc. Abbreviated as M/M/M, M/M/M/M, etc. Almost always, the polyam relationship is closed, which means that the main characters only sleep with and otherwise date each other.

**This trope in action:** *More* by Sloan Parker

**Motorcycle Club Member Hero**

At least one of the characters is a member of a motorcycle club. Oftentimes, it will be a club that engages in criminal activity.

**This trope in action:** *Laurent and the Beast* by K.A. Merikan, *Aces and Eights* by Rain Carrington

**One-Night Stand Becomes More**
The main characters meet during a one-night stand. What was only supposed to be a sexual hookup leads to a romantic relationship.

**This trope in action:** *The Arrangement* by Felice Stevens

**Opposites Attract**

The main characters are extremely different in some way. Usually, this pertains to opposing personality traits, such as one character being extremely outgoing and the other being extremely introverted. Works well with tropes which already imply a core difference such as **Class Difference**, **Paranormal/Human**, and **Size Difference**. However, this trope can be paired with almost any other trope.

**This trope in action:** *Tattoos & Teacups* by Anna Martin

**Paranormal/Human**

One of the main characters is a supernatural creature, and the other main character is human. Almost always, the supernatural creature is humanoid or some type of human/creature hybrid. Examples include werewolf, vampire, ghost, witch/warlock, mage, etc. Romance stories with this trope are classified as paranormal romance.

**This trope in action:** *Vampire Prince* by S.J. Frost

**Rockstar Hero**

At least one of the main characters is a musician, usually a professional one. Oftentimes, the central relationship will be between the musician and a fan, which also fulfills the **Famous/Not Famous** trope.

**This trope in action:** *Play it by Ear* by KM Neuhold, *Working Out the Kinks* by Misha Horne
Second Chance

The main characters dated in the past, and the story follows them as they reunite and give their romance another shot. The circumstances of the initial breakup will vary. One or both of the main characters may have initiated the breakup, or outside forces may have pulled them apart.

This trope in action: Chaos Station by Jenn Burke and Kelly Jensen

Secret Baby

One of the main characters falls pregnant with the other main character’s baby and does not tell him. Oftentimes, the pregnancy happens in the past, usually during a one-night stand, and the romance develops later on when the second father finds out about the child. In M/M, this trope requires Mpreg (see M/M-Related Tropes).

This trope in action: Accidental Pregnancy by Aiden Bates

Sex Worker Hero

At least one of the main characters is a sex worker. Examples include stripper, hooker/escort/rent boy, and porn star. Usually, the sex worker character gives up his profession at the end of the story in order to commit sexually to the central relationship.

This trope in action: Bullet by Garrett Leigh

Single Dad Needs a Partner

One of the main characters is a single parent in need of a partner in love as well as parenting. Sometimes, the parent character has suddenly been given custody of a child or children after a death due to being a godfather, older
sibling, etc.

**This trope in action:** *At Attention* by Annabeth Albert

**Size Difference**

One main character is much larger in physical size than the other. Usually, the more sexually dominant character is larger, but not always.

**This trope in action:** *Muscling Through* by J.L. Merrow

**Slow Burn**

The main characters start off not in a relationship, and their connection develops gradually over many scenes. This trope usually involves a lot of unresolved sexual tension and yearning for one another before they actually come together physically and/or romantically. In slow burn romances with erotic content, the first sex scene will usually occur later in the story.

**This trope in action:** *True Colors* by Anyta Sunday

**Slutty Hero (Reformed Rake)**

One of the main characters is sexually promiscuous until he meets or falls for his love interest, at which point he becomes uninterested in sleeping with any other person.

**This trope in action:** *Convincing Arthur* by Ava March

**Stockholm Syndrome**

One of the main characters kidnaps the other, and their romantic relationship develops over the course of the captivity.

**This trope in action:** *A Prince for a Kingdom* by Meg Harding
Taboo Love

The circumstances of the central relationship break social taboos or straddle the line between taboo and socially acceptable. Examples include step-siblings (also called pseudoincest), incestuous couples, and couples with socially unacceptable age differences.

This trope in action: *Dark Needs* by Maris Black

Teacher/Student

As the trope name suggests, the central relationship is between a teacher and a student. Most often, these stories take place in university settings.

This trope in action: *Seducing Professor Coyle* by Darien Cox

Uniformed Hero

At least one of the main characters has a profession that requires him to wear a uniform. Oftentimes, the profession is seen as heroic and/or selfless. Examples include firemen, policemen, soldiers, and other military.

This trope in action: *Hot Head* by Damon Suede
WHERE TO FIND MORE EXAMPLES

With each trope listed in this book, I have included a maximum of two M/M romances which incorporate that trope. But there are countless M/M romance stories on the market today, and a huge number of them include these common story conventions and plot devices.

Here are some places where you can find additional examples of tropey M/M romances.

GOODREADS LISTS

Goodreads has a large number of M/M-related book lists. Many of them have been created by members of the M/M Romance group, and you can find links to all of their lists in their forum. Their official Listopia lists cover categories such as genre, occupation, relationship/sex dynamics, species, and much more.

You can also locate Listopia lists with Google. I personally find the Listopia section of Goodreads cumbersome to search, but if you use Google with a search term such as Gay romance with BDSM, a Goodreads list usually shows up near the top of the search results.

One caveat with Goodreads lists is that older, more popular books usually show up at the tops of lists and stay there because over time, more Goodreads members have voted for those titles. You can sometimes find newer books by going deeper into the list.
GOODREADS GROUP BOOKSHELVES

Goodreads group bookshelves vary in how they categorize books. Some may have tropes-related shelves, and some may not, but you can usually find specific types of reads by navigating the different tags and sorting the books included.

To locate a Goodreads group’s bookshelf, go to the front page of the group and find the “Bookshelf” link in the right sidebar.

The M/M Romance group has an extensive bookshelf. You’ll find many tropes in their “theme” tags (example: theme-hurt-comfort).

Unlike with Listopia lists, you can filter the books on shelves by date added, so you can easily find current books (as opposed to older ones which may or may not be published anymore).

QUEEROMANCEINK

QueeromanceInk is a database of queer romance and erotica titles featuring characters across the LGBTQIA+ spectrum. To find stories which include specific tropes, you can use the Filter Search feature, which allows you to search based on a variety of filters: genre, pairing, character identity, trope, tag, romantic content, heat level, and ending. You can select multiple filters to narrow down your search.

I do have a few caveats, though. First, authors pay a yearly fee to list their books on QueeromanceInk, and it is more expensive the more books they list; therefore, by no means is every M/M title in this database. Titles may also fluctuate since the author fees are on a subscription model. In addition, some of the trope names may be confusing or obscure, and the site does not list definitions for any of the tropes. Because authors choose the filters for their own books, this can lead to some books being miscategorized.

Nevertheless, QRI is a great resource, and unlike with Goodreads lists, authors with smaller fanbases are not pushed to the bottoms of lists, so you
won’t encounter the same books over and over again while conducting trope research.

FACEBOOK GROUPS

Depending on which ones you join, Facebook groups can be great places to get book recommendations of all kinds. If you’re looking for books featuring a specific trope, ask away, and usually at least a few people will respond with answers. Be sure to search the group first, however, to check if someone hasn’t asked your question already and/or recently (members and admins tend to get annoyed if you don’t).

Here are my favorite M/M-related Facebook groups for book recommendations. Be sure to check the rules (about section, pinned posts, etc.) before posting.

- **M/M Book Rec** - A great place to asks for recs and share your latest M/M favorites
- **M/M Taboo Book Lovers** - Specifically for readers of dark and/or kinky M/M
- **M/M Romance** - Facebook group for the M/M Romance group on Goodreads
HOW TO USE TROPES
The idea generation process is one of the most mysterious parts of fiction writing. As a result, the question “Where do you get your ideas?” shows up in almost every author interview—to the point where it’s become cliché.

But where do authors get their ideas? Many report that ideas just come to them while they’re focusing on something else. If you’re like me, though, you don’t have time to wait around for inspiration to strike seemingly out of nowhere. And there’s no reason you should.

A more reliable way to generate story ideas is brainstorming. This isn’t a secret; you probably already know what brainstorming is. If not, here’s how I define it: a mental exercise in which you start with one idea and come up with related ideas until you hit on the idea you’re looking for. In this case, we want to brainstorm a story premise, so we will have to come up with several ideas and combine them.

But where do you come up with that initial idea to brainstorm from? One place you can start is with a trope.

In order to use a trope to build a story premise, take the following steps.

**STEP 1: FIND A TROPE YOU LIKE**

This is the easy part. Look through the list of tropes in this book and find one that speaks to you. Maybe you like to read that trope, or maybe the conflict it proposes sounds delicious to you.
A personal favorite of mine is **Enemies to Lovers** because I find the conflict between enmity and sexual/romantic attraction irresistible.

**STEP 2: BRAINSTORM BASED ON THAT TROPE**

Let’s say that like me, you have an affinity for the **Enemies to Lovers** trope, and you decide to try writing a story that uses it. Let’s review the definition of this trope:

The main characters start out hating each other. Usually, this hate will be based on an experience or experiences from the past, but the enmity may also come from being on opposite sides of an external situation (for example, they are the heads of two warring mafia families). The characters may reconcile, become friends, and then become lovers (often called **Enemies to Friends to Lovers**), or they may go straight from being enemies to lovers, the latter often involving hate sex.

So, you know that for this trope to work, you have to have 1) two characters who start out hating each other, 2) a situation which they are on opposite sides of (if it’s an experience from the past, they will still be on opposite sides), and 3) a series of events over which they go from hating each other to being in love with each other.

It would be kind of hard to brainstorm characters without having the situation they are on opposite sides of—a.k.a., the reason they hate each other. So, let’s brainstorm that first.

There are a few different ways to brainstorm. My favorite is listing, which involves starting with a heading and writing ideas underneath it. Items in the list can then help you create headings for additional lists. Another popular technique is mind mapping, and it works in pretty much the same way: You start with a category, circle it, and branch items off of it. Then, those branched items can spawn more items. You can go an unlimited number of levels deep with these techniques.
You could use listing, mind mapping, or another brainstorming technique to come up with the reason behind your characters’ bad blood. Here’s how I would do it with listing:

**Reason for Main Characters to Hate Each Other**

- They work for rival law firms on a contentious case
- They’re in a bidding war for the same precious item
- They dated in the past and had a really bad breakup
- They used to be business partners, and one screwed over the other for money
- They’re members of rival families with a long history of hatred
- They’re members of rival businesses
- They’re natives of two warring countries
- They’re on sports teams with a heated rivalry

…and so on. As you can see, it would be pretty easy to take one of these items and create a new list. For example, “They’re in a bidding war for the same precious item” could spawn a new list with the heading “The precious item they’re fighting over.” Or “They’re members of rival businesses” could become “Business industry they’re involved in.”

Your goal with this exercise is to come up with more and more granular ideas until you have enough information to form a premise.

**STEP 3: CREATE YOUR PREMISE**

Here’s an example of a trope-centered premise using **Enemies to Lovers**:

Character A and Character B are the owners of rival bakeries. Character A used to have the only bakery in the neighborhood, but Character B has recently opened his. In a spotlight feature in the local society pages, Character B makes a negative comment about Character A’s bakery. When Character A confronts Character B about the comment, sparks fly—in more ways than one. It turns out
Character B is breathtakingly attractive—but that doesn’t change how he disrespected Character A. Character A and Character B continue their public rivalry, each trying to one-up the other in business, but whenever they meet in private, an insidious chemistry grows between them.

Let’s break this down into exactly what you need to create a premise:

- **A central conflict and how it starts**: What situation or situations bring these characters together while simultaneously keeping them apart?
- **The characters’ motivations for the initial conflict**: What makes the characters get involved in this conflict?
- **A general idea of how the conflict can continue**: Can this conflict lead to additional conflicts?

Here is the breakdown for our example:

- **A central conflict and how it starts**: Character A and Character B are the owners of rival bakeries. One of them makes a negative comment about the other’s bakery in a local paper, and the other confronts him about it.
- **The characters’ motivations for the initial conflict**: Character B is motivated to make the negative comment because he just opened his bakery and is trying to attract business. Character A is motivated to confront Character B because the comment wounded his pride and he wants to stand up for himself and his business.
- **A general idea of how the conflict can continue**: Character A can unexpectedly find Character B attractive, which is in conflict with his anger. They can both become focused on one-upping the other with their businesses. They can meet privately later on, and these meetings can cause an attraction to develop between them alongside their increasing public rivalry.
At this point, you don’t need to know how the conflict will play out through the whole story. But you do need to know that you have enough material to sustain the size of story that you want to write (short story, novella, novel, etc.). Once you’re confident in that, you can proceed in a variety of ways.

If you are an intuitive writer (known as a “pantser”), this might be the point at which you start writing. Although, you might want to do some character worksheets and such first to get a better handle on your main characters’ histories and other details about them. If you are a writer who prefers to outline (known as a “plotter”), now might be the time to start brainstorming individual scenes.

It depends on your personal preference what comes next, but the premise is a solid foundation on which you can build the rest of your story.
In addition to being a great starting point for a strong story premise, your trope of choice can help you create your main characters. This is because many tropes mandate what types of characters must be involved. For example, **Geek/Jock** requires one character with cerebral interests and one with athletic interests. And **Smartass Twink** requires a pain-in-the-ass bottom character who is boyish in appearance.

These are qualities you can use to brainstorm character details and motivations.

Here is an example of how one might use the **Sex Worker Hero** trope to come up with two main characters.

First, let’s review the trope definition:

**Sex Worker Hero**

At least one of the main characters is a sex worker. Examples include stripper, hooker/escort/rent boy, and porn star. Usually, the sex worker character gives up his profession at the end of the story in order to commit sexually to the central relationship.

As I discussed in the last section, brainstorming is a great, proactive way to come up with ideas. It would be easiest in this case to start your brainstorming session with your sex worker character.

If it were me, I’d first want to figure out the type of sex work my character does. Here is how I would do it using the technique of listing (see
Inspiration):

Type of Sex Work

- Street hooker
- High-end escort
- Porn star
- Cam boy
- Stripper

(I’ll note that if you are looking to write a historical Sex Worker Hero book, many of these may not apply. But for the sake of simplicity, let’s assume we’re writing a contemporary story.)

From here, we can choose one of the types of sex work. Let’s go with porn star.

So, now we have our main character’s occupation. What else do we need to know?

Here are some examples of additional details we can come up with based on the occupation (or any other initial detail we choose based on the trope):

- Name
- Age
- Appearance
- Backstory

How would being a porn star affect these details? For his name, he will probably have two: a porn star name and a real name. For age, he is probably on the younger side—twenties or thirties—at least if he is a big-name porn actor. For appearance, he probably has a well-built body that he works out a lot to maintain. Or he has a different sort of body and does specialty porn (for example, maybe he does a specific type of BDSM porn that puts less emphasis on his appearance and more on a leather costume or role). For backstory, you can think about how and why he became a porn star. Does he thrive on attention? Does he have a high sex drive that makes him a good fit?
Or is it an occupation outside forces pressured him into but he found he was good at? These are personality traits and past experiences you can use to help your character come alive.

Let’s say you’ve decided your character’s name is Lucky Fox (real name: Jeremy Ashby), and he’s a big-name porn star beloved for his bottoming skills. He’s an effeminate twink with a slender but muscled form, auburn hair, and brown eyes. He originally got into porn after dating a guy with a fetish for filming their sex. He found this was also a fetish of his, but he wanted to do it on a more public scale. He started out in smaller films when he was nineteen, but now that he’s twenty-seven, he’s established in the industry and makes a good living.

Now we have one main character. But since this is a romance, we need at least one more.

How to continue? If we were using a trope that mandated two types of characters (like Paranormal/Human), we’d probably start with species, social role, etc. But we’ve done enough already to satisfy our trope of Sex Worker Hero.

A good place to start with the second main character is to brainstorm how our porn star could meet him. What roles could a potential love interest occupy?

Here’s a sample list:

- Fellow porn star
- Fan
- Production crew member
- Boss
- Photographer

Once you choose the role, you can brainstorm additional details about the character as we did with Lucky.

Make sure you also consider what type of conflict your characters will have with each other, as this is what your story will be built upon. Your
characters need reasons to come together romantically, but they also need reasons to stay apart. More on this in the next section.
So far, we’ve explored how tropes can help you come up with your story premise as well as your main characters. But working from a trope can also help you plot your novel. This is because the basis of plot is conflict, and many tropes suggest a multitude of conflicts.

Here are some examples of tropes and what kinds of conflicts they suggest:

- **Paranormal/Human** - the main characters may struggle to reconcile the physical/emotional/lifestyle differences between their species; for example, the paranormal character may be physically stronger than the human one and risk hurting him, the paranormal one might be immortal and the human not, etc.

- **Class Difference** - the main characters may struggle to reconcile their social and economic differences; for example, outside forces may frown on their union, the characters may have opposing political/social views, the character of the lower class may be wary of the one of the higher class due to their differences in privilege, etc.

- **Homophobic Hero (Toxic Masculinity)** - the main characters may struggle to reconcile the homophobia with their gay/queer relationship; for example, the homophobic hero’s partner may not be able to handle his beliefs since they equal a hatred of his identity, the homophobic hero may want to keep the relationship secret while the other character does not, etc.
As you can see, it is easy to brainstorm conflict based on a trope. Almost every trope implies tension of some kind or can be used as a foundation for tension.

How can these potential conflicts help you to plot your novel? Well, you can use them to brainstorm scenes.

If you are an intuitive writer, you may not want to brainstorm any scenes after you have your characters and central conflict (to make characters from a trope, see Character Planning). Maybe you would prefer to start writing. But if you are an outliner or someone between an intuitive writer and outliner, you might like to plan out at least some of your scenes ahead of time.

Each scene in your story must have a conflict. I personally am an intuitive writer, so I don’t like to plan out scenes on a granular level. I plan my characters and follow them while keeping the central conflict and a few key plot points in mind.

Let’s briefly discuss these plot points before exploring how a trope-based conflict can help you plan them.

In a romance, there are a few key moments that you must have (I am calling them moments instead of scenes since they can occur in the same scene). I’ll note that these might vary depending on your story’s length. For instance, a short story might have some of these moments happen off-screen. But in a novel, you will probably have all of them within the meat of the story.

These moments are:

- **Character introduction(s)** - In a single point-of-view story, the POV character is shown by himself before he meets the other main character. In a story with multiple points of view, this happens with each POV character.
- **Meet cute/meet ugly** - The main characters meet or run into each other after time apart.
- **Point of no return** - Something shifts in the main characters’ relationship which causes them to become entangled enough that
neither can leave the relationship without emotional and/or physical consequences.

- **Midpoint** - Something shifts so that the characters must go from passive to active; up until this point, they have been reacting to their circumstances, but now they are emotionally and/or physically invested enough to start making active decisions about the relationship.

- **Darkest moment** - The characters face the highest point of conflict for their relationship.

- **Happily ever after/happy for now** - The characters reconcile and commit to the relationship.

As an example, let’s say you’ve chosen to write a story around the **Paranormal/Human** trope. I’ll brainstorm a quick premise.

Our paranormal character is an immortal vampire who has been alive for hundreds of years. In fact, he’s been hibernating underground for the last century and has recently risen. Maybe he was in his own grave and coffin. We’ll give him supernatural strength so he has the ability to push himself out of his coffin and to the earth’s surface at a preplanned time. After rising, the vampire will be dirty and in need of a shower, so what if he goes to the nearest motel? Our main character could be the night auditor there.

So far, this isn’t a whole premise (see **Inspiration**) because we don’t have a central conflict yet. But our **Paranormal/Human** trope can help with that. Let’s brainstorm a couple of conflicts based around the differences in our characters’ species:

- Our vampire is immortal, and our human isn’t. Once they start thinking about their love in the long term, this could come up as a worry. Our human could insist on being turned, and our vampire could express reservations. Perhaps the reason our vampire hibernated for so long was because immortality had had a
depressive effect on him and he had the desire to “check out” of life for a while. Perhaps he can’t bear to inflict immortality on his human lover.

- Our vampire has supernatural strength, and our human has a fragile, mortal body. Perhaps our human is immediately smitten with the vampire, but the vampire is reluctant to get involved with him because he fears he can never be with a human in any sexual way without hurting him. Perhaps he is a naturally rough lover and accidentally killed a human partner in the past, so he refuses to get physical with this new human.

Let’s use both of these conflicts in our story. If we’re going to be writing a novel, we need lots of reasons for our characters not to commit for several thousand words.

How can we work these conflicts into some scenes? Let’s focus on our key plot points. Here are some examples of how we could integrate these conflicts into our romance’s crucial moments.

- **Character introduction(s)** - Based on our initial premise, the vampire’s introduction is probably going to be when he rises from his grave. To illustrate his dislike of immortality, he could express disappointment that he is waking up. Perhaps right before he decided to go into hibernation was when he killed his human lover. He could remember this. If the human is a central character, we will also have a character introduction for him. We probably want to allude to how he will fall for the vampire because his love and desire for the vampire will be the other side of these conflicts. Perhaps a couple checks into the hotel and are clearly in love as they interact with our human. He feels a pang of jealousy; he wants nothing more than to be in love.

- **Meet cute/meet ugly** - Our characters meet when the vampire goes to the motel to get a room so he can freshen up from his hibernation. As in pretty much all romance stories, you’ll want your characters to feel attracted to each other at this point. Perhaps
the vampire finds the human very cute; what if he looks similar to
the lover he killed? Perhaps the human is immediately attracted to
the vampire’s majestic aura and old-fashioned clothes. The
vampire could be well-spoken and polite, which is probably in
contrast to many of the human’s customers.

- **Point of no return** - This is a plot point I usually don’t come up
with until I’m writing, and it intuitively develops based on the
trajectory of the characters and their relationship. So, if you can’t
see how you could come up with this plot point ahead of time,
don’t panic; you might be an intuitive writer. But usually, it has
something to do with outside forces pushing your characters into
something. Here are some ideas: A robbery occurs at the motel,
and afterward, our human, distressed, asks the vampire to guard
the motel at night. The vampire has a soft spot for the human at
this point, so he agrees. Or the vampire and human engage in their
first sex scene (this will probably be an activity with little to no
physical touch between them given our vampire’s fear), and
afterward, the human becomes even more into the vampire, and
the vampire becomes weaker to his advances.

- **Midpoint** - This is another plot point I never plan in advance, and
it’s okay if you don’t. But at this point, our characters could break
up due to one or both of our conflicts. Maybe they have a more
intense sex scene, and the vampire ends up injuring the human. As
a result, he ends things and leaves. Or perhaps the human declares
his love and asks the vampire to turn him. The vampire, realizing
he’s taken things too far already, breaks up with the human. (This
plot point doesn’t have to involve a breakup, but that is one very
active decision that one or both of the main characters can make.)

- **Darkest moment** - Our vampire and human must face their
conflicts head-on. Perhaps the human becomes gravely injured and
can only be saved by the vampire making him immortal. This
would solve both conflicts, as the human would be stronger
afterward and could withstand our vampire’s supernatural strength
during lovemaking.
- **Happily ever after/happy for now** - The characters have now moved past their conflicts, so we would need to show them in this conflict-free emotional and physical state. If the vampire has now turned the human, we would probably want to show them having a happy conversation about their immortal future together and also making love without the threat of injury obscuring their pleasure.

Can you see our story taking shape? Of course, these key moments cannot make up the entire story. You need additional moments in which your characters reflect on story events and also spend more time together getting closer, pulling apart, and otherwise developing their romance. If you have external plot threads going on, you’ll need scenes to develop these and bring them to a close (unless you’ve got a sequel planned that will do this, but it’s best not to leave any major or even minor plot threads open).

I hope this has given you a way to come up with plot ideas from a clear starting point—your chosen trope. In the next section, we’ll talk about how to use tropes to market your finished product.
Tropes are an invaluable tool when it comes to marketing your book. This is because many readers specifically seek out tropes when they are looking for a book to read.

If you’re an established author, maybe enough readers are already looking for your book that you don’t need to worry about discoverability. But for most authors, this isn’t the case. They’re trying to get readers’ attention, and it’s an uphill battle to do so.

Tropes are one way readers can find your books.

Here are some places you can incorporate tropes into your marketing:

- Title
- Cover
- Description/blurb
- Keywords
- Promotional graphics/advertising copy

Let’s talk about how you can include tropes in these areas.

**TITLE**

If you have written a book based on a trope, it is a good idea to allude to that trope in the title. Some authors do more than allude; they will list the trope right there in the title, usually as a subtitle.
Here are some examples of M/M romance books that I found on Amazon which plainly state their tropes. I’ve also included the trope names in parentheses for extra clarity.

- **Innovative Desires: An Enemies To Lovers Billionaire Romance** *(Billionaire Hero, Enemies to Lovers)*
- **Alpha’s Prize: An Mpreg Romance** *(A/B/O, Mpreg)*
- **Lover on Top: A Firefighter Romance** *(Best Friend’s Sibling, Uniformed Hero)*

You might be able to see how including a trope name in a title can help readers find your book. Amazon especially works like a search engine, so if a reader types in “M/M Mpreg Romance” a book with “Mpreg Romance” in the title might be more likely to show up early in the search results (though of course, search results placement is based on many factors).

At the least, when a reader comes across a book with a trope name in the title, they know to either avoid that book (if they dislike the trope) or pay special attention to it (if they love the trope).

You may be thinking that you would want any reader, even one who dislikes your book’s trope, to pay special attention to your book; however, what actually happens when the wrong reader picks up your book is an unhappy reader. On the other hand, if you write a great book with clear marketing, attracting the right readers leads to repeat fans.

You don’t have to explicitly state your book’s trope in the title, though. You can also allude to it in a subtler fashion like the following books do:

- **Captive Prince** *(Enemies to Lovers, Master/Slave)*
- **Training Season** *(Athlete Hero, Cowboy Hero)*
- **His Client** *(Sex Worker Hero)*
Depicting your trope in your cover is another way to signal to a reader that the book is for them or not. It is easy for covers to get too busy and become illegible at thumbnail size, so if you have multiple tropes in your book, a good rule of thumb is only to emphasize the most important one in your cover. The kinds of tropes which lend themselves to being reflected in cover imagery are:

- Tropes about heroes who have specific physical characteristics or attire (Android Hero, Athlete Hero, Cowboy Hero, etc.)
- Tropes which specify a main character’s species (Paranormal/Human, shifter A/B/O, etc.)
- Tropes which imply a certain object, prop, or other key story element (Mpreg or Secret Baby - baby, Rockstar Hero - instrument)

If your trope doesn’t imply a specific type of image, you can still reflect it in the imagery along with colors and typefaces. A good way to do this is to look at books with your trope which are already selling well and consider creating a cover of a similar style (or telling the designer you hire that you would like a cover that fits in with those).

**DESCRIPTION/BLURB**

Many readers expect to see trope information in your book’s description. Usually, the story situation described in the blurb will convey the trope, but the sales copy at the end of a blurb can specifically name the trope for added clarity.

Here’s an example of one of my own book descriptions which conveys its book’s trope in the story situation. The trope is **Out For You**. I’ve added italics to emphasize the part of the description which pertains to that trope.

Eden is a high-end escort who never has sex off the job. But that changes when he meets Greer, his scrappy, tatted-up new driver whose harsh exterior hides a tender heart. Greer’s naked honesty and instant,
obvious crush on Eden spur Eden to have a little fun playing with him, but quicker than either of them expected, that play turns into something real.

One-sided sexual encounters are no big deal to Eden. But Greer demands more: he wants to bring Eden true pleasure. For Eden, who has only been attracted to one man he never got to touch, this feels impossible. He’s trained himself to get hard during appointments, but what if he can’t with Greer?

Greer, who isn’t out as bisexual to his friends, is used to one-night stands via hookup apps. But Eden is something special. Greer is willing to do whatever it takes for the chance to get Eden off—and make him happy.

Successfully conveying a trope in your book description can take practice. One way to check if you have succeeded is to ask someone who hasn’t read your book to read your book description. Can they tell which trope(s) your book has just by reading the blurb?

Another method for highlighting a trope in a book description is to plainly state the trope name somewhere above or below the “meat” of the description. For example, you could name the trope in the first line of the description: “In this sexy enemies-to-lovers romance, two men can’t fight the chemistry between them.” Or you could name it at the end like I did with my book fangjunkie27: “fangjunkie27 is an erotic M/M novella with lots of angst, a bit of dubcon, and an HFN ending” (trope: Dubious Consent).

No one knows for sure if using trope names and other keywords in your book description will put your book higher in store search results. Nevertheless, alluding to the trope and/or mentioning it explicitly in your description will help sell your book to the right readers—the ones who love your book’s trope(s).

For some readers, this is the only thing they need to know about your book before buying it. They will scan through descriptions, and if they spot
their favorite trope, they will download or buy your book. Including your book’s trope in your description will help you catch these readers.

**KEYWORDS**

For every store where you decide to put up your book for sale, you have the option of including keywords to help readers search for your book. This is especially important on Amazon, which functions more like a search engine than any other bookstore. You can add up to seven keywords there of up to fifty characters in length, and this is a great place to include trope names.

Amazon is secretive about how their algorithm actually works, but the way I build keywords is to include as many characters as possible so that readers can find me with as many search terms as possible. An example of a keyword like this featuring the **Enemies to Lovers** trope would be: *gay enemies to lovers hate to love romance*.

I’ll confess that I don’t know if longer keywords like this are helpful in other stores such as Kobo, iBooks, and Barnes & Noble, and I am always experimenting with keywords to get them right. Regardless, you should still include your trope names. A shorter keyword using **Enemies to Lovers** would be *gay enemies to lovers romance*.

**PROMOTIONAL GRAPHICS/ADVERTISING COPY**

In order to sell your book, you’ll have to promote it. One common way of doing this is on social media. Users on social media are not necessarily in the buying mindset, and you’re competing with a ton of other posts whenever you share something about your book. So, you’ll want to make sure that you stand out and catch their attention.

You can do this with images, videos, and the text in the post itself. These three places are perfect for including information about your book’s trope.

Imagine that you are scrolling through your Facebook feed (or Instagram
feed, Twitter timeline, etc.), and a picture with your favorite trope name comes up. You’re probably going to stop and take a look. Facebook frowns on text-heavy images when it comes to Facebook Ads, but that’s all I’ll say about advertising since I am always rejected due to my books having erotic content. But when it comes to posts on your profile, on your page, and in groups, you can include text in your promo images. If you’re tech-savvy enough (or you use a program like Lumen5), you might have a book trailer with text. On one of your frames, you might want to include text that mentions your trope by name or alludes to it.

If you’re having trouble picturing how to mention your trope name in promotional copy, here are some generic examples along with their related trope(s) in parentheses. This type of language can be used in your post’s body or your image or video.

- In this steamy friends-to-lovers romance, a cute nerdy guy falls for his football player roommate. *(Friends to Lovers, Geek/Jock)*
- This rent boy can’t afford to open his heart to anyone, but a new client demands much more than his body… *(Sex Worker Hero)*
- In this hot Mpreg romance, a one-night stand becomes more… *(Mpreg, One-Night Stand Becomes More)*

Another way to include your trope in your promotional posts is to use tropey language from your book’s description. You don’t have to write entirely new copy every time you want to advertise your book. Instead, you can take the most alluring parts of your blurb and include them in your posts and graphics. You can even include your whole blurb if the social media platform allows the word count. Just remember that less is more when it comes to text in photos and videos. You need to catch a reader’s attention with something short and obvious before you have any hope of them reading (or more likely, scanning) the body of your post.

You should now have some concrete, actionable methods for using your
book’s trope in marketing and promotion. If you’re ever at a loss for how to move forward, look at books that are selling well in your genre. Examine their titles, covers, descriptions, and promotional graphics and study their methods. Don’t copy anything word-for-word or whole-cloth, but do see how you can apply the same techniques to achieve similar results.
I hope this book has helped you to better understand tropes and how to fit them into your writing and publishing process. If you’re just starting out as an M/M romance author, I hope that what I’ve shared has helped you to gain clarity within the mass of writing and publishing information available today.

If you’re interested in reading more from me about romance writing craft, please take a moment to join my writer group at subscribepage.com/mmworkbook. That way, you’ll never miss anything.

Also, please share a review of this book. When a book has more reviews, it is able to reach more readers, which is all any writer is trying to do.

Thank you for reading.
I’ve created the FREE printable M/M Romance Tropes Story Planner Workbook, which you can use alongside this book to plan your next tropey masterpiece.

GET YOUR WORKBOOK
M/M ROMANCE BY LYSS EM

Escorting the Escort
Making It Better
Lyss Em has been writing and publishing M/M romances since 2015 and learning along the way. With her nonfiction, she seeks to make accessible the information she wishes she’d had when first starting out in indie publishing.

In her free time, Lyss devours M/M romance books, her favorite trope being enemies to lovers. When not reading or writing, she works as a freelance editor for romance and erotica authors. Lyss is nonbinary and has no preferred pronouns—any are fine.

You can find Lyss primarily on Twitter.

Connect with Lyss:
Website: www.lyss.press
Email: author@lyss.press