

2016 August When Words Collide
Trilogy, Series, or Serial?

Are We Writing a Trilogy, Series, or Serial?

What are we writing?		
Trilogy	Series	Serial
Three stories that contain a unity of one or more: characters, theme, sequence, location	A sequence of stories having certain characteristics in common that are formally identified together as a group.	Episodic stories, which may or may not be complete in themselves, made available in sequential instalments, and often end with a cliff hanger.
Two strong changes plus a resolution Personal opinion: don't hedge our bets with a weak third story ending because we just might want to write more stories in the same universe. If that's the case, consider the <i>Star Wars</i> option, multiple sets of three linked stories.	Types of series characters 1. Characters grow in each story. 2. Characters remain static, but situations change around them. 3. Different characters in each story, but something else (theme, location, etc.) remains the same. Think Debra Dixon's Mossy Creek series.	Same three possibilities as for series. The difference between a series and a serial is that traditionally, series linked stories; serials assumed the reader/listener wants to focus on this story and doesn't need connecting links. The Lone Ranger arrives in town. We have no idea where he's been or what he's been doing since the last time we tuned in.
Most often feature the same characters, though theme (peace, order, good government); location (the same house, three different decades, three different families); or genealogy (same family, three generations) trilogies are possible.	A series' strong point is reader/listener/viewer identification with the characters. It's hard to sustain a long story arc if the main characters change from story to story.	Especially today, readers/listeners/viewers are more tolerant of different characters emerging throughout the serial. Think of how many comic super heroes have come and gone over the decades.
Length of each story is about the same, though the third book may be slightly longer. Frequently released at twelve to eighteen month intervals.	Length of each story is about the same. Collectors particularly like a unity of look so the entire series, on a bookshelf, makes a pleasing visual image. Regular new releases.	Any length, not necessarily released on a regular schedule, though there may be some givens, such as <i>Dr. Who</i> always having a Christmas special.

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<p>Trilogies that do the three story thing well</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deanna Rayborne: <i>Lady Julia Grey/Nichols Brisbane</i> trilogy, mystery/romance set in Victorian England • Kim Stanley Robinson: Mars trilogy, colonization of Mars • Libba Bray: <i>Gemma Doyle</i> trilogy, Gothic mystery/horror, young woman at a Victorian boarding school • Maureen Jennings, Tom Tyler trilogy, women in World War II series • Paul Auster: New York trilogy, dark psychological/private eye, set in New York City • Paul Pilkington: <i>Emma Holden</i> trilogy, woman in jeopardy, set in modern England • Philip Kerr: <i>Berlin Noir</i> trilogy, set in Germany in the 1930s and 1940s • Philip Pullman: <i>Dark Materials</i> trilogy, parallel universes with young adult protagonists • Tanya Huff: <i>the Enchanted Emporium</i> trilogy, matriarchal magic-using family, series set mostly in Calgary • Theresa Meyers: <i>Jackson Brothers</i> trilogy, set in an alternate Seampunk old west • Series set in Calgary - sent e-mail to Lorna 	<p>Series that sustain multiple story lines, through which the characters lives changes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dana Gabrion, <i>Outlander</i> • Dana Stabenow, <i>Kate Shugak</i> or <i>Liam Campbell</i> series • Lois McMaster Bujold, <i>Vorkorsegan</i> family saga <p>Series that sustain multiple story lines, but the characters essentially remain the same</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Any TV sit-com you care to name • Ian Fleming, <i>James Bond</i> series • Jillian Stone, <i>Phaeton Black</i>, <i>America Jones</i> erotic Steampunk series (three books so far, so this may be a trilogy, but I'm hoping for more) • Nancy Atherton, <i>Aunt Dimity</i> series 	<p>Serials</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Classic serialized authors of the 1800s: Charles Dickens, Wilkie Collins, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, Alexandre Dumas, Gustave Flaubert, Eugène Sue, Henry James, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Herman Melville, Leo Tolstoy • Any radio serial you care to name • Any super hero comic book you care to name • Mobile based communities such as the JukePop Serials in both iOS and Android apps • <i>Serial</i> (2014-2016), podcast, hosted by Sarah Koenig • Web-based communities such as Livejournal, Fictionpress.com, fictionhub, and Wattpad.
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Got questions? Want to discuss some of this? I'd love to hear from you.

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