

## Sample Interview Questions

**Your stories often involve addressing social issues like domestic abuse, refugees and discrimination. What draws you to these topics?**

To be honest, it's the story and characters that dictate what happens. I never consciously sit down and think, I'm going to write about X topic. Instead, the characters choose what I write about, which sounds odd I know. Part of it comes from writing more diverse characters and then exploring the culture and what would affect the characters and their personalities. For example, for the Flanagan Sisters I wanted to set the series in Houston again and so I searched for the common ethnicities in the area and discovered the Hispanic community made up a large part of the population. A further search introduced me to the fact that many of the refugees were unaccompanied child migrants and the stories built from there.

**What challenges do you face when researching a novel?**

It can be difficult to find people to talk to, particularly when I was writing novels set in the United States. Emails can often go unanswered and phone calls can get expensive. I much prefer talking to people who have experienced what my characters have experienced, so talking to people who have operated homes for refugees and speaking to people from different cultures is always helpful. It's one of the reasons why my new series are set in Western Australia, only a few hours drive from where I live. I can visit people and talk to them, and have been fortunate that people are happy to help.

**Why do you write romance?**

I love the happily-ever-after. There is something extremely satisfying about having two people fall in love and working through their issues.

**What do you say to critics who say romance is disempowering to women, or just formulaic?**

I say they probably haven't read a romance recently! Romance is a billion-dollar industry employing women and being read by women. The stories range through all genres – thriller, suspense, historical, paranormal, fantasy etc – and the women more often than not are strong, confident women who get what they want. They show women they can do anything and they don't need a man to do it.

In regards to romance being formulaic, it's only formulaic in the way that all genres are formulaic. Two (or more) people meet, fall in love and live happily ever after. In between those points, anything can and does happen. You could easily argue that crime novels are formulaic because a crime is committed and then solved by the end of the story.

**Your Flanagan Sisters series revolves around a family from El Salvador. What made you choose that country?**

When I decided I wanted to have a Hispanic family as the heroines of my series, I chose El Salvador because I have a friend from there, and I was able to ask her questions about the culture.

**Your first two series were set in Texas, and yet you are from Australia. Have you spent much time in the US?**

Not at all! I spent a day in Miami on my way to Ecuador a couple of years back, but that is it. I set my stories in Texas because my publisher asked me to. My first book, What Goes on Tour, featured a rock star who was from Houston, and so it made sense to have the whole series set there. Then when it came time to write the second series, I'd researched enough about Houston to be comfortable with the location. It enabled me to have a few cross-over characters between the series as well which was fun.

**What inspires you to write?**

All the stories in my head. I get my ideas from so many different areas: songs, documentaries, comments from friends, podcasts etc, and I need to write them down so I can get them out of my head. I also love following a story and discovering where it leads me – often it's a surprise.

Being a writer is a fantastic job – I can work at home in Ugg boots and tracksuit pants, I can choose my own hours and I can be flexible. It's wonderful.

**What was your biggest challenge to becoming published?**

Finding a publisher who wanted my work. Before I wrote What Goes on Tour, I'd written four fantasy novels and they attracted a little bit of attention from publishers and agents, but I didn't quite get to the contract stage. I pitched at conferences and entered competitions where the final judge was an editor or agent and so I got in front of a lot of people, but it wasn't until the first three pages of What Goes on Tour was read out to a panel of agents and editors that I was picked up to be published. When that publisher scaled back its operations, I chose to independently publish my novels and it's been a rewarding challenge.

**What advice would you give aspiring novelists?**

Don't give up. It can be difficult to be picked up by a publisher, if that's what you want, but you need to keep writing and keep submitting. If you want to independently publish, don't rush out and publish your first novel straight away. Trust me, it's probably not as good as you think it is! (I know my first few weren't!) Set it aside, work on the next novel and when you've finished that, come back and edit the first. You will have learnt a lot and be able to pick up new ways to improve it.

I also found that having a routine really worked for me. I gave myself dedicated writing time to focus on the story. Also, give yourself permission to write rubbish. Your novel does

not need to be perfect in the first draft – that’s what editing is for. So don’t let yourself get stuck, because you don’t like what you’re writing, just write it and go back and fix it later.

**What qualities do you feel a writer needs to succeed in today’s highly competitive marketplace?**

Persistence, dedication and a willingness to learn. The days are gone when you can just write a book and let it go out in the world without any support. Authors are business people as well as creators, and so they need to have some understanding about marketing, networking and building their revenue streams – or to be able to hire people to do it for them.

They also need to not let all the business overwhelm them so they stop writing. Writing should always be the priority.

**Do you think the paper book is a dying format?**

No. I think there will always be people who prefer reading paper books and there are definitely instances when paper books are preferable. I often buy non-fiction books in paper format, because I like the ability to tag pages and flick back and forth between chapters when I am researching a particular section.

**How important is it to represent diversity in fiction?**

I think everyone should be able to pick up a book and find a character they can relate to. The awareness that this is lacking is beginning to build and I think it’s the responsibility of all authors to add diversity to their novels. There can be a risk of cultural misappropriation, but as long as the author does their research and is sensitive to the people they are representing, diversity can only be a good thing.