

Keeping It Real: How Much Fiction Belongs in Historical Fiction?

If your details are inaccurate, it will affect the reading experience for certain readers. But can't some details be invented? How do you determine whether to fictionalize or be factual? Writers of historical fiction, mystery/thriller/suspense, or romance set in earlier times, let's talk about it!

Keeping It Real

- Be as accurate as possible, but fictionalize when necessary
- Generally, readers are willing to go along for the ride, as long as the story satisfies

Poetic License

- **poetic license:**
license or liberty taken by a poet, prose writer, or other artist in deviating from rule, conventional form, logic, or fact, in order to produce a desired effect.
[<https://www.dictionary.com/browse/poetic-license>]
- Historical fiction is *fiction*—therefore, some elements can be made up
- Historical fiction is *historical*—therefore, elements should stick as close as possible to accurate history

Novels That Use Poetic License

- *The Book of Longings* by Sue Monk Kidd
- *Margot* by Jillian Cantor
- *Jack 1939* by Francine Mathews
- *Leonora in the Morning Light* by Michaela Carter
- *The Scribe of Sienna* by Melodie Winawer
- Additional resource: <https://www.bookbub.com/blog/the-best-historical-fiction-of-fall-2024>
Note: I have not read any of these yet—they are all new books in fall 2024, but they could be useful for inspiration.

The Power of Story: Why It's Important to Get it Right (When You Can)

- Your “it isn't a big deal if I change this” might be a big deal to someone who experienced it (or knows someone who did)
- Make sure you have a thorough understand of the “why” of your intentional inaccuracies

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Research: Getting the Details Right

- If you're going to be inaccurate, understand first what *is* accurate
- Primary sources:
 - Interviews
 - On-location research
- Secondary sources:
 - Books, newspapers, maps, photographs
 - Online research
- Own and cite your intentional inaccuracies