

The Name Game

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Choosing the right name for your characters can be as difficult as choosing your child's name. Perhaps more difficult, because your child's surname is either your's or your mate's.

SO WHERE DO YOU BEGIN? If I can't decide on a first name, I use the tried and true method of consulting baby books. Also, some dictionaries have a section called, "Pronouncing Vocabulary of Common English Given Names."

Be sure to give your characters' names their due. The name's meaning can be important to the story. In one novel, I wanted a name that denoted someone regal and kingly, but I didn't want to use "Rex." After looking up a few names, "Basil" nicely fit the bill.

For surnames, the telephone book is a popular source of inspiration. Language books can help with ethnic names. Sometimes the authors' names on my research books come in handy. Can't you just picture what Russell Chamberlain, author of *Great English Houses*, looks like?

When I write Regencies, my characters usually need Anglo-Saxon names. A two-page genealogical advertisement for English/American family names has really helped out. Another way I get authentic names is to look through my well-worn copy of the *London Times*. Where else could you

find marvelous names like Boothroyd, Weatherill, and Hailsham?

HOW DO YOU KEEP TRACK? If you've a few completed books under your belt, you'll want to keep track of your characters' names so you don't repeat them. I use Microsoft Access to sort my characters by first name, last name, and book. I also record the titles of the nobility. Another field lists a brief description of the character, for example: innkeeper's daughter, or British spy. And I input a special code for "real" people¾just to see how many times I use a particular historical figure. As you can imagine, George IV (Prinny, the Prince Regent) pops up in many of my books! In recording the fourth Duke of Richmond in my last Regency novel, I was surprised to see that I'd mentioned him in a previous book¾set during the American Revolution. Not the same man¾but his predecessor!

When choosing a name, I flip through the database to make sure I don't pick a similar one. That's how Roger Farnsworth became Roger Farnsley after I spotted my creation named Cransworth.

Here's the hardest part. You've selected your names, now you have to create characters worthy of them. That's not as easy as it sounds. So take a deep breath and go for it!