



MINK

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writers of popular fiction.

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President's Voice

By Diana Peterfreund



The other day, my daughter declared that Valentine's Day was her favorite holiday, which came as a surprise to me, after her sustained, months-long Christmas excitement, and the fact that she planned her Halloween costume the April before.

Skeptical, I asked her why, and she said it was because the holiday is about love.

Years of it's-a-conspiracy-of-florists-and-Hallmark and it-exists-to-make-single-people-feel-bad judgments fell away, and I saw it through the eyes of a five-year-old child who doesn't understand romance or expectations, just friendship and family.

It's about love.

Celebrating the existence of love and the people you love.

From now on, I want to celebrate Valentine's Day the way she does, and make it an acknowledgment of the people in my life that I love, for all definitions of the word.

I've recently read articles about the rising trend of celebrity "squads", which detractors say are the new "cool cliques," but I believe are no different than other, long-accepted groups of artist friends.

Is Taylor Swift's much-derided girl squad of young artists and singers any different than the Rat Pack? And aren't these groups of close celebrity friends following the same ideals of mutual support and admiration as famous artist circles like the Inklings or all those Lost Generation bohemians swanning around Paris in the Jazz Age?

I know I've benefited greatly from my friendships with my colleagues and associates in the writing world. Conversations with my friends have turned into anthology projects such as *Zombies vs. Unicorns* and *Skip to the Good Part*.

Together, my writer friends and I have rented booths to sell our work at cons, organized book festivals and school visits, served on panels at conventions, and other activities. We've rented castles in Ireland for writing retreats, and sent crateloads of books to disadvantaged libraries or teenagers in combat.

Other "squads" of like-minded writers have formed business associations like Book View Café and The Indie Voice. Indie writers have banded together to produce multi-book bundles that have catapulted their names to the top of the bestseller lists. Groups such as NINC form for mutually beneficial advancement and exchange of ideas. Even the less-organized critiquing

relationships, email-loop discussions, and writer's coffee klatsches can be precious to a writer looking to connect.

So, in the spirit of a Valentine's Day focused on all kinds of love, take a moment to think about the people on your squad. The mentor who helped you navigate the choppy waters of publishing. The critique partner who stood by you through good drafts and bad. The Facebook friend who introduced you to a valuable research contact, and the co-writer who first suggested you do something together.

And keep in mind that the value of the squad isn't merely in the results; it's in the mentality: the idea that we aren't competing against each other, that a rising tide lifts all boats, and that we can band together to be stronger together than we are apart.

In a society that is fond of provoking and popularizing "feuds" between artists, squads prove that the opposite is true—that love, admiration, and support are what fosters creativity, innovation, and success.

Go out and spread a little love.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Diana". The letter "D" is large and circular, with the rest of the name written in a cursive, flowing script.

Diana Peterfreund is NINC's 2016 president. She writes YA and middle-grade novels as Diana and new adult romance as Viv Daniels.

Novelists, Inc.

Founded in 1989

NINC Statement of Principle

Novelists, Inc., in acknowledgment of the crucial creative contributions novelists make to society, asserts the right of novelists to be treated with dignity and in good faith; to be recognized as the sole owners of their literary creations; to be fairly compensated for their creations when other entities are profiting from those creations; and to be accorded the respect and support of the society they serve.

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NINC Member Notes

Conference

NINC 2016: Master Class—from business to craft to creativity to marketing and sales, we will present speakers to guide us to a higher level of knowledge and achievement.

DATE: September 21-25, 2016

PLACE: Tradewinds, St. Pete Beach, Florida

Registration is open and filling up fast! If you're interested in attending, sign up now to secure your spot and your room at our amazing destination resort hotel. Member and assistant registrations are both open, with multiple ways to pay, including our three-part EZ pay.

Sign up now at ninc.com, and while you're there, renew your membership. The conference is just one of the benefits you won't want to miss in 2016.

Hot Sheet discount

NINC members can use the discount code NINC20 on [The Hot Sheet](#) at checkout for 20% off the annual subscription fee, for as long as their subscription remains active. Please don't share this code with anyone.

That brings the price down to \$47.20, or \$3.93 per month. The Hot Sheet isn't about "new and breaking" publishing news ... it's about analysis of that news by industry professionals. The NINC website also has a section for NINC discounts.

We want you on the roundtable

Be a part of Nink's roundtable interviews. You'll receive three to four short interview questions by email, and then Nink will present your perspective along with other members' thoughts on that topic. Current roundtables forming:

Business roundtable: Advertising—Which advertising channels are producing the greatest return on investment for you right now? What are you doing in advertising, and what's working best?

Genre roundtable: Contemporary romance—What's the next big thing—a breakout category or subgenre—in contemporary romance? How are readers' tastes changing? What feedback do you get from readers on this?

Promotions roundtable: Author newsletter content—What content do you send in your newsletter? What gets the most clicks and interest? How often do you communicate with subscribers, and what freebies do you offer? How do you leverage programs such as Instafreebie and Amazon Affiliates for your audience?

Email ninkeditor@gmail.com by Feb. 11 to join our roundtables. Your answers will be published in a future edition of Nink.

The Art of Bookselling at Events and Cons

By Mari Mancusi



Around six years ago, my friend and fellow NINC author Diana Peterfreund told me a fantastic story about participating in a joint author booth at DragonCon, a fantasy convention we were attending. She said she sold boxes and boxes of books until she had just one book left, which she handed to Felicia Day.

I so wanted to hand a book to Felicia Day. And, of course, sell boxes and boxes of books.

I have since done one of those things.

With bookstores closing and shelf space shrinking, it becomes more and more important for authors to find alternative ways to get our books in front of readers. Especially indie authors, who might not have the distribution. (Though let's be honest—these days, distribution is a big problem for traditionally published authors as well.)

While online venues are still probably the number one bang for your buck, since you can be all over the world at one time versus shelved in a physical space, I have found a lot of value in putting my books and myself out there in real life as well.

Where to sell

The sky is the limit—from large fantasy conventions such as DragonCon, where attendance tops 70,000, to a Christmas bazaar in your hometown with local businesses and crafters. There are indie author events around the country, many of which are heavily attended by readers.

And there are librarian conferences that are well worth attending if you're doing children's or teen literature. (In addition to selling books, these are great for making connections to do paid school visits.)

I've primarily sold books at sci-fi fantasy conventions, so I'm going to focus on those, but most of the information can be applied to any event you choose.



Choosing a booth

This is probably going to be your No.1 investment/expense, so weigh your options carefully. In smaller author- or librarian-focused events, you might purchase a table or share a half-table. In larger fantasy conventions, such as at one of the many Wizard World Comic Cons, you'll need to make a choice between a group author booth in the main convention hall or a smaller table in Artist's Alley.

Group booths and tables are great if you have writer friends you love hanging out with. These are the kinds of friends that you might go with to Comic Con for fun with in the first place. My friends and I have spent many happy hours hanging in our booth, drinking wine and taking turns pimping each other's books. And you won't miss a book sale if you have to run to the bathroom or take a lunch break.

But large group booths can be pricey and you do have more competition for book sales. It's also sometimes hard to get people to realize you're the actual authors, not just friends running a bookstore. We have tried everything to combat this, such as major signage, but still people sometimes just *don't* get it.

Artists' Alley is generally cheaper. You'll be the only one at your table selling books, and people will definitely understand that you are the author. People really like buying stuff from local artists—it makes them feel good after all the Made in China plastic they just bought in the vendor's room for their whiny 10-year-old.

That said, Artists' Alley can be less fun as you won't have a group to play off of, and you'll likely spend most of the convention just sitting by yourself.

Setting up shop

You have a couple of options when it comes to selling books at events. For larger group booths, we often team up with a local bookseller who will give us the books on consignment and a tablet with a storefront to ring them up.

If you prefer to not handle money at all, you could ask the bookseller if they would be willing to set up shop at your booth and sell the books while you handle the signings. This works best if you're in a group booth to give the bookseller the best return on investment.

If you don't have a bookstore to work with, you can sell your own books. At a group booth, you can set up a single cash register to handle all the transactions and then pay out everyone at the end. The advantage of this is that people can buy from different authors and pay one time. Also, you won't have to juggle the sale and the signing parts, but it can be a pain to figure out how much each author is owed.

You can also have each author sell his or her own books. With Square or the PayPal reader it's easy to have a cash register right on your phone or tablet and accept credit cards yourself.

It's important to note that if you're not selling through a bookstore, you are responsible for collecting sales tax for each book sale. Some states offer temporary tax IDs if you're not registered to do business in that state.



Speaking up

Once you pick an event, find out if they are looking for speakers. If they are, definitely pitch a panel or volunteer to serve on an existing panel. This gives you a two-for-one marketing punch. I've had a great ROI from audience members coming down to my booth after my panel to purchase my books—now that they feel like they know me.

For a fantasy convention I might pitch a "Publishing 101" panel. Or, if they don't have a writer's track, I would look for an appropriate genre panel. For example, if you write books with zombies in them, get thee to a zombie fan panel. If it's a librarians' convention, you could talk about the benefits of school visits, applying fiction to required curriculum, etc.

Attracting customers

Some writers are natural salespeople. They can talk to a brick wall and sell it their entire series in hardcover.

I am not that person.

I am kind of shy and I hate the rejection I get when I explain the plot of my book and receive nothing but a blank stare in return. But I've learned that for every five blank stares, I get one excited face. And—trust me—that one, “This sounds *awesome!*” is worth every rejection.

In fact, that's one of the reasons I enjoy selling books at events. That thrill of matching a book of mine to a new reader who hasn't heard of it before. I have gained lifelong fans from selling books at conventions—people who would have never seen my book otherwise and yet now come back every year to get the new one.

One of the great things about fantasy conventions is you're putting yourself in front of people who don't necessarily define themselves as “readers.” They might never go into a bookstore, or if they do, they just grab a bestseller off the front table. Here, you're able to hit them in an entirely different setting and intrigue them so they make a purchase they never would have made otherwise.

That said, there's a lot of competition for event dollars—you won't be the only one trying to make a sale. Consider offering a few incentives to stand out from the crowd, such as offering a discount if they buy all three books in your trilogy. A free gift with purchase also works well.

I bought some dragon ear cuffs off eBay in bulk, for example. They were very inexpensive and I was able to offer one free if the person bought all three of my *Scorched* series in hardcover. I sold a lot of trilogies with those ear cuffs.

Exclusives are also a big draw—my friend PJ Hoover offers customized artwork, free with purchase, that's only available at the show. It's a great incentive for people to buy now.

First day discouragement

For multiple-day events, there is “First Day Syndrome,” which can be very discouraging to new vendors. The first day of the show, everyone just kind of walks around, looking at everything that's available without buying a thing. You're just standing there, not making any money, and freaking out thinking this was a big mistake.

Trust me—they will be back. They will buy.

At DragonCon, we are at the booth from Friday through Monday. I usually sell more on Mondays than I do the entire rest of the weekend. It's still important to be there for the whole show, however. People need to walk by your book a few times before they stop to buy.

After the convention

Let's face it. Not everyone is going to want to buy a book at an event. They're heavy to lug around. People figure they can buy the book later at a bookstore, unlike that vintage 1980s Millennium Falcon toy they're eyeing. So it's important to create a way to follow up with potential readers after the event, to ensure they don't forget you.

One way to encourage after-show interaction is to offer a drawing for a prize to all those who sign up for your newsletter. Then, after the show, you can send a follow up email announcing the winner and pointing people to where they can buy your books.

Secondly, the authors in my booth created a group website and handed out postcards with the address on it. On the website are buy links for all of our books. This way, if the person wants an e-book or just wants to check you out later, you have something to give them.

To wrap up

Events are *not* for everyone. They might be the seventh circle of hell for an introvert who hates crowds. But if you're outgoing, motivated, and looking to have fun while making money and getting your books in front of a largely untapped market of potential readers, it's a worthwhile outlet.

Oh, and if you see Felicia Day, tell her I have a book for her.

Mari Mancusi always wanted a dragon as a pet. Unfortunately, the fire insurance premiums proved a bit too large and her house a bit too small—so she chose to write about them instead. Today she works as an award-winning young adult author and freelance television producer, for which she has won two Emmys. When not writing about fanciful creatures of myth and legend, Mari enjoys traveling, cosplay, snowboarding, watching cheesy (and scary) horror movies, and her favorite guilty pleasure—playing video games. A graduate of Boston University, she lives in Austin, Texas, with her husband Jacob, daughter Avalon, and their two dogs.

The Science of Fiction

How intense moments in your plot affect reader satisfaction

By Jennifer Lynn Barnes



One of the questions I get a lot as a writer who has a double life as a psychology professor studying the science of books, movies, and television shows is whether my work looking at the psychology of stories affects the way I write them.

And the answer is that everything I learn about the power of stories from a scientific standpoint changes the way I write. So I thought I'd take *The Fixer* as an opportunity to give readers a look into the way my scientist and writer selves work together when I sit down to write a new book.

There's a famous experiment that looks at people's perceptions of pain. The gist of the experiment goes something like this: In one condition, people are asked to put their hands in painfully cold water for sixty seconds. In the other condition, they're asked to put their hands in painfully cold water for sixty seconds and then to put their hands in slightly less cold, but still painful water for another thirty seconds.

Afterward, they're asked which of the two experiences they would rather repeat. Logically, the answer should be the first one—it's identical to the second, except that it has thirty second less pain at the end.

But that's not what people choose.

People prefer the second option. The one with more pain.

Why? Because it ends on a better note. You get similar results with positive experiences: everything else being equal, people prefer the thing that ended on a higher note. In fact, there's reason to believe that when we evaluate experiences, we're really only evaluating two things: the most intense moment and the last moment. This is called the Peak-End effect.

What does that mean for writers and readers? Well, one thing that it suggests—to me—is that if you're writing comedy, it's more important to have one super hilarious laugh-until-you-cry moment than it is have to have a ton of different moments that make people chuckle. If you're writing tragedy, making someone sob hard once is going to leave more of an impression than making them tear up a dozen different times.

If you're going for plot twists, one *huge* surprise will have more of an impact than a dozen tiny ones. And if you can stack two *huge* surprises close enough together that they encode as a

single moment, all the better.

When readers look back on the reading experience, by and large, they're going to evaluate that experience based on the most intense moment and the last moment.

Knowing this, I spend a lot of time as a writer asking myself, "What are the most intense moments in this book?" and "How should this book end?"

When I sat down to write *The Fixer*, there was one moment that stuck out in my head, one that I knew from the very beginning would be one of the most emotionally intense scenes in the entire book. That was the moment that made me want to write the book. That was the moment that made me want to understand these characters.

Ultimately, even though each reader is going to evaluate the book largely based on the most intense point and the last point, as a writer, I also know that one big moment and a good ending isn't enough. Different readers can and do have different reactions to the same scenes, so that intense, defining moment may well be different for each person, and part of creating an intense reading experience is the way that intense moments build on each other.

So the challenge, as I sat down to write *The Fixer*, knowing that I was building to a very specific scene, was to figure out what my other big moments were. They had to be surprising. They had to pack an emotional punch. They had to involve characters we cared about. And they all had to build to an ending that did everything I wanted that ending to do—including setting the stage for book two.

For me, a lot of this happens in revision. Three or four of the biggest, most intense moments in *The Fixer* weren't there in the first draft. In fact, other than The Moment That I Always Knew I Was Going To Write, I'm not sure any of the biggest emotional, plot twisty moments were in my first draft.

For me, the purpose of revision is to make sure that every scene is doing multiple things, that instead of having surprising moments and emotional moments, my big plot twist moments are my big emotional moments.

And those moments are brought to you by the Peak-End effect.

Jennifer Lynn Barnes (who mostly goes by Jen) is the author of more than a dozen novels for young adults, including The Fixer, the Raised By Wolves series and the Naturals series. She has a Ph.D. in psychology and currently works as an assistant professor at the University of Oklahoma, where she studies the cognitive science of fiction, the psychology of fandom, and related topics. You can find her on twitter at [jenlynnbarnes.com](https://twitter.com/jenlynnbarnes) or visit her website at www.jenniferlynnbarnes.com.

Optimizing Newsletter Sign-Ups On Your Website With SumoMe And Google Analytics

Go beyond the basics to increase newsletter signups and gain more readers

By S.J. Pajonas



Everyone can agree that reaching your audience as an author is both critical and difficult.

When you start your career as an author, you're bound to ask, "Who are my readers?"

Sometimes you know right off the bat who your audience is, maybe because you write in a clear genre or your books are very similar to another author's, but you might struggle with this question later if you genre-hop or genre-blend.

Either way, every author starts his or her journey at zero.

One of the most effective ways to reach your audience is through a newsletter that you build and own. If you glance at even one publishing help book, news article, or blog post, one of the top tips is to start a newsletter, and there's a very good reason why.

The main objective for effective marketing, whether you're selling widgets online, classes, or retail goods such as books, is to obtain the email addresses of people interested in your product so that you can directly address them and keep your product top-of-mind.

Some authors may feel that being active on social media is enough, whether it's on Twitter, Facebook, etc. But what happens if Twitter starts charging for access tomorrow? Or you lose access to your Facebook account? How will you reach readers? You'll email them via your newsletter.

In this article, I'll assume you already have a newsletter established, and you're looking to increase signups. You have the basics, such as a form on your website and links to your newsletter on all social media platforms, but you're not sure you are doing enough to capture readers while they are on your website.

There are a few things you can do to optimize signups to your newsletter from your website. You just need to install a plug-in and use Google Analytics (if you haven't been using Google Analytics, please install it and let it run on your website, gathering information, for at least a month before starting).

Let's get to it!

Make sure you're asking people who visit your website to sign up

One of the most effective ways to gather email addresses is by using a pop-up newsletter signup on your website or blog. Download and install the SumoMe plugin for WordPress or add SumoMe's code to your website.

Visit <http://www.sumome.com/> to get the plugin for free.

SumoMe gives you many options for gathering email addresses on your website and porting them directly to your newsletter provider. You can choose from three different options: List Builder, Scroll Box, or Smart Bar.

Each one of these gathers the user's email address differently:

- List Builder darkens your website after a variable amount of time and presents a sign-up box over the content
- Scroll Box appears only as a user scrolls down your website
- Smart Bar appears at the top of your website when a user first visits.

Choose one, play around with it, and test it to see which one works best for you. Once you set it, let it run on your website for at least a month before making any adjustments.

Check data in Google Analytics

After a month of using the SumoMe plug-in, open Google Analytics for your website and compare the month's worth of data to the previous month. You're going to want to look at two specific numbers: average session duration and bounce rate.

The average session duration is how long on average a person spends on your website. Anything over 30 seconds is pretty good, and the higher the number goes, the better. This means people are sticking around and looking at your content. The bounce rate is the percentage of single page visits, or the percentage of people who left your website after being on the entrance page or another single page and not interacting at all.

Look at the average session duration from the month before you installed the plug-in and the month after. How are the numbers?

If the number stayed the same, then you know the newsletter pop-up form did not drive people away. If the number went down, you can make the assumption that the newsletter pop-up annoyed some people and they left your site.

How about the bounce rate? If this number went up, your newsletter pop-up might be the culprit for sending people away from your site.

Once you've analyzed these two numbers, take a look at the top five most popular pages on your website. To find this data, go to Behaviors > Overview in Google Analytics.

You will see a list of the top 10 most popular pages on your website. Click on each of the top five and analyze the user's average time on page. Whichever page has the lowest average time on page becomes your target. For example, the home page on my website is my third-most-popular page, and users spend an average of 36 seconds on that page.

Make adjustments

Now open the preferences for the SumoMe plug-in that you decided to use on your

website. For example, in List Builder, under Behaviors, you can change the “When” function to an interval of your choosing. Choose “Manual” and set the time, in seconds, to a second or two less than the lowest average time on page.

This way, a user won’t be presented with your pop-up immediately and scare them away, but they will get your pop-up after they’ve had a chance to look around but before they decide to leave. Maybe your newsletter offer will persuade them to stay!

When you make these adjustments, be sure to let them sit for a month, and then analyze them again to see if you need to make any more tweaks. It does take time, but it’s worth it, and will hopefully snag you some new readers.

On an advanced note, it’s a good idea to run this test every quarter to see if more adjustments can be made. You may find that the average time spent on your website will grow or shrink depending on what content you produce, so don’t let your plug-in sit untended for long periods of time. Even small tweaks could end up being the difference between one sign-up per day and ten.

With these adjustments established, your newsletter should start to grow. Don’t be dismayed if it takes a while to gain steam. These things start slowly but surely.

Once you have the basics down, and you’re seeing readers sign up for your list, you can proceed to do more advanced marketing with your list, such as giving away free books, asking newsletter subscribers for their feedback, buying Facebook lead-generating ads, and teaming up with other authors to offer specials to your newsletter subscribers. The options are endless!

Remember to communicate with your newsletter subscribers either on a regular basis (monthly, biweekly, or whatever you’re comfortable with) or when you have new releases or sales. They signed up to hear from you.

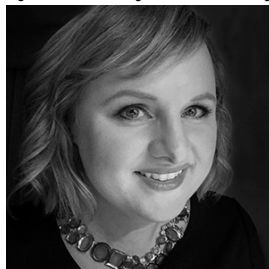
You wanted your audience, and now you have it!

Stephanie (S. J.) is a writer, knitter, amateur astrologer, Capricorn, and Japanophile. She loves foxes, owls, sushi, yoga pants, Evernote, and black tea. When she’s not writing, she’s thinking about writing or spending time outside, unless it’s winter. She hates winter. Someday she’ll own a house in both hemispheres so she can avoid the season entirely. She’s a mom to two great kids and lives with her husband and family outside NYC. They have no pets. Yet. When it comes to her work, expect the unexpected. She doesn’t write anything typical. Find her online at <http://www.spajonas.com>.

Blurb Writing Lab

How to make readers wild to one-click

By Heidi Joy Tretheway



The ugly truth about slaving away over a manuscript for months, then going six rounds with editors and beta readers, is that almost none of that matters in the moment of truth—when a reader’s finger is poised over a buy button, or her eyes are skimming a book’s cover.

That’s because while the quality of a book drives reviews that can drive sales, many readers don’t even get as far as reviews before they dismiss a book. They’re focused on three ingredients—title, cover and blurb—what H.M. Ward calls the “trifecta of awesomeness” (I wish I’d invented that line).

In this article, I’m unpacking the before-and-after process of revising two authors’ blurbs (used with their permission) to help write sharper, more memorable, better-selling blurbs. Overall, I believe readers sniff blurbs for these things:

- **Light/dark:** Is the subject matter funny and optimistic? Or am I going to need a box of Kleenex as I sob my way through this novel? Mystery is the perfect genre example to show how a murder can come with a barrel full of laughs or a barrel full of body parts at the bottom of a river. Before I one-click, I need to know just how gritty a book will be.
- **Heat/sweet:** How steamy or chaste is this book? Romance readers have *very* specific literary kinks, and they’re likely to reject a book if the blurb doesn’t confirm they’ll get what they’re about to pay for. Disclaimers about adult content can be extremely effective in enticing sexytimes buyers to click, while encouraging others to *move along, nothing to see here*.
- **Theme/tropes/triggers:** Some readers can’t stand reading about adultery, secret babies, abused animals, or heavy drug use. Revealing these things in a blurb or disclaimer will avoid some one-stars and DNFs (did not finish), and likewise attract readers who can’t get enough of stepbrothers or murderous kingpins.

As we’ll discuss in several examples, one commonality in a good blurb is we’re not talking plot.

I’ll say it again: Not plot.

An effective blurb is ad copy, not a plot summary. It’s like selling a New York cheesecake

for its rich, suedelike texture on a nutty, crisp crust—not a wedge of eggs, sugar and cream cheese on crushed graham crackers.

Case Study #1: Cutting details to avoid confusion

Here's the "before" version of a light, modern love story set in Japan that digs deep on friendship and family ties:

"When it comes to fight or flight, I always choose to run like hell."

Isano has the perfect summer all planned. Tokyo and the Summer Olympics: Check. Helping her marathon running best friend, Halley, prepare for the Games: Check. Getting away from her friend, Masa, so she can forget she's in love with him: Double check. With a swank apartment in Tokyo, her family close by in the city, and plenty of free time, Isa is set for success until her mother ends up in the hospital.

Now, Isa has to take over for her mom with the family's Tokyo business, leave Halley all alone to train, and Masa has jumped straight in the middle of her problems as well. And Masa is hard to ignore with his smiles, his helpful nature, and their one recent, drunken kiss burning in her memory. Isa gives up on her dreams and throws every itinerary in her planner in the trash. Everyone wants her to stay but all she wants to do is run. Tokyo, her family, and her emerging relationship with Masa, though, are hard to leave behind, and she must choose between an easy, possible future or a harder, certain one before the summer is over.

Summer Haikus is a modern story of best friends, family, and love in Japan, running for the thrill of the race and the accomplishments of a lifetime.

I confess, it took me a long time to read through this blurb, which weighs in at 232 words. Readers make book-buying decisions in a matter of seconds—not minutes—so giving readers too much information can be a liability. That's why our first task was to cut back on the details to help the reader make a buying decision quicker.

It's the same principle behind the evolution of advertising. In adman David Ogilvy's world 60-plus years ago, long blocks of text extolled the virtues of a Rolls-Royce. His iconic ad offered 13 points and 60 lines of copy.

But he recognized the importance of the first few words, noting in *Confessions of An Advertising Man*, "On the average, five times as many people read the headline as read the body copy. When you have written your headline, you have spent eighty cents out of your dollar."

In modern advertising, we see streamlined messages that boil a product down to just a few words or sentences. I believe successful book blurbs will likewise become shorter, punchier and more mysterious, while still offering enough to distinguish a book from others.

One very successful book launch from new NINC member Meghan March featured a blurb that was just 69 words long. She set the hook with conflict and emotion and had me one-clicking even though I didn't know much at all about the plot, the characters, or the setting:

Blurb for Beneath This Ink:

I've always known she was too good for me, but that never stopped me from wanting her. And then I finally had her for one night.

A night I don't remember.
I figured I'd blown my shot.
But now she's walked back into my life, and this time, I have the upper hand. I want my second chance.
Will she be able to see the man beneath this ink?

When author Stephanie Pajonas and I worked on the *Summer Haikus* blurb, we weren't looking to cut details unessential to the story. We were cutting details that *unessential to the buyer*.

Isa's full name is Isano, but a reader doesn't need to know that. Her best friend is a key character, but the reader doesn't need Halley's name. And since Tokyo is mentioned as a setting cue, we don't need to know that Isa lives in a swanky apartment unless a murder is going to happen there (spoiler: it's not that kind of book).

Masa's smiles and helpful nature likewise don't leave a strong impression, but the kiss makes things interesting. So we kept that detail, but fired it up with some more expressive language.

The "after" blurb:

"When it comes to fight or flight, I always choose to run like hell."

Isa planned the perfect summer: Tokyo and the Summer Olympics—check.

Helping her best friend prepare for the marathon—check.

Forgetting she's in love with Masa—double check.

But when Isa's mother is hospitalized, she has to abandon her summer plans to run the family's Tokyo business. Masa's offer to help makes it impossible for Isa to ignore him—and the firecracker kiss they shared half a world away. Everyone expects the world of her, but the pressure to please them all is as oppressive as the Tokyo summer heat.

The simplest answer to all her problems? Run.

Case Study #2: Matching the tone

Here's the "before" version of a medium-light, medium-steamy debut novel with a lot of heart:

Bliss Kaufman can make anyone beautiful with enough makeup and hair product. Her life, however, is anything but.

Leaving her salon job to break out on her own, she encounters unforeseen struggles, from conniving rivals eager to see her fail, to her own family.

A life-changing medical diagnosis and a chance encounter with someone from her mother's past forces Bliss to question everything she's ever known.

Both consciously and subconsciously, readers seek books that match their literary tastes. Do they want funny? Dark and macabre? Clever, with a side of snark? A blurb's tone should reflect that.

If your style is witty, don't let the blurb-writing demons suck the fun out of you.

Author Amy Jo Cousins does zesty blurbs brilliantly with crazy disclaimers such as: "Warning: This book contains cranky roommates who vacillate between lashing out and licking,

some male / male voyeurism, emotional baggage that neither guy wants to unpack, and the definitive proof that sound carries in college housing.”

Um, one-click that. I am *in*.

In addition to the blurb itself, the tone of the cover—colors, font choice, expression on the model, and lighting—will reinforce the light or dark tone a reader perceives.

For *A Taste of Bliss*, author Adrian Hale hit a light note with a softly cast couple almost kissing and a pink title that has me reaching for my beach bag and flip-flops. We revised her blurb for a light, irreverent tone:

After (this is just the first part of the blurb):

All Bliss Kaufman wanted was a sandwich and a nap after a grueling day beautifying this week’s bridal party.

So when a bartender with a panty-melting grin offers her dinner and a ride on his motorcycle, Bliss swerves from her plans for one unexpected night with Talan McGregor...

I’ll be back next month with another blurb-writing case study that digs into lead-in lines and takes a new blurb apart, line by line.

Heidi Joy Tretheway is a sucker for campfires, craft cocktails, and steamy romance in books and real life. She sings along with musicals (badly), craves French carbs, and buys plane tickets the way some women buy shoes. Her first career as a journalist took Heidi Joy behind the scenes with politicians, rock stars, chefs, and detectives, all of whom inspire her stories. She is currently working on her eighth book from her home near Portland, Oregon.

Forensic Files

Can my villain cook commit murder using contaminated food?

By D. P. Lyle, MD



Question: My villain is a cook who wants to kill the hero by feeding him tainted food. I want to avoid using a detectable poison, so I thought a deliberately introduced food-borne pathogen, such as ptomaine, botulism, e.coli, or salmonella, or something like those, would do it.

But how do I get the bacteria/germs/whatever into the food? What will it do to him? How long would it take him to die, and what steps could the hero take to make sure he survives? What could the villain do to make sure the hero dies?

Answer: This scenario will work, but there are a few problems with it.

First of all, using bacteria for murder is extremely unpredictable and most killers prefer a more predictable method. Just because your villain feeds contaminated food to the victim does not mean that the victim will die, because contaminated food rarely kills people—it merely makes them sick. Typically, people survive these types of illness.

The only way to assure, or at least increase, the probability that your victim would die is to prevent him from reaching medical care.

Infectious processes most often kill by two different mechanisms. The first is that they alter the function of the infected organ. For example, pneumonia can kill by infecting the lungs and filling the air spaces with bacteria and liquids we call exudates. This is simply the body's reaction to the infection, like a weeping wound or one that forms pus. As a result, it interferes with the exchange of oxygen and the victim can die because the lungs fail.

An infection in the kidneys can do the same thing by causing kidney failure and infection in the gastrointestinal tract, which is what would happen with ingested bacteria. It can lead to severe diarrhea, dehydration and death, or severe bleeding and death.

The most treacherous thing associated with any of these infections is the passing of the bacteria from the infected organ into the bloodstream. We call this sepsis or septicemia, big words that mean infection in the blood stream.

When this happens, the infection spreads rapidly throughout the body and very quickly the victim can suffer from septic shock—low blood pressure and shock from bacteria in the blood

stream. This can lead to death in short order.

Regardless of which bacterium you decide to use, it would need to be added to the food and the victim must ingest it. This would make him ill with gastrointestinal symptoms such as nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, abdominal pain, and perhaps bleeding in either the diarrhea or the vomiting.

If untreated, such an infection could then spread to the bloodstream and be deadly. But the key here is that he must be *prevented from reaching medical help*. Otherwise, he would be treated and survive. Untreated, his chance of survival is dramatically reduced.

As for which bacteria to use, both ptomaine and botulism would be very difficult to come by. Your cook would have no access to this type of organism. He could damage a can of food, leave it sitting in a warm environment, and hope that the right bacteria grows.

But most likely, it would not be the bacterium that causes botulism—that's actually quite rare. There would be no way for him to predict what organism would occur under that circumstance.

On the other hand, e. coli, salmonella, and shigella are quite common causes of food-borne gastrointestinal illness. If your chef knew someone who was infected with one of these, perhaps from a recent trip to Mexico where these are not uncommonly encountered, he could then use this individual to supply the needed bacteria.

How would he do this? The best way would be to obtain some stool from the infected individual. This could be from contaminated toilet paper or an unflushed toilet. (Gross, but that's the way it is.)

This could then be placed into some food product and allowed to grow, which he could simply do in a closet at home. He could then add some of this bacterial soup to the contaminated meal and in this way introduce a large amount of bacteria to the victim.

Even better would be injecting this bacteria into the victim, but that's not absolutely necessary.

Again, this would make the victim very ill with gastrointestinal symptoms. Then, as I said, you'll need to devise some scenario that prevents the victim from reaching medical help and he could die from sepsis.

There is an excellent nonfiction book, *Blood and Money* by Tommy Thompson, in which a murder is committed exactly like this. It involves the murder of Joan Robinson Hill by her husband Dr. John Hill. The incredible story took place in the 1960s in Houston, Texas.

Dr. Hill apparently grew bacteria in petri dishes at home and infected cream puffs to kill his wife. He then admitted her to a small hospital in the outskirts of Houston and he managed her care, which amounted to preventing her from getting adequate treatment since he did not offer her the treatment she needed.

This huge, convoluted case did indeed involve blood and money.

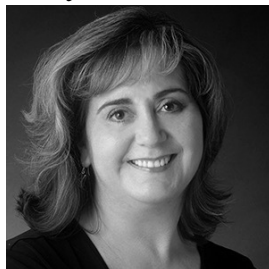
D. P. Lyle, MD, is a regular contributor to Nink. His book Forensics for Dummies releases its second edition this month. Learn more about his work at www.dplylemd.com and see his blog at <http://writersforensicsblog.wordpress.com>. You can also hear him on Crime and Science Radio: <http://www.dplylemd.com/>

[*crime--science-radio.html*](#)

What Kind of Chunky Writer Are You?

The Chunky Method offers a fresh approach to time management for writers

By Allie Pleiter



Award-winning author Allie Pleiter has been teaching her Chunky Method of time management to writers across the country for several years. In a series of articles this year, she shares her popular method with NINC.

Most of us know there's no magic bullet or shortcut to the productivity today's market demands. We know what needs to be done, but so many of us have trouble doing it. In this series of articles, I'll teach you to adopt my Chunky Method system to break the job of writing a book into daily or weekly tasks that will get the job done.

What is your Chunk?

How much can you write in a single sitting if you're not interrupted? Given an ideal setting and no interruptions, how many words could you write before they stopped coming?

That amount is your chunk. It's that simple.

Believe it or not, most of us have a consistent chunk, and that can be the basis of some very effective planning.

If you don't already have a good idea of what your chunk is, try this:

1. Record your word count on five different days of writing under the best possible conditions you can manage
2. Establish the average by dividing the total number by five. Yes, this is math, but you can do it. The average is your chunk.

Are you a Big Chunk writer or a Small Chunk writer?

Based on my experience, if your chunk is 2,000 words or more, you are probably a Big Chunk writer. If it is less than that, it's likely you are a Small Chunk writer. You'll learn why that matters later. Here are some additional hints to help you decide:

Generally, Big Chunk writers must totally immerse themselves in the story to make progress. Their work demands a certain set of circumstances to be satisfying, and they often aren't fond of multi-tasking. You most likely are a Big Chunk writer if:

- You need a dedicated space to write. Banging out your chapters at the dining room table annoys you.
- Your writing is affected by your environment. You require silence or a certain kind of music around you when you write. A shared, messy, or a make-do office won't do.
- You write for extended periods or not at all. You need a big block of time to find your rhythm. It's frustrating to find a large enough span of time to write every day.
- You'd love a cabin in the woods. Hiding yourself away to finish your novel sounds like heaven. There's so much you could do if you could just be left alone long enough!
- Ergonomics matter. Big chunk writers often battle carpal tunnel syndrome, neck and shoulder issues, and other physical ailments that attack the writer's primary tool: his or her body. You need a chair, desk, keyboard, mouse, monitor and lighting that helps your body rather than hurts it.

Small chunk writers tend to be more adaptable ... and prone to distraction. They take life—and writing—in smaller bites and often juggle multiple projects. You are most likely a Small Chunk writer if:

- You can write anytime, anywhere. Coffee bars, park benches, libraries, airplanes—any setting works for you.
- You easily tune out distractions. You don't need pleasing music or silence—you can tune out and crawl inside a project anywhere.
- You write often. Small spurts fit your writing around and into a busy life. A daily word count works for you, but cramming for a deadline probably won't.
- Any tools will do. Tablets, notepads, laptops, even index cards or cell phones—ergonomics don't make much difference, so you've got lots of possibilities.

An Important Truth

I want to declare one important truth: Big Chunk and Small Chunk writers are equals. One is not more “saleable” or dedicated or talented than the other. They are equally capable of producing great work.

Small Chunk writer that I am, for years I felt myself inferior to all those authors who locked themselves away on writers' retreats for days on end. Surely those folks who wrote nonstop for hours or stayed up all night were more committed to their craft than I was. I am slowly and steadily productive—too slow and steady to be a “real artist”.

I couldn't have been more wrong.

The truth is that I work as hard as the next novelist. I just don't work as long in a single sitting as the next novelist. You can be productive and professional no matter what your personal writing style. Writers of any size chunk can learn to develop a professional, consistent output and reach their goals.

In our next segment, we'll talk about how to wield your Chunky style to create a tailored writing plan.

Allie Pleiter spends her days writing four books at a time and buying yarn to knit. Both a RITA and Carol Award finalist as well as a RT Reviewer's Choice and RomCon Reader's Crown Award winner, Allie recently celebrated her millionth book sold. She speaks nationally on writing, faith, women's issues, and time management. Visit her website at www.alliepleiter.com or her knitting blog at www.DestiKNITions.blogspot.com. She is the author of [The Chunky Method Handbook: Your Step-by-Step Plan to Write That Book Even When Life Gets in the Way](#).

Not Your Usual Writing Advice

Friendly Inspiration

By JoAnn Grote



*"The bond that links your true family is not one of blood,
but of respect and joy in each other's life."
—Richard Bach, *Illusions: The Adventures of a Reluctant Messiah**

Many of us don't live near other writers, so we are extremely thankful for organizations like Novelists, Inc., through which we form long-distance friendships, ask questions about the sometimes confusing and often frustrating business side of writing, and seek emotional support for the long road of life as a novelist.

Many of us don't discuss our writing careers with friends not in the business, believing non-writers won't understand our world. Their jobs may not be in a creative field; they may make their livings doing whatever their boss tells them to do next, rather than coming up with a new idea, making a proposal, and/or developing the idea into a complete manuscript; and they may receive regular paychecks (now there's a concept).

We and they may believe their careers are more boring than ours, but we doubt they would understand a career that one needs to create, then recreate, and keep going primarily by one's own efforts, or understand the risks and fears such a career entails.

I'm not so sure those assumptions are true.

In Debbie Macomber's nonfiction book *Knit Together: Discover God's Pattern for Your Life* (Faith Words, Hatchette Book Group USA, 2007), she discusses a local support group of which she's a member: The Breakfast Club.

In addition to Debbie, who is a New York Times bestselling author, members include an attorney, a real estate broker, a social worker, a bank vice president, and a business owner. The Club meets once a week. The members share career challenges and successes, and personal problems and joys.

"We became a prayer group, a support group, and advocates for one another," Debbie wrote. "My friends held my hand when I struggled through contract negotiations when changing publishers. Over the years, they have listened and advised, counseled and encouraged me."

About five years ago I told three friends about The Breakfast Club and suggested we form a club of our own. All enthusiastically agreed. We call the group Soul Sisters.

Like The Breakfast Club, the members are from different careers: one is a pharmacist, one is a photographer, one works in assisted living, and I am a writer.

Again, like The Breakfast Club, we have supported each other in our careers, and through health challenges and family changes. In our personal lives, one has married, one divorced, two have become mothers, two have made major moves, and one has known the helplessness of watching her children struggle with severe illnesses.

Each of us has also had challenges and changes in our career lives. When we began, I was the only entrepreneur. The photographer was working for an established and well-respected photographer while she grew her own skills. About a year after the group began, she shared her dream to have her own studio, and shared her fears related to that dream.

As writers, we all know those fears, including, *Am I good enough to make it on my own?* and, *Will I be able to make a living at this?*

We all believed the photographer had the ability to make it work and encouraged her to make the shift. I shared my experiences in turning my dream of publication into reality, including practical business advice. She now has a successful business. Her talent, skill, and creativity make her a sought-after photographer.

The pharmacist has added a part-time business in yoga, essential oils, and aromatherapy to her pharmacist career since the Soul Sisters began meeting. At our latest meeting, she shared her desire to move away from her career in pharmacy and work full-time with non-mainstream healing arts, setting a timeline of two years to make it happen.

We all know she has excellent knowledge of the holistic areas, but she has concerns about her abilities in the practical side of running a business. The photographer is wonderful at combining creativity with business savvy. She gave the healer a couple ideas to begin working with immediately, and offered to work with her on developing her business skills.

The woman working in assisted living said at the last meeting that she's decided to look for a new position. While not facing the same fears as those who became entrepreneurs, she faces the fear of change with which we are all familiar, and we are listening to her and supporting her in this process.

I've discovered that many aspects of my writing world overlap with the worlds of my non-writer friends. They offer practical advice that is just what I need as my career continues to evolve, even when that advice is not specific to the publishing world.

They offer insights that trigger my creative brain and my logical business brain. In return, my creativity and experience with taking risks and landing on my feet has inspired them, in their current careers and as they branch into new areas.

Our honesty with each other is as important as the experiences we each bring to the group. We are straight shooters, but we say it with kindness and the best of intentions. We trust each other. My Soul Sisters are usually the first people I want to contact when I have a disappointment, a problem, or a joy to share.

If you're wishing for more support in your own life, don't be afraid to look beyond writers. Life experiences can be more similar than we are led to believe, and the support of those who

love and respect us, whatever their careers, is empowering.

JoAnn Grote is the award-winning author of 40 books, including inspirational romances, middle-grade historical novels, and children's nonfiction. Contact her at jaghi@rconnect.com.

The Mad Scribbler

"Strangers in my Nighties"

By Laura Resnick



*"Give someone a book, they'll read for a day.
Teach someone how to write a book, they'll experience a lifetime of paralyzing self-doubt."
—novelist Lauren DeStefano*

Every time I sent a proposal or pitched a project to one of my former agents, he would react with some variation of, "What's new and different about this? What's fresh or original about it? Nothing."

And then he'd usually refuse to send it out.

This reaction often made me angry, partly because I felt belittled, and partly because it seemed an unfair objection since he represented plenty of books that I doubted were described with phrases such as "fresh ideas" or "new concepts".

Of course, his habitual denigration of my work took its toll on my confidence, and I wasted a lot of energy alternately fearing, suspecting, and privately denying that I was indeed (I quote from that agent's various emails) a "mediocre," "grade B," and "lazy" writer who had "never really accomplished anything."

Even knowing in retrospect how wrong that agent was about so many things (for example, in the weeks after finally firing him, I sold five books that he had declared unmarketable), the fears he cultivated have stalked me like a patient predator.

They emerge from the shadows when I'm vulnerable.

They appear at my shoulder without warning.

Ironically, one of the few the proposals I ever showed that agent which did *not* elicit this reaction, and which was the only thing he ever sold for me, was a wholly conventional genre project built on familiar motifs and devices. It happened to be the type of book he was successful at selling—and, indeed, he soon sold it.

I began to realize after this that he probably wasn't using the words "fresh," "new," and "different" the way we Earthlings use them.

Thereafter, I argued with him about the various pitches and proposals he belittled and I also realized that neither my goals nor my strengths as a writer include "original ideas" or

“something we haven’t seen before.”

And that’s OK—that’s not who I am as a novelist in large part because it’s also not who I am as a reader.

On the days when I feel like a competent writer—and also the days when I feel like a very good and under-appreciated writer—I believe that my strength as a novelist is in *how* I tell a story, rather than in the cunningly cunning cunningness of my ideas.

As a reader, I like a novel in which prose rolls smoothly forward, dialogue makes me feel like I’m hearing it, and characters and relationships are compelling. There are additional things that matter to me or which make a novel a keeper, but an engaging, smoothly written tale of characters I enjoy spending time with is usually what keeps me turning pages late at night and what gets me to re-read novels.

I need to feel absorbed in a book’s people to like it and recommend it to others. I need to enjoy how a story is told, rather than particularly caring what kind of story it is (which is also why I’ve never been a loyal fan of any particular genre or subgenre).

The kind of reader I am determines what I focus on as a writer, too. Although I love all compliments from readers, my very favorite is always some version of “the characters seem real to me” or “I love your characters.”

But on a bad day, I think, “Oh, crap, I don’t even tell an un-fresh, unoriginal story well, do I?” That despairing feeling arises whenever my writing isn’t going well; when I encounter editors or readers who find my characterization and storytelling inadequate; and sometimes when I see other writers enthusiastically exalted.

The genre I work in, science fiction / fantasy, does indeed laud and applaud that which readers feel they have not seen before, and writers are admired and praised if their work is perceived as unusual or groundbreaking. This, too, often nudges me into feelings of inadequacy.

Nonetheless, in much the way that I’m typically bored by popular science fiction movies where the emphasis is on special effects rather than on smart dialogue and compelling characters, I seldom enjoy books where all the buzz is about how original the premise is or how unusual the structure or execution or point of view is, rather than about how engaging the characters and their relationships are.

I keep reminding myself of what draws me into a story when I had an agent who belittled my lack of original concepts. And it’s something I have to keep reminding myself as a writer, because sometimes strangers get into my nighties.

(Any Sinatra fans out there?)

When I was a teenager, my best friend and I used to oh-so-cleverly sing *Strangers In the Night* by replacing “the night” with “my nighties” throughout the song.

Go on, give it a try. I’ll wait.

Yes, it changes the song in much the same way that adding the words “in bed” alters a movie title: 12 Angry Men In Bed; Snow White and the Seven Dwarves In Bed; The Force Awakens In Bed.

These days, I find that recognizing there are “strangers in my nighties” is a cheerful and kind way of warning myself that I’m running other people’s tapes in my head, to the detriment of my happiness, focus, and self-worth.

It helps me halt that spiral: feeling inadequate for not doing what some other writers do, and not producing whatever type of work some people admire other writers for producing.

Sure, it's a cute adolescent joke to change lyrics in a song; but it's distracting, draining, and destructive to let strangers—expectations and tastes in fiction that aren't even your own—into some place as private, intimate, and personal as your nighties or your writer psyche.

Obviously, I do not object to books that are unique, different, or highly original. I like to sample such novels, and even if it turns out not to be to my taste, I'm capable of respecting a book with qualities that engage other readers.

I just don't want strangers in my nighties, that's all.

Interestingly, neither did Sinatra. Although this 1966 pop hit was a big comeback song for him, becoming his first number-one single in over a decade and earning him a Grammy Award, Sinatra hated it.

He called *Strangers In the Night* “a piece of shit” and was often disinclined to perform it. But it followed him throughout his career, going in and out of his repertoire for decades, and was frequently requested.

Many top artists have recorded *Strangers In the Night* over the years, but Sinatra remains the artist who is enduringly associated with it—precisely because people loved the way he sang it, his style of telling that story of a chance encounter one night between two lonely strangers who fell in love.

As long as those two people don't exchange their glances in my nighties.

Laura Resnick is the author of the Esther Diamond urban fantasy series published by DAW Books, as well as previous fantasy novels and, long ago, more than a dozen romance novels.