



# NINK

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a professional organization for  
writers of popular fiction.

# *Nink* April 2016

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# President's Voice

*By Diana Peterfreund*



I've been thinking lately about the power of *No*.

A writing opportunity recently presented itself to me, and I turned it down. It would have been good money, and quite possibly a good career move, too.

But I could tell in an instant that it wasn't right for me.

The current state of publishing has been a boon to a lot of writers. We're given more options and more opportunities than ever before. We can partner with publishers if it works for what we want, but they are no longer the sole gatekeepers of whether our works come to market. There are small publishers, self-publishing, patronage subscription services ... the list goes on and on.

These days, writers are finding all kinds of innovative methods to find our audience and get our work into the hands of the people who matter most: readers.

Unfortunately, all this freedom comes with a decided downside. Call it the tyranny of choice—with so many avenues available to explore, we realize that there's always something *more* we could be doing.

Once upon a time, we could point at a publisher's lack of support or bad packaging and marketing for an underperforming title or series.

Now it's, well, why aren't we rebranding the cover or running a sale or doing more school visits or heading off to festivals or finally cracking the enigma of Facebook marketing? Why aren't we writing a book every month or resurrecting an abandoned series?

We *could* say yes to all of these things, and many, many more.

Enter *No*.

Though there might be no limit to our opportunities, or our passions, there sadly is a limit to the number of hours in any given day.

*No* allows us to recognize not only that, but also our own strengths and personal interests. The time we spend marketing might be better engaged writing a new book. Yes, we could resurrect that series, but is it worth the time and energy for the dozen (admittedly diehard) fans

or would we be better served writing something new, with the potential of reaching a much larger audience?

I know if I tried to write at the pace of some of my more prolific friends, I'd burn out completely. Festivals are off the table until my baby is a little bit older, as I have to protect all the writing time I've got. Plus, I'm in the middle of a book contract, with all its associated deadlines, and of course there's this pesky writer's association I agreed to be the president of.

*No* is an acknowledgement of our own values and focus. It defines the direction of our personal path.

In the case of my recent *no*, I did not feel the necessary passion for the project. The time and energy I would have spent would be far better served doing something else. What that is, I don't know yet, but *no* gave me the chance to explore and decide on an alternative for myself.

The freedom of opportunity must include a judicious application of the power of *no*. If we're to be in charge of our own career, we need to decide what that's going to look like.

What is the brand you are crafting? What is the author platform you wish to pursue? Some people like to keep their heads down and write, and some are marketing maniacs. Some of us love interacting with readers, or teaching craft.

Some of us are quite happy to co-write or ghostwrite or play in another creator's sandbox, and others feel ownership of every syllable they type.

There is no one answer. There is no *right* answer.

Every map is your own.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Diana". The letter "D" is large and loops around the start of the name.

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

# Call for Nominations

## Step forward and volunteer for service in 2017

*By Victoria Thompson*



The 2016 Nominating Committee is putting out a call to members to step forward and volunteer for service to Novelists, Inc., in 2017.

Here's what we're looking for (full job descriptions are available upon request):

**President-elect:** This is basically a training period before taking the position as president of NINC the following year (2018).

You'll find this hugely helpful! You will have a year with skilled people to guide you as you learn all about the workings of NINC before taking office as president.

If you'd like to learn more about it, just email me, and I'll be happy to discuss it with you.

**Secretary:** This person needs to be a good note-taker and fairly well organized, skills most published novelists can claim.

It's a great way to be deep in the inner workings of NINC and to have a voice in guiding the organization into the future.

**Treasurer:** The Board has an administrative assistant and an accountant to handle a lot of the financial duties, but the treasurer still needs a good working knowledge of how to handle finances as well as some experience balancing books and making regular financial reports.

Previous service as treasurer in smaller organizations or clubs would be very valuable here.

**Nine candidates for the 2016 Nominating Committee:** Nine will run and five will be elected, and it will be their job to find candidates for 2017.

Although it's not very time-consuming (most of the committee's work will be done during the month of April 2017), it's extremely important to NINC.

These members will have a direct hand in finding members to serve on the NINC board.

If you have any questions or suggestions, please get in touch! Email me at

[vestinpa@aol.com](mailto:vestinpa@aol.com).

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*Winner of the Career Achievement Award for Mystery from RT Book Reviews, Victoria Thompson is the bestselling author of the Edgar®- and Agatha Award-nominated Gaslight Mystery Series. Her latest is Murder on St. Nicholas Avenue. She has published 19 mysteries and 20 historical romances and contributed to the award-winning textbook Many Genres, One Craft. She currently teaches in the master's degree program for writing popular fiction at Seton Hill University. Victoria is a founding member and past president of Novelists, Inc., and a co-founder and past-president of both PENNWRITERS and New Jersey Romance Writers. She lives in Indiana with her husband and a very spoiled little dog.*

# Conference Update

## NINC Master Class announces its first slate of speakers

*By Julie Leto*



The 2016 Master Class conference committee and programming team is thrilled to share our preliminary lineup of speakers.

As is traditional with the NINC conference, we'll be adding to this list in the weeks and months to come, but this will give you an idea of the direction we're going with this year's event.

### **Fauzia Burke**

Fauzia Burke is founder and president of FSB Associates, a digital marketing firm that specializes in books, both fiction and non-fiction. They have long been known as innovators in the field of digital book marketing, responsible for the very first web-based book publicity campaigns, from Sue Grafton's first author website to the online marketing for *The South Beach Diet*.

She comes to us with high recommendations from our media partner, Porter Anderson, and our own Lou Aronica. Her website alone is chock-full of information regarding every aspect of presenting your work to the public with maximum impact. A great way to get to know her is through her blog, <http://www.fsbassociates.com/blog/>.

One of her articles about online marketing mistakes that authors make will appear in the May edition of Nink.

### **Mark Dawson**

Independent thriller author Mark Dawson has become an expert in using Facebook ads and mailing lists to boost his sales onto the bestseller lists.

He teaches super-popular and effective classes on the topic and has become a much sought-after speaker. He has concrete strategies for boosting an author's visibility and we are lucky to get him all the way from the UK.

Read a [great interview](#) with him through Reedsy, one of last year's corporate sponsors.

## **Jennifer Barnes**

Author and professor Jennifer Barnes has a Ph.D. in psychology and currently works at the University of Oklahoma, where she is one of the world's foremost experts on the cognitive science of fiction and the psychology of book fandom.

She has published over a dozen young adult novels, and her first book came out while Barnes was still an undergrad at Yale. In February, Nink ran her article on "The Science of Fiction," exploring how intense moments in the plot of a story affect reader satisfaction.

You can get to know her better through [her Tedx Talk](#).

## **Richard Marek**

Richard Marek is an institution in the traditional publishing world, responsible for editing household names including Robert Ludlum, Thomas Harris, and more.

He has now successfully transitioned to independent editing and ghostwriting for bestsellers such as James Patterson. His history with taking books to the next level spans nearly fifty years.

To get to know Marek, check out this [interview with him](#) at [writerscast.com](#).

## **F. Robert Stein**

F. Robert Stein of the law firm Pryor Cashman is a friend to NINC who has been at our conference before and we are thrilled to have him again.

His bio on the firm's website says it best: "On behalf of authors, literary agents, and book publishers, Bob resolves disputes, negotiates settlements, drafts contracts, and prepares collaboration and publication agreements. He has represented authors Johanna Lindsey and David Baldacci in copyright infringement cases. Bob also reviews book manuscripts prior to publication for libel, copyright, and other potential issues."

He has insight into not only the book world, but into Hollywood as he has been legal counsel for a host of documentary films, including several Oscar nominees.

## **David Vandgriff**

Best known for his popular publishing blog, [The Passive Voice](#), Vandgriff is a contracts attorney who has specialized in intellectual property litigation.

He has a wide range of knowledge concerning legal matters related to the publishing and technology industries, as well as the latest scoop on legal issues and current events in the publishing world. If you aren't already a frequent visitor to his blog, you should check it out.

## **Ed Masessa**

Ed Masessa is senior manager of product development at Scholastic Book Fairs. His specific responsibilities include the selection of books in the fantasy, adventure, sports, and graphic novel categories, chosen from more than 100 publishers.

Masessa is an active member of the [Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators](#) and



attends several reading, library, and graphic novel conventions every year.

Because of the nature of his job, he has direct exposure to the reading habits of children at the grassroots level. He is also the author of several books including [The Wandmaker's Guidebook](#), a *New York Times* #1 Bestseller, and [The Time Traveler's Journal](#).

Bios, photos, and further information will be posted on the website and new speaker announcements will first be posted to NINCLink.

The conference committee has heard a few rumors that people are concerned we will not be as focused on business this year. This is not true: as you can see, we already have top talent coming to speak on business, marketing, and legal issues.

Your conference committee understands NINC's business focus, but we are also responding to members who have, for some time, asked for us to bring back discussions on craft, albeit at a higher level than you'll get anywhere else.

That's what NINC does best. We are working hard to present a balanced and comprehensive conference that will appeal to as many of our members as possible.

People have also asked about special programming for author assistants. We are in the very beginning stages of planning and we have an assistant-led programming committee organizing now.

The programming will consist of at least six workshops or panels (two each day) and at least two Night Owls for assistants only. Notice that I said *at least*. We are trying to strike a balance between offering programming specifically for assistants *and* giving assistants the option of attending main conference workshops that might apply to their jobs.

Assistant registration will be capped at 50 because of space limitations. So if you are thinking of registering your assistant, now is the time.

If you have a suggestion for a guest speaker, please feel free to [email me](#) with names. I cannot guarantee that we will invite your suggestion, but we will take a look and see if they fit in with our vision and plans.

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*[Julie Leto](#) is the immediate past president of NINC, current Conference Chair, and a Florida native. She graduated with degrees in speech communication and English (creative writing) from the University of South Florida and has published nearly fifty novels.*

## General Announcements

### New book creation platform available from Reedsy

Reedsy is proud to announce the release of the Reedsy Book Editor. Ricardo Fayet from the Reedsy founding team offered a sneak peek demo of the book editor at NINC World 2015, and wanted to share the news of its release with all NINC members.

Baked in a beautiful interface, the book editor allows authors to create high-quality, professionally formatted ePub and PDF files for free.

The editor requires absolutely no technological knowledge from the author: simply write, copy-paste, or import your book into the editor.

From there, you can move chapters around, add end notes or insert images. When your book content is ready, you can choose between two templates and export perfectly typeset electronic and print-ready files, which you can then send to your usual distributors or retailers.

The print templates have been tested in collaboration with Ingram Spark and Reedsy states they are compliant with nearly every print-on-demand (POD) distributor.

Over the course of the next few weeks, Reedsy will be adding more templates and implementing real-time collaborative features that will allow authors and editors to work together on a manuscript using the Reedsy Book Editor.

You can [sign up to test the Reedsy Book Editor](#) now. Please email [Ricardo Fayet](#) with questions.

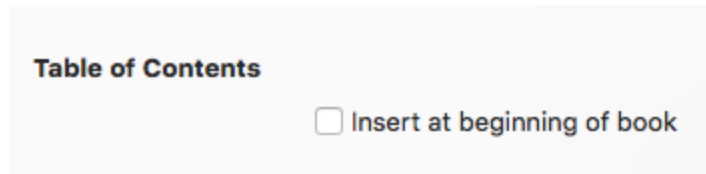
### Change to Amazon's table of contents requirements

The following announcement went to subscribers of Vellum, an e-book publishing software, which NINC members recently purchased en masse thanks to a NINCLink thread and group discount.

From Vellum:

Recently, some authors [have been affected](#) by a change in Amazon's policy toward e-books that include a Table of Contents (TOC) at the end. Although this technique has long been used to prevent the TOC from taking up space within the Look Inside [Amazon feature], Amazon has since decided to not allow it, in some cases removing books from sale until they are updated.

Although by default Vellum places a Table of Contents in the front of your e-books, it also includes a switch that, when turned off, causes the TOC to be placed in the back:



You will want to revisit any Kindle e-books you've generated with this switch turned off. By re-enabling *Insert at beginning of book* in [TOC Settings](#), your book will include an HTML TOC

in the front, which is what Amazon recommends.

But we know that many authors would prefer to not have a TOC as a page in the book, especially since it is included within Amazon's Look Inside.

And so, with Vellum 1.3.6, we are changing the behavior of this switch. When on, it behaves as before, and an HTML TOC will be included at the beginning.

When off, however, the HTML TOC will be omitted entirely. (In either case, the logical TOC, a hidden file that informs navigation, is always included.)

When choosing to exclude the HTML TOC, please take into consideration that, although the [Kindle Guidelines](#) do not state that it is required, including an HTML TOC is "strongly recommended."

**Updating:** Vellum 1.3.6 is available to Direct users today. If you are reading this on your Mac, click [Check for Updates](#) to download it now.

If you downloaded Vellum from the Mac App Store, then this update will be available after it is approved by Apple, a process that typically takes about a week. To learn more about how to upgrade to this latest version of Vellum, please read our guide to [Updating Vellum](#).

—180g, Creators of Vellum

## **Nook announces it will no longer sell digital content in the UK**

The following announcement arrived in many NINC members' in-boxes in March. It's reprinted here as a service to members:

Dear Publisher,

We are writing to announce an important change to our Nook Service that will affect Nook Press vendors publishing content in the United Kingdom. Effective March 15, 2016, Nook will no longer sell digital content in the United Kingdom. The Nook Store on Nook devices sold in the UK, on the Nook Reading App for Android, and at [www.nook.com/gb](http://www.nook.com/gb) will discontinue operations.

Nook customers in the UK will continue to have access to purchased Nook Books until May 31, 2016. After this date, Nook has arranged for the award-winning [Sainsbury's Entertainment on Demand](#) to provide access to customers' purchased NOOK Books.

There is no change to Nook Service or Nook Press in the United States. If you are an author based outside the US in a supported country, you can continue to use Nook Press to publish digital content in the United States and receive payment in your local currency.

After the March 15th, 2016 deadline, titles will be available for sale in the US only, with a list price in USD (\$). For new titles, you will no longer be able to set pricing in British Pounds (£) or Euros (€). For existing titles, no changes need to be made by you at this time. If you are making a change to the Book Details, however, the Sales Territory Rights will default to "United States only". Your sales reports will continue to report any sales of titles in the UK that were sold prior to the discontinuation date.

To review more information about this change, visit our [FAQs page](#).

We'd like to thank you for continuing to be a part of the Nook Press community and

sharing our passion for books. We will try to make the transition as smooth as possible for you and our customers who have purchased your titles in the UK.

Sincerely,  
The Nook Team

### **NINC editorial policy**

Nink is intended to serve members of Novelists, Inc., with relevant, actionable, sophisticated, and industry-leading content that helps them in all aspects of their author careers: writing and editing, writer's life, business and legal, marketing and publicity, etc. It endeavors to serve all authors in membership.

Nink's editorial judgment reflects the philosophy of NINC, which means:

- Declining to comment on other writing organizations and their activities.
- Declining to distinguish members through awards.
- Equally valuing all publishing routes (self, traditional and hybrid).
- Advocating on behalf of authors' interests over publishers' or platforms' interests.
- Emphasizing content relevant to all genres (and aiming to balance genre-specific information).
- Emphasizing industry-leading expertise and original content unique to Nink.
- Refusing advertising placements and self-promotion from contributors.
- Maintaining privacy by redacting new member applicant information from public issues of Nink.

If you have questions about the editorial policy, please contact Nink editor [Heidi Joy Tretheway](#).

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*To submit an announcement for the Nink newsletter, please contact the [editor](#). Submissions must be received by the 15<sup>th</sup> of the month prior to publication for consideration. Publication is at Nink's discretion and in accordance with our editorial policy.*

# How to use NINClick

## Tips to make the most of our discussion board

*By Brenda Hiatt*



For those who don't know me, I'm Brenda Hiatt Barber, past NINC president and moderator of NINClick since its inception 20(!) years ago.

With our recent influx of new members, I agreed with our intrepid Nink editor Heidi Joy that it's time for a quick refresher on just what NINClick is, why you want to subscribe, and what to expect once you do. I hope both new and longtime members find the following pointers helpful.

### **What's NINClick? Why should I sign up for it?**

NINClick is a private Yahoo Group open only to active NINC members, with more than 650 subscribed, about 90 percent of our membership.

Given the requirements for NINC membership, discussions on the loop tend to be at a professional level, often including cutting-edge news about the writing/publishing business.

### **How do I sign up for it? What's the approval process and how long does it take?**

Once your NINC membership is confirmed, you can subscribe to the loop by sending a blank email to: [Ninlink-subscribe@yahoogroups.com](mailto:Ninlink-subscribe@yahoogroups.com)

The moderators will receive your subscription request and check your name/email against the active membership list before approving—usually within a day (sometimes much sooner).

If you subscribe under a different name/email from what's listed in the NINC roster, include a note about that to speed up the approval process.

### **What do people talk about on NINClick? How can it benefit me?**

Any topic of interest to professional novelists is fair game on NINClick, so discussions can be wide-ranging. Along with industry info, recent topics have included current NINC business, writing life issues such as ergonomics and writing processes, craft, technology advice, and promotional strategies.

Though we don't have strict topic guidelines, self-promotion is strongly discouraged, including requests for social media "likes", sharing, etc. We are all career novelists and no one wants the loop clogged by such posts.

### **How do I know whether my question has already been discussed?**

NINClick discussions are archived, though the Yahoo Groups search feature leaves a lot to be desired. In any event, new people join the loop all the time and our industry keeps changing, so don't hesitate to post a question to the loop.

If the topic has been discussed recently, odds are someone can point you to that thread in the archives.

### **What's the etiquette for using NINClick?**

As long as you conduct yourself as a professional, you'll probably be fine. The main things to remember are:

- No disparagement of other authors, whether they're on the loop or not.
- No self-promo (other than a brief signature line with your website and maybe another bit of info).
- No posting copyrighted material—link to an online article rather than copying and pasting.
- TRIM YOUR QUOTES.

What does trimming your quotes mean? It's simply avoiding the inclusion of the full text of a prior link post.

Since approximately two-thirds of our subscribers are on daily digest rather than individual emails, this one causes the most grief.

To make it easy, click the little "reply to group" link at the bottom of a post rather than hitting "reply" on your email window. The text of the post you're replying to should automatically be trimmed off.

Trust me, you will not endear yourself to your fellow NINC members on digest by quoting back a long thread with your reply!

If you have a question about any of the above, please feel free to contact the moderator (me) or ask on the loop. We're a friendly bunch and always eager to help!

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*Brenda Hiatt is the New York Times- and USA Today-bestselling author of 21 novels (so far), including sweet and spicy historical romance, time travel romance, humorous mystery and young adult science fiction. Brenda is passionate about embracing life to the fullest and enjoys scuba diving, Taekwondo, hiking, and traveling.*

# Author Platforms in the Digital Era

How has the platform game changed, and how should authors' strategies evolve?

*By Jane Friedman*



Author platform, in its simplest form, is an author's ability to sell books. What that platform looks like, or how it works, varies from author to author.

Some authors are big names who can attract attention with any book they release. Others have figured out how to harness a loyal fan base to spread word of mouth, and still others know how to exploit digital media for visibility.

Digital and social media are among the most prevalent ways that authors make themselves visible to readers to sell books.

In some ways, this has changed publishers' expectations and what authors need to do—regardless of how they're published. But in other ways, the game has remained exactly the same.

It's just that now there are more game expansion packs, more players to navigate, and more rules that tend to change in the middle of game play.

## **The numbers aren't everything**

When social media was still relatively new, there was a lot of focus on the numbers. How many followers do you have? How many likes? How many shares?

While numbers are still a surface-level indicator of your platform strength, it's too easy to boost social media activity in an artificial way, leading to numbers that are fairly meaningless.

Even with my own 215,000 followers on Twitter, which is 100 percent organically grown, a good portion of followers are fake accounts that contribute nothing to my platform.

This is why there's been more attention and focus lately on email newsletters, which indicate more highly engaged readers or followers, not casual or fake ones, and how authors develop distinct initiatives that cater to very specific types of audiences or markets.

A strategic author is looking at platform strength on three separate levels:

1. Ability to reach new readers;
2. Ability to engage existing readers, and

### 3. Ability to mobilize super fans.

Social media can be disappointing when it comes to uncovering new readers if you aren't spending ad dollars, but it does a great job at engaging people who are already aware of you and your work.

Discounts and freebies—regardless of where they're offered—tend to be better tools for finding new fans.

### **Social media is useful, but not trustworthy**

The challenge with social media is that it's constantly in flux—platforms evolve and who uses them changes over time.

However, social media does make it easier to reach the required threshold of three, four, five impressions required to connect with a reader, so that they first have awareness that your book exists, then are compelled to take action when they feel like they're seeing it everywhere.

Remember the old advertising cliché says that your brand needs to appear in front of your customer seven times to be remembered? The same principle applies to selling books. Authors who have multiple ways to make an impression are by default in a stronger position—they're both more protected from social media platform changes, as well as getting more touch points out there.

This doesn't mean you have to be active on *every* social media channel; however, you do want to build as many impressions in as many places as possible, to break through the noise.

Because more people are playing the game than ever, you need to be more creative, experimental, and diverse with the types of moves you can make.

### **Better market insights for long-term growth**

Perhaps most importantly, digital media can make you smarter in identifying how to best grow your platform.

Once you're active on Twitter or Facebook, or have Google Analytics installed on your website, you have actionable information about *who* you're reaching, *where* you're reaching them, and *how* to reach them better.

This allows for more strategic efforts in the future—you can build and place better ads, run more effective giveaways, and identify the most important influencers for your readership based on past performance.

### **Some of the easiest ways to start:**

- Use your website, Facebook, or Twitter analytics to pinpoint geographic locations that make the most sense for events or print retail initiatives.
- Use tracking and affiliate links to identify where you reach people who are most likely to buy (Twitter? Facebook? people who end up at your website through search?).
- Use website, Facebook, or Twitter analytics to identify important qualities about your readership—e.g., what other books, movies, or TV shows they love. Can you create content or advertise in such a way to reach the audiences of those books, movies, or TV shows?

At the end of this article, you'll find some nuts-and-bolts advice to help you research your



audience through digital tools.

### **IRL (in real life) carries high value**

Marketing strategies almost always work better when they combine online and offline engagement. One in-real-life event stays with people longer, is more likely to be talked about and shared, and is the equivalent of dozens (possibly even hundreds!) of online interactions.

Professional marketers and publicists still advocate for “in real life” activities to activate and extend the strength of your platform—everything from traditional book signings to speaking engagements, to any event that can help lead to word of mouth or anchor a publicity campaign.

Plus, there’s still very little that can replace meeting peers and influencers at events, which increases the likelihood of collaborative action later on.

One of the fastest ways to grow your own platform is to team up with someone (or a group of someones) who reach the same audience you want to reach.

### **Your next steps**

Publishers and authors know that a social media following doesn’t necessarily equal book sales. *An engaged readership that spreads word of mouth leads to book sales.*

As you think about how to build your platform for the next stage of the digital era, use analytics to identify how and where you get the best engagement, and what tools help you find the *right* readers, rather than the *most* readers.

Ultimately, this is the most powerful feature of digital media: its ability to target just the right person who will enjoy your books. Here are specific articles that can help you find new readers and grow your platform:

- [SEO: How Much Does It Affect Novelists?](#) (The Hot Sheet)
- [Audience Research Needn’t Be Costly or Time Consuming](#) (Digital Book World)
- [Researching Reader Intent to Fine-Tune Book SEO](#) (Digital Book World)
- [Finally, A Social Media Strategy That Puts You Right in the Middle of Your Target Market](#) (ConversionXL)
- [How to Hack the Amplification Process](#) (Moz)

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*Jane Friedman is the editor of [The Hot Sheet](#), the essential industry email newsletter for authors. She’s worked in publishing for more than 20 years, with a focus on digital media strategy for authors, and has served a diverse set of companies and nonprofits, including Writer’s Digest, Publishers Weekly, The Great Courses, the National Endowment for the Arts, and the Virginia Quarterly Review.*

# Teaching Writing Workshops

Creating a sustainable curriculum without undermining your writing time

*By Patricia Burroughs*



“Those who can, do. Those who can’t, teach.”

Balderdash!

Not only can writers teach, but teaching can also be terrifically rewarding and energizing.

I was once asked how I managed to stay upbeat and optimistic despite the typical years of real-world writing experiences that often leave us beaten down.

My answer? “I teach.”

Every semester, adult students entered my classroom with a dream, often desperate to hear what I had to say. They were eager and energetic, and I fed off their enthusiasm. They reminded me that the life I was living is my dream come true, even if it isn’t always easy.

Many working writers assume that teaching creative writing involves a huge outlay of time spent reading, marking up, and critiquing student work. This, in turn, takes time away from your own writing.

However, for the past 25 years I’ve taught seminars and community college classes to adults who want to write novels, without reading or critiquing (unless it was a specific critiquing class).

This is the first article in a series that will explore your options in teaching and critiquing with minimal time outside the classroom.

Wait. Back up. Did I say critiquing? I did. A recent discussion on the NINC email loop touched on getting paid to critique. And yes, you can. In my experience, the best way to start down that path is to teach writing classes. The ‘how-to’ on getting paid to critique will come later in the series.

## **Building a sustainable curriculum**

I created self-contained classes, where I spent all my prep time structuring the class, gathering materials, writing handouts, and creating visuals that would be reused for later classes. The longer I taught, the less prep time it took.

To build your curriculum, think of your presentation as if you were speaking to a group of writers at a conference or a meeting.

In that situation, you will likely not read what they wrote. Instead, you will share wisdom and information that they desire and need. This is the secret to teaching without reading, grading, and critiquing student work at home.

Second, figure out which writing subjects you enjoy talking about the most. Research? Sex? Characters? Plot? Marketing? Choose subjects you enjoy, and your work becomes less like work. Choose subjects in great demand, and finding students becomes easier.

### **Expertise doesn't always make it easier**

The third step is to analyze what actual facts, experiences, and advice you can share about your chosen subjects. Do you have enough for a two-hour once-a-semester talk at the local community college? Half a day? A full day? A four- or six- or ten-session class?

The first class I taught was a four-hour 'how to write a romance novel' session on a Saturday. I quickly realized I had enough material to teach four sessions: an introductory class with exercises and basics that any new romance writer needed to know, a session on story/plot, a session on creating and writing characters, and a session on scene structure.

My theory (communicated to the students) was at the end of that four-week course, they would have the building blocks needed to write a novel and could take off on their own, supplementing their self-education as desired and needed by reading, attending other classes and conferences, and joining groups to expand their specific knowledge needs, such as inspirational, erotica, YA, or paranormal.

As I continued teaching, my classes became longer, more detailed, and expanded in scope; I no longer limited my classes to romance.

Part of the self-analysis when you select your class topics is considering not just what you know and enjoy talking about, but also how much detail do you have for that class?

This is a real issue. Don't assume you can handle a subject with little effort simply because it's your 'best thing'. Often our writing strengths are the things that come most easily to us. Because they are second nature to us, we may not have ever broken them down enough to teach someone else how to do them.

When my oldest son was 5 years old and needed to learn to tie his shoes for school, he kept getting frustrated. Several family members tried to help him, but he wasn't catching on. Then his older cousin who had a learning disability and minor motor skill deficiencies got down on the floor and taught him in about 90 seconds.

How? Because shoe-tying had been difficult for the cousin, and he'd been taught a process that none of us ever had to learn.

Plotting a novel has never been easy for me. Through the years I've read many books, watched many presentations, and tried many different methods. My students have benefited from these efforts, because I've shared those with them.

On the other hand, characterization always came so easily to me that I had to research how to present it to people in a helpful way. Even though I'm a comfortable public speaker, the first time I was asked to fill in on a convention agenda, I found I couldn't wing it at the last minute.

I couldn't casually rattle off hints and answer questions on the subject. I had to spend time actually figuring out how I did it first, and I spent an intense few hours prepping before I took that podium.

### **YMMV = Your mileage may vary**

Never forget that your way is not the only way. Through my years of teaching, I have had many students tell me that previous instructors had taught them some very rigid ideas, and this rigidity had created real problems for them.

These instructors believed that their own experiences in publishing made them experts, so they presented their 'path to publication' as the *only* path to publication. This approach didn't encompass the many paths writers take to end up with books in a store—and this was before self-publishing and digital publishing became standard options.

One teacher told her classes, "I write five to ten pages a day when I get home from work. If you can't do this, you aren't serious and you will never be a professional writer."

I think anybody reading this article understands the folly of such a statement. You will look *more* professional and knowledgeable when you admit that publishing is a wild and untamed frontier, and no single process is guaranteed to work every time, even for the same author.

Offer options—whether it's three different ways to collect research for world-building, or five different ways to self-publish your first book. You don't always have to give details. You can help your students by giving them a list of links or search terms that will point them in the right direction.

### **Don't set yourself up as the only expert**

Use other people's work to illustrate strong writing technique, whether it's character description, dialogue, or effectively backstory presentation.

Self-promotion was a major complaint I heard about other instructors—that people signed up, paid their money, and then were subjected to "all about me" presentations that ended with an opportunity to buy the speaker's books. This is *not* the time for you to promote yourself as a writer.

On the other hand, I use an example from one of my earliest published novels to illustrate some newbie mistakes. It's illustrative of several things:

One, not all published work is perfect, yet despite the fact that my writing hadn't evolved as much as it has now, it still got published.

Two, my writing has evolved and, ahem, improved, thank goodness, and will continue to as long as I write.

Three, I'm a good sport.

Four, I honestly don't like pointing at another writer's work in public and saying it's bad—and I tell my students that.

I hope that some of you already have ideas about teaching and speaking on the side without stealing from your writing time. In later articles we'll get into how to build your classes and get paid to critique.

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*Award-winning screenwriter and novelist Patricia Burroughs loves dogs, books, movies, and football. A lifelong Anglophile, she treasures her frequent travels in the British Isles researching [The Fury Triad](#), the epic romantic-fantasy series that has taken over her life and heart. She and her high school sweetheart husband are living happily ever after in their hometown of Dallas, Texas. If you'd like her to address specific questions in a later article on teaching writing workshops, please [email her](#).*

# Hiring an Author Assistant

Pay a *lot* of attention to the man or woman behind the curtain

By Eve Henry



An author assistant is like a wizard to anyone who spends their days hunched over a laptop spinning tales—and nights stressing over all of the *other* work of publishing that too often is left undone.

Authors are typically alone in many responsibilities, such as plotting their next series, revising their last manuscript, writing their next blog post, finalizing a short story for a promised anthology, and hitting a daily word count.

That's the author's job.

But what about checking stats? Answering emails? Creating [bit.ly](#) links for a new release? Tracking advertising reach and revenue? Booking events, flights, and hotels?

Other capable hands can take care of all of those things. This is your opportunity to hire a wiz to work out these details for you.

In a recent NINCLink discussion, Patricia Burroughs pointed to author assistant Kate Tilton's website that offers an [extensive list of links](#) that can be helpful to assistants.

The discussion was particularly timely as NINC has conference registration open to author assistants (limited to just 50 participants), a dedicated assistant track, and Night Owl events exclusively for assistants.

Tilton encourages authors to first decide what they want in an assistant—a marketer, a publicist, or more time to write?

From Tilton's website:

When considering hiring an author assistant, first take into account your main goal. Author assistants are focused on getting authors more time to write, and although in many cases this can lead to better sales, that is not the main focus of working with an assistant.

- If you are looking mainly to increase sales, you need a marketer.
- If you are looking to increase visibility, you need a publicist.
- If you are looking for more time to write, you need an author assistant.

"She makes it clear that author assistants can do any of the above," Burroughs said. "You

just need to find the assistant who meets your needs.”

### **From analytics to street teams**

NINC member Sierra Cartwright, has this down pat. She looked no farther than her own backyard to find her assistant—she hired her daughter.

The family connection is helpful as Cartwright trusts her daughter with a credit card for expenses, as well as login credentials for social media, email, and publishing platforms.

In addition to financial trustworthiness, Cartwright also recommends that assistants sign a confidentiality agreement.

Cartwright’s assistant has a long list of duties that ultimately give Cartwright more time to write. “I’m her biggest client,” Cartwright said, but she works with other authors on a project basis, or on brainstorming business and promo ideas.

Cartwright pays her assistant \$20 per hour for most tasks, more for certain tasks such as making memes and teasers.

“I keep her busy about 10 to 15 hours per week,” Cartwright said. Duties include coordinating her street team, managing its content and instructions, sending ARCs, and making street team members feel appreciated with Christmas presents and other goodies.

Cartwright’s assistant also orders her swag, keeps track of her to-do list, travels with her, and makes all of their travel arrangements. On Facebook, she contributes about 50 percent of the content on Cartwright’s author page, tracks its analytics, and gives Cartwright a weekly update of what’s working best. “What enables us to work so well together is Evernote. I have a professional version of Evernote and find it critical for our success,” she added.

Cartwright also assigned her assistant to work with Facebook on ads. “I’d gouge out my eyes dealing with them. In erotic romance, the approval process is brutal. She’ll switch up ad keywords and demographic targeting. She analyzes what others are doing and what’s getting engagement. And she dealt with Facebook to get me the coveted blue check mark.”

Cartwright listed many more assistant duties, including:

- Gather [bit.ly](#) links for all platforms for releases.
- Distributing links and teasers to the street team.
- Tracking links to see where they’re getting the highest responses.
- Managing the Amazon author page.
- Entering royalty information into spreadsheets.
- Renewing memberships such as NINC.
- Registering for conferences.
- Running Rafflecopter giveaways and sending winners free copies.
- Hosting Facebook parties and blog takeovers.
- Sending her bio and photo to event organizers.

“Most times readers don’t know they’re dealing with her rather than me,” Cartwright said. “Even my publisher now goes to her for certain things rather than coming to me, such as scheduling blog tours and finding out what promo material we need to have shipped to cons.”

Cartwright and her assistant have a release day checklist and she coordinates with other members of the team including a bookkeeper and website designer.

"I'll do a mind dump and she asks the other team members to handle stuff," Cartwright said.

All of that delegation means one thing—Cartwright can spend an extra 15 to 20 hours each week writing.

### **Handling ads, newsletters and organization**

NINC member Jen Stevenson also has a wizard working for her, freeing up her time so she can focus on rockin' her keyboard.

Her assistant updates and modifies her WordPress site, including installing and monitoring Google Analytics. She applies for BookBubs and Fussy Librarian ads, including assembling the supporting data for each ad or application.

To stay on the same page, Stevenson's assistant set up a Google Calendar they both use. They also use a shared DropBox account.

Stevenson's assistant set up her author pages at all retailers, including her pages at foreign Amazon stores. She created and maintains Excel spreadsheets for sales and book promotions, and posts to social media during book promotion periods.

She produces and distributes Stevenson's newsletter and spends time researching the demographics of Stevenson's fans and similar authors, and set up her Hootsuite account to monitor and communicate through Twitter.

Stevenson pays her assistant \$25 per hour. They've structured payment so that the assistant works for up to four hours on tasks Stevenson assigns, keeping track of her time. When the assistant hits four hours, she invoices Stevenson with a list of the tasks accomplished during those four hours.

"Sometimes she'll pay for a Fussy Librarian ad for me and I'll reimburse her; that's over and above the time she bills for. She's very fast and smart, and does not waste time," Stevenson added.

"There are things she has not learned that I'd like her to learn, such as e-book formatting and tweaking backmatter," Stevenson added, "but since I'm overworked I haven't tried to teach her yet."

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*Eve Henry moved to the Pacific Northwest before it was cool. She studied English lit and forestry in college, married a forester, and worked as a newspaper reporter and editor for 15 years. Two kids and one internet later, she gave up on newspapers and began writing books. Eve spends the rest of her time [copy editing](#) fiction and nonfiction, and planning her family's move into their Buttercup Cottage.*



# Social Media for Advanced Authors

Spend less time doing more impactful engagement

By Kate Tilton



Most authors' social media process looks like this:

1. Create accounts on all social media platforms they've ever heard of.
2. Become overwhelmed by the advice and techniques on how to manage social media.
3. Give up managing all channels perfectly and post when they get around to it, if at all.

Not all authors fall into that category, but it's what I run into often when helping authors learn social media.

Ideally, your social media process should look like this:

1. Determine your target market (the intended group for which something is marketed).
2. Research where your target market is active online (Twitter, blogs, Facebook, etc.).
3. Pick one or two of these channels to start with.
4. Grow your channel(s), and gradually reduce the time required to manage each channel.
5. Expand into a new social media channel one at a time (following your initial research on your target market).
6. Repeat the learning and growing process for each new channel.

So how can you go from social media mess to social media mastery? Follow this plan to master your social media.

## Know your audience

I bet you've heard this before, but it bears repeating because it's the most vital part of any marketing you will ever do, period: *having a clear picture of who you're trying to reach will make everything you do in marketing easier and more effective.*

As an author, you want to create a narrow target market. It's even better if you can narrow down your target to a single reader, your number one fan who reads everything you write,

comments on all your social media posts, and tells everyone about your books.

It's much easier to get your number one fan to buy your book than it is to get a massive group of people you know nothing about to do so.

Many authors I've encountered struggle with this stage. They tell me, "But my book is for everyone!" Or they give me a target market that looks like this: 18-80-year-old women, romance readers.

Well, I can tell you right now what interests an 18-year-old romance reader and an 80-year-old romance reader are vastly different.

Here is where the problem lies if you do not have a clear picture of a narrow target market: your marketing messages will be too generic and won't appeal to anyone.

It's better to narrowly define who is most likely to enjoy your book and aim to create superfans, than it is to try to please everyone.

If you write in different genres, you will want to create different narrow target markets for each genre. See where they overlap, then focus on the overlap for best results.

Before you even begin a social media account, get your target market down on paper. Start with these areas and narrow them down as you research: age, gender, location, education, profession, income, group affiliations, hobbies, lifestyles.

For example, instead of picking "male of any age," you can narrow that to "male millennials." Instead of "English-speaking countries," you could say "Southeast USA."

Don't be afraid to go a step deeper or to make a mistake. The wonderful thing about social media is its constant evolution. The more involved you are in learning about your readers, the easier it will be to engage them in meaningful ways.

Your target market will guide your marketing efforts to ensure you reach those who are most likely to want to read your books. Being focused when it comes to your target market will allow you to craft a clear message that resonates with readers and leads to life-long fans of your books.

Once you have developed your target market, research where these readers live on social media. An easy way to do this is to check the social media accounts of authors who are writing books your target market adores. From those accounts, you can see where readers are most active.

Check Goodreads for groups focusing on your genre or look up some Twitter chats such as #K8Chat allow you to connect directly with readers to learn more about their favorite places to hang out online.

### **Create a schedule that works for *you***

Once you've determined who your target market is and which accounts you'll be starting with, it's time to sit down and decide exactly how much time you have to commit to social media.

If social media is a part of your marketing strategy, you'll have to commit regular intervals of time to devote to your social media efforts. I suggest authors aim for one hour a day from

Monday to Friday when first starting out, and once established, aim to reduce that time by half.

By scheduling time, you make a commitment to be consistent on social media, which builds the trust readers have for you. The Internet has the memory of a goldfish, so by being consistent you remain in the memory of those online.

No one checks Facebook pages that haven't posted in weeks or Twitter accounts that post once in a blue moon. Develop a schedule that you will stick to of posts per channel per day.

My main posting schedule looks like this:

- Twitter: 12 times per day, Monday-Friday; 5 times per day Saturday-Sunday
- Facebook: 2 times per day
- Instagram: 1 time per day
- Pinterest: 1 or more times per day

Depending on your audience, your schedule may differ. Take the time to research the channel you're starting with to see how many posts per day is expected and aim to match that in your own efforts.

### **Post valuable content your readers want**

Once you know the target audience you want to reach inside and out, it should be pretty clear what your audience is after. You should be able to answer these questions easily: What is the biggest pain/issue/problem they face? How can you help? Do they seek knowledge on a subject you know well? Are they looking for an escape after a hard day of classes/work/life? What matters to them?

Pick five areas of interest to your target market and post valuable content from those five areas. For example, my five areas are: publishing, reading, and books; cats; social media and marketing; facts and productivity (think Mental Floss, life hacks); and geeky things like Doctor Who, Star Trek, and superheroes.

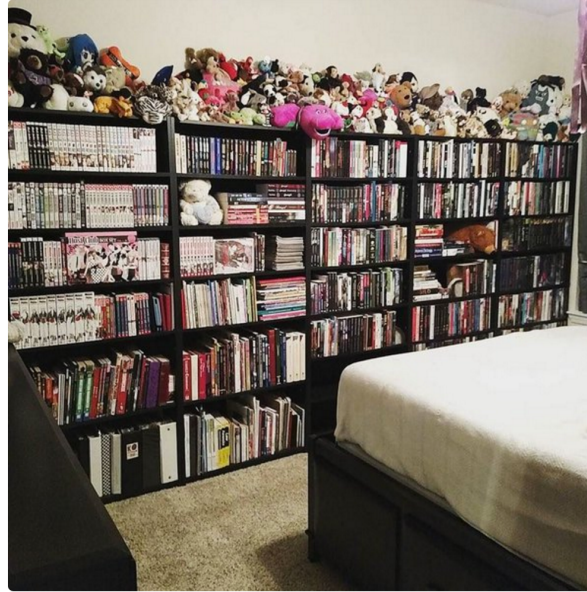
When looking for valuable content to post, remember variety is best. Try posting a combination of things in addition to cool links. Here are some types of posts you can use:

1. Pictures: Share a picture of your current read and ask your audience, "What are you reading?" Share a picture of your writing workspace. Share a picture of the stunning sunset or snow outside your window.



**Kate Tilton**  
@K8Tilton

Someone told me it was #worldbookday .... ❤️  
📖 📱 📚 #shelfie #shelf #bookshelf  
#bookshelves #sh... ift.tt/1oTAHju



Link: <https://twitter.com/K8Tilton/status/705609872235175936>

2. Questions: Ask your readers to help you name characters when you're stuck. Ask for casting suggestions for your latest book. Ask simple yes/no questions such as: "Do you like the snow?" Ask your readers what their favorite hobby, movie, book, or TV show is.

3. Quotes: Share a quote that resonates with you and your brand. Share a quote from your latest book (this is promotional, so use your own quotes sparingly). Share a quote from your current read. Share a quote from your favorite author.

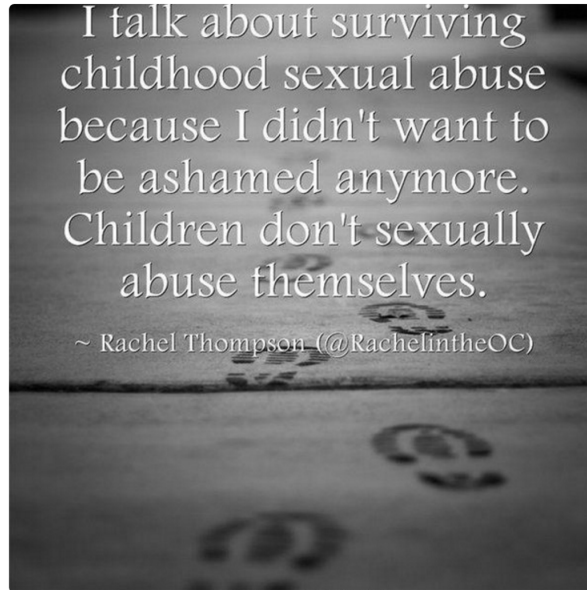


**Rachel Thompson**  
@RachelintheOC



Following

I talk about surviving #CSA because I didn't want to be ashamed anymore. Children don't sexually abuse themselves.



RETWEETS  
873

LIKES  
698



Link: <https://twitter.com/RachelintheOC/status/603785009628086272>

4. Facts: Share facts about books, publishing, and facts you found while researching for your latest book.

5. Tips: Share tips to inspire writers and readers. Share tips related to the nonfiction subject you write about.

6. What's going on in your life: Share updates about your everyday life. These little statements show readers that you are a person, just like them.



**Maggie Stiefvater** ✓  
@mstiefvater

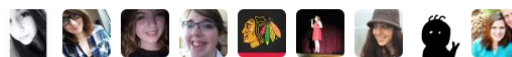


Following

Him: how was your day?  
Me: dinner is mashed potatoes and bacon

RETWEETS  
21

LIKES  
230



Link: <https://twitter.com/mstiefvater/status/707336551118860288>

And remember, unless you're writing nonfiction for fellow writers, you're trying to connect with readers who are more than likely not interested in writing their own books or publishing.

Focus, instead, on topics readers are looking for. The above ideas should help you get started with a reader-focused mind.

## **Adjust and grow**

Becoming a part of a community takes time and effort but the results are well worth it. As you continue to work on your social media efforts, adjust as needed to the changes of each platform and your own schedule and needs.

Watch what works—what generates the greatest engagement? What are your readers commenting passionately about? Focus on learning new methods to apply to your social media efforts so you are constantly growing your audience of readers.

Don't be afraid to get involved in conversations. Don't wait for readers to come to you. *Go to them.*

Follow readers interested in your genre. Look at the content they're sharing and contribute to the conversation when you have something of value to add. If a reader shares a review of a book you've read, take the time to read their review and comment with what you enjoyed about the book.

And most important of all, be yourself. Too often we are afraid to open up online and show our personality, but without that personality, we come across as boring, robot-like social media accounts.

And no one likes a robot.

So don't be afraid to let your personality shine through. If you're funny, be funny. If you're geeky, let that geek flag fly high. By letting others see your personality, you'll build stronger bonds with those who share your interests, and that's priceless.

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*Kate Tilton has been serving authors since 2010. Founder of Kate Tilton's Author Services, LLC, Kate works as an author assistant and speaker with the mission of connecting authors and readers. Kate is the creator and host of #K8chat (Thursdays at 9 p.m. Eastern on Twitter) and has appeared on popular media such as Publishers Weekly and Library Journal. You can find Kate on [katetilton.com](http://katetilton.com).*

# Get to Know Nook

**New promotional opportunities emerge, plus new ways to read Nook books**

*By Jennifer Stevenson*



*With Eve Henry*

There are more ways to produce books, more options for authors, and several new ways to promote books on the Nook platform, said Julia Coblentz, senior marketing manager for Nook Press.

At the NINC World conference last September, Coblentz shared what's new with Nook and tackled key questions on promotions and partnerships.

## **Nook history and royalty structure**

Nook traces its roots back four years, when it was originally called PubIt. It became Nook in 2013.

To publish on Nook, authors can bring an epub to the Nook Press platform, or create an epub from text documents such as Word, .html, .txt or .rtf.

Making edits within an epub at the Nook site is also possible. Authors can also make changes at any time to their cover or metadata.

Once an author has supplied their content to Nook, their book is on sale within 72 hours.

Royalties for books priced \$2.99 to \$9.99 are 65 percent, slightly less than Amazon's 70 percent.

Royalties for books priced below \$2.99 or above \$9.99 are 40 percent, which exceeds Kindle's 35 percent royalty.

For print editions, authors can upload a PDF and their book will be ready in a week, Coblentz said. These editions are sent only to the author, who can then resell them.

The Nook print-on-demand (POD) service will also assist authors with their promotional needs for physical copies of their work.

## **Nook books accessible on any device**

Coblentz reminded the audience to tell readers that you don't need a Nook device to buy

books from Nook.

You can read them on your own technology, such as your phone, tablet, or computer. There are free Nook reading apps on [BarnesandNoble.com](http://BarnesandNoble.com), Google Play, iTunes, and on the Windows store.

The app automatically syncs between devices, and free content comes with the app—readers get two free books with their new app download.

“Nook is spreading the news about the app by giving books away with partners,” Coblentz said. Partnerships include a program with Amtrak Guest Rewards in the Northeast Corridor, Six Flags, [Grandparents.com](http://Grandparents.com), Liberty Travel, and eRewards.

For those purchasing a device, the Samsung Galaxy Tab S2 Nook features an interface that can incorporate pictures and video.

Nook spreads the word on new books through device notifications, [BN.com](http://BN.com), and by directly emailing customers based on their past purchases. Merchandising messages are integrated into groups such as, “500 books under \$5.”

### **Nook First and other promotions**

The Nook First program enables authors to publish to Nook with more than four weeks of promotion, such as including a book in both the digital customer email and in the on-device promotion through push notifications.

Nook First is nonexclusive, enabling authors to still sell wide. The only rule is that enrollment in Nook First must be the book’s first time in digital format.

Coblentz advised NINC members to give the program about six to eight weeks of lead time.

Category promotions are featured in weekly category-based emails to Nook customers and on-site. “These are targeted genre promos,” Coblentz said. “It doesn’t have to be a new book.”

Nook is also paying attention to the holiday cycle in its promotion schedule, which is a benefit to authors whose work might be best promoted during a specific time frame during the year.

Promotions are offered throughout the year, but you must first establish a title through sales and reviews to qualify. Coblentz recommends doing a box set or bundle to find the “value” shopper, but Nook doesn’t yet have a program for box set promotions.

She added that limited-time promotions continue to work, as do social media tools.

### **Nook blog**

In February 2015, Nook launched its blog to bring self-publishing voices to Nook readers. Advantages of the blog include cross-channel promotion at the Nook Blog, Facebook, Twitter, and Google+.

Coblentz said guest blogs are always welcome and they will cross-post author blogs on a case-by-case basis. Contact [Coblentz](#) to get involved with the Nook blog.

### **Questions from the audience**

*Q: How do we get our book into a free giveaway with partners? How can we get into Nook First and*



*the blog?*

A: The books in the free giveaway are elected by the merchandising team. If you are interested, contact [Julia Coblantz](#).

*Q: I can't seem to put my first-in-series free on Nook. How do I get that?*

A: Nook doesn't offer that now, but you can do it through Draft2Digital or other aggregators. We're aware of the interest.

*Q: I'm an author assistant. Some of my clients' BN links have broken. What can I look for to figure out which client and which books I might need to fix the links for?*

A: We have a new website in the last couple months and that led to a lot of broken links. Check your links and then [email Nook Press](#) to ask about this issue.

*Q: For box sets, do you prefer 3D covers or flat covers?*

A: We prefer flat covers. The 3D covers are tough because in thumbnail you can't see anything. 3D covers also don't fit well on the site page structure.

*Q: What kind of print books do you produce?*

A: Paperback and hardcover. You upload a PDF and there are videos to help you design it.

*Q: Are there partnership programs suitable for romance novels?*

A: We developed our partnership programs with reach in mind. Lot of romance, thrillers, mysteries, a little science fiction.

*Q: Can you tell us more about pre-orders?*

A: We launched a limited preorder release in Spring 2015. We're about to roll it out for everybody; but we're still working on it.

*Q: There are more subcategories now. But I don't see how I can get my book into narrower subcategories within, say, paranormal—witches, vampires, etc. These categories are on the website but not available when you list it.*

A: Ask the tech group at [Nook Press](#).

*Q: If we use some of the categories in our keywords, as on Amazon, will that help?*

A: Definitely include them in the keywords. Put the category in your title, too, or make it part of your series title.

*Q: To get accounting for preorders, how do I do that?*

A: The preorder counts toward your ranking the day someone puts in the order, but the sale itself counts the day the book goes on sale and is delivered. (Coblantz added she didn't

know exactly how to get the reporting.)

*Q: When you roll out preorders, will it be asset-less preorders or a dummy file preorder? Authors prefer asset-less because sometimes a dummy file gets delivered by mistake.*

*A: Use a dummy file. Upload the real file ten days out. For technical questions, contact the [tech team](#), and for blog pitches and links to merchandising, [contact Coblentz](#) directly.*

*Q: Can we get information about who buys our books?*

*A: We don't release our demographics information.*

### **Advice for authors new to Nook**

- Provide full metadata for your title.
- Link your series, and include Nook in your promotions.
- You can become an affiliate. Links to the affiliate program can be found on Nook's FAQ page. Nook offers 6% to 9% payback for referrals via the affiliate button.

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*Prior to joining Nook in 2010, Julia Coblentz was a marketing director at illustrated book publisher Abrams. She also marketed a wide variety of fiction and nonfiction during her six and a half years at Random House. Coblentz has a background in book marketing and digital content development and has handled marketing for Nook Press for nearly five years.*

*Jennifer Stevenson writes comedy: funny fantasy, funny paranormal romance, romcom, and funny paranormal women's fiction. Her series are Hinky Chicago, Slacker Demons, Backstage Boys, and, coming soon, Coed Demon Sluts. She is a founding member of Book View Cafe.*

*Eve Henry, Nink's copy editor, also contributed to this article.*

# The Art of the Addictive Novel

A character's ability to adapt and react proves a potent story driver

By Catherine Nichols



In January, Adelle Waldman wrote an [excellent essay](#) for *The New Yorker's* Page Turner blog called "The Ideal Marriage, According to Novels."

In it, she notes that men and women write about marriage differently. Roth and Bellow write about mysterious attractions and breast shape; Ferrante and Austen write about the practical quest to find an intellectual and emotional peer.

While reading Waldman's essay, I remembered a quote from Douglas Adams:

*"It is difficult to be sat on all day, every day, by some other creature, without forming an opinion on them. On the other hand, it is perfectly possible to sit all day, every day, on top of another creature and not have the slightest thought about them whatsoever."*

In Adams's context, he's talking about a horse and rider, but I thought: Female novelists have been writing from the role of the horse.

In literature and life, it's been a woman's survival tactic to understand and adapt to the character of a man, whether her boyfriend, husband, or father.

Even with property rights, women are still often the meteorologists of mood—and FEMA when things get bad. Men haven't been forced to form opinions about the minds of women to the same degree, and Waldman makes the strong case that there's a difference in the ways relationships are described in their fiction.

Waldman writes: "Intelligence, taste, conversation—these are the terms on which the heroines of novels by women again and again evaluate their love interests. Male authors, on the other hand, tend to proceed differently."

Even in portraying Kitty and Levin's complex marriage in *Anna Karenina*, Tolstoy's Levin sees Kitty in the same simple [terms](#).

"It was the childlike expression of her face, combined with the slim beauty of her figure," he muses. Her smile "always transported [him] into an enchanted world where he felt softened, and overflowing with tenderness as he remembered feeling on rare occasions in his early

childhood.”

Waldman’s piece is so well-considered, and I’d like to add to her point. I think the thing she’s found in the women’s novels goes beyond the search for intellectual connection.

There’s a novelistic technique that early nineteenth century female writers invented, which has been used primarily by female novelists ever since.

It’s a technique that goes deep into the soul of the novel itself. It’s something like the blues, or early rock n’ roll—something artistically explosive invented under circumstances of oppression. It’s the technique of adaptation.

Adaptation is a kaleidoscopic way of understanding human nature, and a novelistic technique for showing that character isn’t fixed.

In real life, people change constantly, depending on who’s in the room, or what they’ve each understood of the others’ nature and mood.

**Character isn’t only a ball rolling down a hill, these women write it like a game of billiards, with endless potential shifts and ricochets.**

Female characters aren’t just judging which man’s mind will give them the best hope for a respectful marriage; they are describing and creating a frame for the ways people create themselves in relation to others.

This is the way adaptation plays out: Person A comprehends some information about person B’s nature from what B says or does, and that changes how A approaches her afterward.

It sounds simple, but I think it’s very difficult to write and nearly impossible to write well. Almost no one tries. Jane Austen and Charlotte Brontë each did this over and over.

Here’s an example from *Pride and Prejudice*:

The first time Mr. Darcy tries to express his interest in Elizabeth, he asks her to dance, and she refuses.

Later, he sees her reading, and he comments to other people in the room that reading is important and his library is huge. *Really great library at Darcy’s house*. Elizabeth, however, doesn’t take the hint.

Any shy person might recognize the arrows in his flirting quiver—standing around near her and saying to his friends that he likes the things that he thinks she likes. It’s as effective for him as it usually is for the rest of us; she doesn’t know—or doesn’t want to acknowledge—that flirting is taking place.

Then, the next time Darcy is alone with Elizabeth and his friends, he adapts. He makes an unflattering observation about Mr. Bingley’s personality, offered to Elizabeth as a gift. He’s changing his approach based on a comment she made in the previous scene.

Darcy can only change within the range of his own character, which is shy (he’d never say this in another context), clever (no one fully gets the insult except for Elizabeth), and sort of mean.

**It’s an incredibly efficient scene, and it’s how Darcy, a man with few lines and no third person narration spilling his secrets, can be as well-developed a character as**

## Elizabeth herself.

Darcy's original attraction to Elizabeth is described the way Waldman figures male-authored love stories in general. He notices that she is pretty, has a nice figure and her eyes seem smart; on this topic, he, via Austen, does not go into specifics.

No physical description can ever be as specific as the way dialogue telegraphs thought. Austen gives us much more direct access to the attractions of his character than to the beauty of Elizabeth's figure.

In the scene about Mr. Bingley's character—in which Elizabeth doesn't buy Darcy's diss of a friend—Mr. Darcy speaks with greater meaning than any of his friends. He sometimes puts covert significance for separate people into a single statement.

The arguments he makes are well-reasoned. From the perspective of a writer, that's a real trick: it's hard to make a character sound smart while they're also wrong.

Elizabeth counters this with her own style of intelligence, which makes Darcy adapt as the conversation continues: Austen, here, is doing a backflip between trapezes.

Instead of a character being defined at the start and continuing to make his or her characteristic speech and actions through to the last page, Austen's characters change from page to page.

The adaptations are shown directly through dialogue and action, connecting the reader (who has access to these things the way they generally don't, to vague allusions to beauty or allure) to the changes and the reasons for them—as well as the effect among all the characters that these changes create.

## **This technique makes a romantic plot like a murder mystery; readers have the same clues as the detective.**

When Elizabeth falls in love with Darcy, it's for reasons we've experienced ourselves. We're in the laboratory of human nature.

For contrast, take Romeo and Juliet, who probably speak to one another more than Elizabeth and Darcy, and yet the cause and progress of their love is mysterious to the audience.

Even Shakespeare's comic banterers, Beatrice and Benedick change only because of outside forces, never because of something the other has said. Their jokes are only funny—never the key to the next step of the unfolding drama. Their personalities, and understanding of one another, are fixed whether they are in hate or love.

Charlotte Brontë takes us a step deeper. *Jane Eyre* uses almost every potential complexity of the adaptability technique and uses it to paint characters not only vividly but even luridly.

Both Jane and Mr. Rochester are moving targets: neither of them settles into a single set of characteristics. They always have a restless connection.

In other words, the attraction Waldman describes as based in character doesn't always lead to respect or an ideal marriage, it can also lead to big, off-kilter, bizarre and thrilling love—it has no less of the dirty force of love based in other, male-valORIZED qualities.

Where Austen might be making a pattern for all love, the way marriage ought to be, Brontë

uses the adaptation technique to make her characters and their connection idiosyncratic.

Waldman describes their union like this: “Rarely is the inner life of another so wholly congenial, so perfectly aligned with one’s own sense of self, as is Rochester’s with Jane Eyre’s.”

This point is one of a very few places I disagree with her. I don’t think their inner lives are so congenial. Unlike Elizabeth Bennet, Jane Eyre would have married her eventual husband on the most unequal of terms, with enormous misunderstandings between them; she only didn’t because she found out it would have been bigamy.

Even after their wedding is called off, the mad wife is revealed, and Rochester is purring about the possibility of using violence to keep Jane against her will—Jane quickly forgives him.

In the last third of the book, godly St. John Rivers offers Jane something like the on-paper version of an ideal marriage. He respects her mind. He hopes they’ll travel together. He looks after her when she’s weak and supports her professional goals and independence when she’s strong. He’s a good conversationalist.

Isn’t this what women are supposed to want?

Women—people—probably often skip reading the St. John Rivers chapters because they’re boring. Through all of Jane’s adaptive and intelligent calculation, Jane Eyre isn’t a story of finding dignity in marriage, but experiencing visceral desire.

Rochester, despite being Jane’s match, doesn’t come to understand his own flaws and treat Jane as an equal—though Brontë gives him some of the speeches of a man who believes he’s doing that.

His actions never seem as convinced; there’s no final version of his personality. Rochester’s character is drawn a double way—he wants a pure and innocent heart of his own, but he gets Jane’s through lying, manipulating, and threatening, as well as adapting.

Readers can see it like this: There’s an inflection in his dialogue when he first understands that Jane can’t be bought, that she isn’t the person he assumes she was at first.

He changes his mind about her because of what she says and her astringent manner. He is her boss, and he can tell her what to do, which makes him think he has the right to her free conversation—but he reads in her face that she’s annoyed when he commands her to speak about her own thoughts.

At this point he’s frantic about keeping her good opinion and changes his approach: he’s kind to her, and she accepts his friendship. That works for a while, but he assumes, since she’s not too particular about many social conventions, that she might be open to sleeping with him after a romantic moment.

When she doesn’t, he has to come up with a new plan—a mean-spirited plot forcing her to watch him courting a beautiful, nasty woman.

Idiosyncratic Jane likes that kind of thing—appreciates the intelligence, however twisted, that it evinces. She confesses her love while scolding him for his badness. Love based in character can go deep into the weird psyche, and these female novelists aren’t making lesson-plan romances any more than their male peers.

Waldman suggests that the women’s attention to character leads them to value respectful marriages more highly than men—I think that’s only part of the picture. Women have developed techniques to write about the ways personality can excite desire; even more, they

developed techniques to write about the ways people can change one another.

**The adaptation technique isn't just an efficient way of telegraphing psychological depth.**

**It hits the reader like rock n' roll.**

It doesn't have to be done at the level of genius to be incredibly catchy and exciting, but there's no ceiling to its potential for complexity or connection to the audience.

It's often used for romantic pairs, but that's not the only possibility. Contrary to its reputation as Shakespearean, I think *Breaking Bad* draws heavily on the adaptation technique.

It's in *Gone With the Wind*, *Harry Potter*, *Twilight*, and *The Hunger Games*.

I don't think it's a coincidence all those books have found massive popularity and obsessive followings. It makes books feel addictive. It lets us read the intentions of non-point-of-view characters naturally, the way we read actual people.

It's not everywhere in the canon. It isn't in the work of George Eliot, Woolf, Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, or Dickens; however romantic and psychological they are, those authors use other methods.

Where the free indirect discourse of Flaubert, the minimalism of Hemingway, and maximalism of Nabokov are often credited with marking the great countries on the map of modern literary fiction, I think the geniuses of the adaptable character are under-praised.

Brontë and Austen are often lauded, of course, but for irony, psychology, and free indirect discourse: rarely for the scale of this achievement.

A comedy of manners sounds like someone tittering about Mr. Collins picking up the wrong fork. But these women have created one of our most powerful and effective literary techniques using the materials of their underdog—or under-horse—role.

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*Catherine Nichols lives in Massachusetts. Follow her on Twitter [@clnichols6](#). Her work has appeared in [Jezebel.com](#), [Electric Literature](#), [Seattle Review of Books](#) and [Open Letters Monthly](#). This article first appeared in [Jezebel](#) and is used with the publisher's permission.*

# Creating a Writing Plan

## The Chunky Method—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.*

In my last article [Nink, February 2016], you discovered the size of your writing chunk, and what that means for how you work.

Now we'll use that information to predict and improve how you work toward a deadline. In this article, you'll create your Chunky Method Writing Plan.

Most working writers are familiar with the concept of a daily word count, but the Chunky Plan takes it a step further, providing you with data you can quickly scale and tailor to your style and your circumstances.

### **Step 1: What's the word count of your target manuscript?**

Although standards for length can vary widely due to electronic content options, most of us still have a project target in mind. Make an educated guess, because you need a total word count on which to base your Chunky formula.

For the purposes of explanation, we're going to use a nice round figure for our target word count: 100,000 words.

### **Step 2: Planned over-writing**

Stephen King and many working writers I know plan for the first drafts of their manuscripts to be about 10 percent higher than the desired word count.

Write too far under, and you're likely to revert to adding unneeded filler, spending too much time in description, or keeping scenes that don't accomplish much.

If you go too far over, you'll find yourself in the painful, unenviable position of needing to quickly axe large chunks of your manuscript.



Here's an added bonus to planned over-writing: grace. There are days where I look at my accomplished chunk and think, "Well, that's part of the doomed 10% for sure."

Think of it as creative margin—you know you've got a few words to spare, so the pressure to make every first-draft word sparkling and perfect eases up.

I've found that a little grace in the form of planned overwriting goes a long way toward boosting productivity. It doesn't have to be perfect, it just has to be written.

So, take your target word count and multiply it by 1.1, rounding it up to a nice even number. Using our example target of 100,000 words, our target will now be increased to 110,000.

### Step 3: Divide by your chunk

There's an old joke, "How do you eat an elephant? One bite at a time." That's a silly example of how to apply the Chunky concept to your manuscript—and you likely do some form of this to set your daily word or page count.

It sounds obvious, but remember that this tactic uses the powerful truth that you don't have to write the whole thing right now, just the current chunk of it. You'll be amazed how energizing and empowering this smaller goal can be.

Just for clarification, I'll work this math on our example using a 1,000-word chunk.

1. Example word count + over-writing (110% of word count):	110,000 words
2. Example chunk:	1,000 words
3. 110,000 divided by 1,000	110 chunks

This tells us that it will take 110 chunks to reach the end of our example manuscript.

The path from here to "The End" is 110 chunks—that's news you can use!

### Step 4: How many chunks in your week?

You may think the key to productivity is how many words you can write. It is—if we wrote in a perfect world where nothing else competed for our time.

But we don't live in a perfect world.

As a matter of fact, most of us are struggling to get the words down in a highly imperfect world, one that seems at odds with our writing wishes.

The key here is not how many words, but how often you write them. How often per week do you write? This question helps you take the Chunky path we're creating and give it a home in the real world.

I never find it helpful to think in terms of every day, because days are rarely the same. Adjusting our thinking to plot in terms of weeks gives us a little wiggle room for the real world to poke its nose in our business—and if your life is like mine, that happens all too often.

Back to our example:

Look at our 1,000-word-chunk writer—we'll call her Wendy—and how long her manuscript will take her to write:

- If Wendy gets two chunks per week, it will take her 55 weeks, or just over a year.
- If Wendy gets three chunks per week, it will take 37 weeks—about 9 months.
- If Wendy gets four chunks per week, she can finish her draft in 28 weeks—about 7 months.

We can spend a lot of time beating ourselves up for how many books we can or can't write in a year. We can wish and hope or complain, or we can deal head-on with facts that we can use to make solid plans, and perhaps motivate us toward making changes.

We can also plan to avoid trouble. Smart Chunky writers know that there will *always* be weeks where they cannot write at full speed. Vacations, family events, holidays—all these have an impact on our productivity.

Workers in more traditional jobs plan for these things, and so should you.

So before Wendy declares her deadline to be met in week 28, she needs to insert some padding into the weeks where other things will command her time.

Of course, not every obstacle gives us advance notice. Life can blindside you without warning. All the more reason to plan for the things you do know in advance.

A smarter plan for Wendy will take into consideration the three weeks she won't get any writing done and adjust her target to 31 weeks. That's a dependable, realistic goal she can build on for success.

You can use a spreadsheet and a calendar to calculate this data. In fact, you could do the whole thing on your smartphone.

Still, I know many writers who just aren't numbers people. In case that's you, I've developed a free tool (details in my bio). Fill in the blanks and watch the Chunky Calculator set out your Chunky Plan for how many weeks it will take you to finish your manuscript. You can craft dozens of scenarios in minutes and see what level of productivity gets you to the writing productivity goals you want.

Now you've got a plan based on your current productivity. In the next article, we'll learn how to use the Chunky Method to shift from the speed you've got now to the speed you want next.

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*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. To obtain a free copy of the Chunky Calculator, visit [www.alliepleiter.com](http://www.alliepleiter.com) or text the word CHUNKY to 22828.*

## Forensic Files

### Can DNA be used to identify multiple assailants in a three-decade-old rape?

*By D. P. Lyle, MD*



*Question:* Was it possible in 1969 (or is it even possible today) to determine if a woman found dead in sub-zero temperatures was raped by more than one assailant?

If so, how could this be accomplished? Could a pathologist conclude that the woman was raped, as opposed to consensual intercourse, even if there is an absence of physical evidence such as bruising?

What language would the pathologist employ when writing his conclusions? Could evidence from 1969 be preserved (how would it be preserved?) and used today to identify suspects through DNA testing?

*Answer:* DNA for testing comes from the genetic material found in the nuclei of the body's cells. Every cell in the body contains a nucleus, with the notable exception of red blood cells (RBCs), which do not contain nuclei. However, white blood cells (WBCs) do.

DNA testing of blood targets the DNA found in the nuclei of the WBCs.

Adequate DNA samples for testing have been gleaned from semen stains, bite marks, sweat, sputum, hair, and saliva—even from the saliva left behind by licking a stamp or sealing an envelope. In the case of saliva from stamps or bites, the DNA tested comes from the cells that line the mouth (called buccal cells), which are constantly shed into the saliva.

Hair does not contain cells and thus no DNA, but hair follicles do have DNA, and a single hair follicle may yield enough DNA for testing.

As you can see, very small samples may be enough.

DNA is a fairly hardy molecule and survives time, freezing, drying, mixing with other materials, and many other adverse circumstances. It does not survive heating, however. Heat denatures, or destroys, the DNA strands.

It is important to note that DNA testing does not require intact cells, merely intact DNA. This means that clotted blood, dried semen, and tissue fragments found under victims' fingernails might yield enough DNA for conclusive testing.

The sub-zero temperatures in your scenario would serve to protect the DNA and would

thus help the coroner by preserving better samples for his evaluation.

Yes, he would be able to determine that there had been two assailants, since each would have his own distinctive DNA pattern. The finding of two different DNA patterns in the semen sample obtained from the victim would prove this and when the suspects were apprehended, each could be matched to his own contribution to that sample.

Mixing the semen would not alter this finding in any way since each DNA strand would be unchanged. It's not like mixing blue paint with yellow paint to make green paint, but rather like mixing a bunch of tiny blue beads with tiny yellow beads.

From a distance, they might appear as though they had melted together to form a green mixture, but on close examination, each tiny bead would be seen to have remained intact and separate. DNA strands don't "melt" into one another.

DNA can last for years, decades, even centuries. It has been found in Egyptian mummies, exhumed bodies, and samples stored from very old crimes.

Recently, DNA evidence linked Gary Leon Ridgway to the famous string of prostitute murders known as the Green River Murders in Washington State. The DNA evidence connected him to murders that occurred in the early 1980s. This was possible because the DNA was handled and stored properly. Typically, the sample is dried and placed in a nonreactive container such as a glass vial.

The problem of determining if a rape occurred is a question for the jury. Rape is not a medical term, but rather a legal term.

The coroner could determine if penetration occurred and if semen were present. If he found trauma to the vagina or to other body parts that suggest the victim was struck or restrained, he might conclude that in his opinion the intercourse was not consensual.

Still, it would require a judge or a jury to determine whether a rape occurred or not.

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*D. P. Lyle, MD, is a regular contributor to Nink. His book *Forensics for Dummies* released its second edition in February. Learn more about his work at [www.dplylemd.com](http://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>*

# The Mad Scribbler

## The Tipping Point

By Laura Resnick



*"There is nothing permanent except change."  
—Heraclitus (c. 535 – c. 475 BCE)*

A couple of months ago, I talked with a friend who is so fed up with a major publisher that this author has decided to pull a delivered book, buy back the multi-book contract, and walk away.

I wasn't that surprised, since I'm aware of a number of writers who've made similar decisions with regard to this particular company, which is notorious for being glacially slow to edit, pay for, and release books.

But my friend's literary agent was cautionary about canceling the contract and walking away, warning the author that it might not be possible to sell those books to another publisher.

To which the writer replied that if the agent couldn't sell the books elsewhere, that wasn't a problem; this author is experienced in the indie world and has a confident estimate of what the books can earn if self-published. The writer would be satisfied with that path and those earnings for this work—earnings from which the agent would be excluded.

In the decades before self-publishing was so viable, an agent would obviously earn nothing from books he either tried unsuccessfully to sell a second time or chose not to make any attempt to re-sell.

The vital difference these days, of course, is that the writer is going to earn income from these books (and has earnings from other self-published works which affirm that assumption), whether or not the agent also earns from them. The agent can't threaten or eliminate the author's potential earnings from these works by declining to market the books elsewhere.

So the writer was free to make a decision about the current problem (things are going badly at a publisher) without being limited by the agent's abilities or intentions.

Those books will eventually be published and generate money with or without the agent's involvement. And this is accepted and understood by both parties (though I gather the agent

was a little startled upon being reminded of it).

This is an example of why I don't talk much about agents anymore.

We're approaching the tenth anniversary of when I fired my last literary agent. After selling about ten books on my own to Harlequin/Silhouette at the start of my career, I sought representation when I wanted to expand my career beyond that company.

In the ensuing years, I ran through four agents. All of these experiences were horrible and costly, and they all ended very badly.

Yet I hadn't hired scammers and charlatans. One of my ex-agents was experienced and respectable, and the other three were (and still are) extremely successful and well-established. Moreover, I had researched and interviewed them all thoroughly before hiring them. So it should have gone well, but it never did.

I did a little doomed agent-querying after firing my fourth agent, then I started submitting to publishers on my own. I soon found I was getting better response times from editors and better offers than my agents had been getting for me, and the literary lawyer I retained was negotiating better contractual clauses, while my legal fees were a fraction of what agency commissions would have cost me. Additionally, I was much less stressed without an agent.

Nonetheless, everywhere I went, online or in person, every editor, certainly every agent, and almost every writer I saw was telling new and aspiring writers how essential literary agents were.

They also said this to career writers who, like me, had been burned out by years of bad experiences with one agent after another, to writers who were unhappy with their current agents and thinking of leaving, and to writers who'd been dumped by their previous agents and kept getting rejected by the agents they were querying.

So I started conveying the message that I dearly wished had been presented to me years earlier: You could certainly run a writing career without an agent, and it might even be better to work without one.

But I found this proposition was seldom warmly embraced. Sometimes my comments were dismissed as bad advice or ill-considered nonsense. At other times, I was framed as an anomaly, as someone who could work without an agent for specific reasons that didn't apply to other people.

(Probably the most common misstatement circulated was that I could do it because I was successful when I tried it; in fact, I was a [midlist](#) writer who turned to self-representation after my latest novel tanked, my publisher canceled my contract, my agent stopped taking my calls, and no other agent would touch me.)

Although some other writers were coming to similar conclusions, I was growing frustrated with the broad wall of "conventional wisdom" I kept beating my head against.

As difficult as this may be to imagine, I got increasingly strident about the subject of literary agents. I wrote about my anti-agent views in this Nink column, on various blogs, on e-lists, in articles and essays, and I spoke about it at conventions, in speeches, on program panels, in hotel bars, on podcasts, in line at the grocery store, to captive passengers in economy seats on commercial airplanes ....

I never proposed that all writers should cease working with agents. Rather, I advocated that

both working with an agent *and* working without an agent should be seen as equal, reasonable, and viable career paths for writers.

I also regularly argued against the many accepted assertions about literary agents that had been proved unreliable by my own experiences and the experiences of the many writers (and occasional editors) who were sharing their stories with me.

Some people thanked me for speaking up, while others considered me an idiot or a crank. And some people, even if they thought some of my points were valid, got tired of me.

I was told there were people who eventually stopped reading or listening to my words as soon as I got on the subject of agents. And sometimes I was too aggressive and offended people, mostly because I was all of out patience with the subject.

But I realized recently that it's a topic I don't discuss much anymore—not even when it's waved temptingly right under my nose. I seldom write about agents these days, and I no longer pounce when someone brings up the subject.

Because I don't feel it's necessary anymore. The business has changed so extraordinarily since 2006, when deciding to work without an agent felt like stepping off a cliff.

The advent of a fruitful and extensive self-publishing market, the rise of indie authors, the spread of the “hybrid” author, the growth of small presses and niche publishers, and the surge of publishing ventures using nontraditional business models have all brought new people into the industry who don't follow the old rules—and meanwhile, many in the old guard have embraced new ways of doing things.

These days, I know many writers who work without an agent, as well as many others who use an agent for some things but not for others, like the friend I mentioned at the start of this article.

Sure, I still see some writers (and many editors, and most agents) asserting that a writer must have an agent ... but I don't need to contradict them anymore, because I see so many other people instantly contradicting them.

I think our profession has reached the tipping point where enough writers are making enough different choices about how to run their careers that the “conventional wisdom” about agents is no longer inflexible and universal.

Which means I get to take a well-deserved rest from yammering about it.

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*Laura Resnick is currently contracted through book ten of the Esther Diamond urban fantasy series, which multiple agents over the years declined to represent.*

# You Might Have Missed This

## Great links for enlightenment or procrastination

*By Ashley McConnell*



Writers' estates are something we rarely think about—we're going to live forever, right? But our works are more deathless than we are—if anyone can find the rights to them after we're gone. The recently deceased Bud Webster wrote an article about tracking down rights on SFWA authors and it's still [something to think about](#).

Got a deal pending with an agent or publisher you're not too familiar with? Before you sign anything, check it out at Absolute Write, [Preditors and Editors](#), and/or [Writer Beware](#). These are the watchdogs of our industry, and they are on the writer's side. And while Writer Beware appears on the SFWA site, that should not make the mystery, romance, or any-other-genre writer hesitate to use it.

Even the most technophobe among us know what "LOL" means online (however much we may abhor such linguistic travesties!). But did you know that there's an equivalent in every language? In French it's "mdr", for "mort du rire." You can find [internet-specific abbreviations](#) in Chinese, Canadian, Tunisian, German, Arabic ... There's a murder mystery clue in there somewhere!

Are you looking for something unusual? Are you dying for a guide for the hidden, the new, the surprising? Check out the [Atlas Obscura](#), your map to the things you never thought would show up on a map, including xylotheques, paper houses, crowdsourced space archaeology, the location of the largest dens of garter snakes in the world, and the grave of Chang and Eng.

Want to make a map for a fantasy world? This [map generator](#) is public domain. Various options, including screenshots and 3-D.

For those who just can't wait to find a new way to waste time, er, test their linguistic skills, the Oxford English Dictionary has a [Timeline Challenge](#): Do you know when particular words entered the English language (or at least were verifiably first published in English)? Take the test.

I Love a Mystery, or, [Birdie, Birdie, Who's Got the Birdie?](#) (Or in this case, the Maltese Falcon.)



What earthly use is Pinterest for writers? [Kirsten Oliphant has opinions](#).

## On trademark, copyright and ISBNs

There is a HUGE amount of confusion about what ISBNs are for, how to get them, and why writers should have them.

I've seen people say that they "buy" ISBNs from second-party sellers such as Smashwords (you can't; what they're selling you is a license to use their numbers), or that "you have to have it for print editions but not e-books" (you don't technically have to have it for either, but they are just as important for e-books as they are for print to uniquely identify a particular edition of your book), or that you need a new ISBN if you put a new cover on your book (you don't).

ISBNs are industry identifiers. [Get the straight scoop](#) from Bowker, which is the only US agent for the [International Standard Book Number Agency](#).

Lacy Williams posted to NINCLink a reminder about the reversion-of-rights-after-35-years on copyright; find the information at <http://www.copyright.gov/docs/203.html>. (Thanks for letting me use this, Lacy!)

[Can you copyright a universe?](#) Paramount Studios thinks so. The courts may disagree.

Trademark is the first cousin to copyright, and writers are often concerned about what the consequences are of infringement. But [it's not impossible for the little guy to win](#).

The Society of Authors is [proposing draft legislation](#) in the UK to protect authors.

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*Ashley McConnell has published seventeen novels and several short stories, including one in the first NINC anthology, Cast of Characters. Her first novel was nominated for the Bram Stoker Award. She was the Registrar for the 2011 NINC conference and was the NINC Treasurer in 2013 and 2014. In addition to her fiction work, Ashley has written nonfiction about writing, science, research and development negotiations and acquisitions, corporate policies, physical security, and the culture of large companies. She is currently engaged in backlist publishing and developing a new mystery series.*



*Founded in 1989*

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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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*Complete committee member listings are available on the website.*

- 2016 Conference Chair: Julie Leto
- Authors Coalition Reps: Pat Roy & Leslie Thompson
- Blog Coordinator: Patricia Rosemoor
- Membership Chair: Mallory Kane
- Nominating Committee Chair: Victoria Thompson
- JoAnn Grote
- Lori Handeland
- Debra Holland
- Charlotte Hubbard
- Julie Ortolon
- Technology Chair: Erica Ridley
- Volunteer Jobs List Coordinator: Dianne Despain

## Central Coordinator

Novelists, Inc. c/o Terese Ramin

P.O. Box 54, Hartland MI 48353

[admin@ninc.com](mailto:admin@ninc.com)

*Address changes may be made on the website. Members without internet access may send changes to the Central Coordinator.*

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