



# NINK

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## *Nink* May 2016

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# President's Voice

*By Diana Peterfreund*



"Write every day."

Who has heard that piece of advice? To be honest, it was never one that worked particularly well for me.

I tend to write in long intensive bursts once I get into a story, pounding out thousands of words a day until it's done, forgoing social time, family time—heck, even meals—in my obsession with my current work in progress.

After the flood, I step back and wait for the well to fill with another story idea that won't let me go. That's the way writing has always worked best for me.

But times change. With two kiddos and a writing organization to look after these days, I'm even busier than when I had a day job. I keep searching for that elusive time-management article that will get the wheels turning.

I've made goal charts and set myself word count challenges. From Brigid Schulte's book *Overwhelmed*, I learned about the trap of "time confetti," in which the free time a person has is so shredded and separated that it's difficult to make meaningful use out of it.

That resonated with me, as it so often seems that I've barely gotten into my work when my baby wakes up from her nap and the world intrudes on my fantasies again.

And yet, back in my twenties, iPod buds in place in my ears, I used to write in crowded break rooms during my lunch hour, or sitting on the N train, jostling under the river from Queens to Manhattan.

I wrote on an AlphaSmart in a tent in the middle of the Australian outback while I waited for my billy can to boil. I finished five whole books in less than four years like that. Is my inability to make use of my "time confetti" these days a sign of an aging brain, or an indication that I've got more mental-capacity consuming priorities now than a Manhattan call center job or kangaroos pawing at my bedroll?

Last month, I decided on a new experiment. For better or worse, the era of swinging single writerhood is long over, and my baby won't be ready for preschool until January. Time confetti or not, I needed to do my best. I girded my loins to write every day.

Spoiler alert: I did *not* write every day.

However, I wrote most days. Sometimes I got up early and pounded out a few hundred or even a thousand words. Sometimes I typed in the car while one kid was at gym class and the other snoozed in

the backseat. Once, all I managed was this column.

A lot of the words were utter crap. My friends, seeing my accountability posts on Facebook, asked me what I was working on.

“Nothing of note,” I told them. “I’m getting into shape. These are the first few puffing laps around the track.”

Somehow, it was easier to devote time confetti to something for which I didn’t have a deadline, a promise, or even a plan. But there are snippets, scenes, even whole chapters that I quite like, and with work, I can make them part of a coherent and even quality whole.

Obviously, I’m writing this column before April 30, but I’ve already managed a healthy five figures of new words, a chunk of book that even vaguely resembles a proposal. The laps are coming easier now.

I don’t know if I’ll ever be a write-every-day type, but at least I’ve proved that there’s always space for a fresh start.

One of the things I admire about NINC members is their willingness to try new methods—of publishing, of formatting, even of writing. I’ve watched conversations on our loop about writers with decades of experience forging new paths, or even just trying out new software.

It’s easy to become complacent or fearful and say “oh, no, this method won’t work for me.” But it may be worth it to step back and give it a try for a month.

You never know what you’ll learn.

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

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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.*

## General Announcements

### Harlequin Class Action Settlement

A proposed settlement of a class action lawsuit has been reached between Plaintiffs Barbara Keiler, Mona Gay Thomas, and Linda Barrett (“Plaintiffs”) and Defendants Harlequin Enterprises Limited, Harlequin Books S.A., and Harlequin Enterprises B.V. (“Defendants” or “Harlequin”).

Details of the settlement are [available here](#).

# Cliché Red Alert

A delicious dissection of trite dialogue—and how to twist freshness out of overused phrases

By Scott Myers



*“The Definitive List of Cliché Dialogue” started with U.K.-based screenwriter [Kevin Lehane](#) ...*

Are you thinking what I’m thinking?

Don’t even go there!

You know as well as I do, I’ve literally been there, done that, bought the T-shirt, and to be honest with you, at the end of the day, when push comes to shove, and it all boils down to it, if you’re not part of the solution, you’re part of the problem.

Know what I mean?

Basically, what I’m trying to say is, with all due respect between you and me, screenwriting is not rocket science, it’s about breaking the mold, thinking outside the box, giving it 110 percent, 24/7.

And I think we can all agree clichés suck but, hey, it’s a job. You gotta do what you gotta do. Just remember you’re writing for an audience and there’s no “I” in ... you get the picture.

Kevin Lehane, who constructed the ultimate cliché-intro above and originated [The Definitive List of Cliched Dialogue](#), discontinued his blog to focus more on his writing career.

But to prevent the loss of some great resources, he handed off the list to the screenwriting blog, [Go Into the Story](#), which shared this list with NINC.

Here is Lehane’s original list of the worst offenders when it comes to lazy, trite dialogue:

I was born ready.

Are you sitting down?

Let’s get out of here!

\_\_\_\_\_ my middle name.

Is that all you got?

I’m just getting started.

Are you thinking what I’m thinking?

Don’t you die on me!

Tell my wife and kids I love them.

Breathe, dammit!

Cover me. I'm going in.  
He's standing right behind me, isn't he?  
No, no, no, no, NO! I'm not going. [Cut to them going.]  
Come in. \_\_\_\_ was just leaving.  
You'd better come in.  
So, we meet again.  
We've got to stop meeting like this.  
(Greeting) Well, if it isn't \_\_\_\_.  
I'm just doing my job.  
You give \_\_\_\_ a bad name. Calling you a \_\_\_\_ is an insult to \_\_\_\_.  
You'll never get away with this!  
    Watch me.  
[Said into a mirror:] Looking good.  
Now ... where were we?  
What the—?  
How hard can it be?  
Time to die.  
Follow that car!  
Let's do this thing!  
You go, girl!  
You ain't seen nothing yet!  
... Yeah. A little too quiet.  
If I'm not back in \_\_\_\_ minutes ...  
    get out of here.  
    blow the whole thing up.  
    call the cops.  
What part of \_\_\_\_ don't you understand?  
I'm not leaving you.  
    You have to go on without me.  
Don't even go there.  
I've always wanted to say that!  
Ready when you are!  
Is this some kind of sick joke?  
Oh, ha ha, very funny.  
Did I just say that out loud?  
Wait. Did you hear something?  
It's just a scratch.  
How is he?  
    He'll live.  
I'm ... so cold ...  
Is that clear?  
    Crystal.  
What if? ... Nah, it would never work.  
... and there's nothing you or anyone else can do to stop me!

You say that like it's a bad thing.  
Note to self ...  
Honey, is that you?  
What's the meaning of this?  
What seems to be the problem, Officer?  
What's the worst that could happen? (or) What have we got to lose?  
I have a bad feeling about this.  
Leave it. They're already dead.  
Don't you think I know that?  
Whatever you do, don't look down.  
Why won't you die?!  
I eat guys like you for breakfast.  
Oh now you're really starting to piss me off!  
We've got company.  
Hang on ... if you're here then that means ... uh oh.  
Oh, that's not good.  
Awkward!  
What just happened?  
We'll never make it in time!  
Stay here.  
    No way, I'm coming with you.  
This isn't over!  
Jesus H. Christ!  
It's no use!  
It's a trap!  
She's gonna blow!  
OK, here's what we do ... [and cut to a different scene]  
Fuckin' A!  
I'm getting too old for this shit.  
Wait a minute, are you saying—?  
You'll never take me alive.  
Okay, let's call that plan B.  
I always knew you'd come crawling back.  
Try to get some sleep.  
I just threw up in my mouth a little.  
Leave this to me. I've got a plan.  
No, that's what they want us to think.  
Why are you doing this to me?  
When I'm through with you ...  
Hi, sis.  
Impossible!  
Wait! I can explain! This isn't what it looks like.  
Showtime!  
You look like you've seen a ghost.



If we make it out of this alive ...  
That's it! You're off the case!  
How long have we known each other?  
    We go back a long way.  
Well, well, well ...  
Aha! I knew it!  
Done ... and done!  
Leave it. He's/She's/They're not worth it.  
In English, please.  
As many of you know ...  
Too much information!  
Yeah, you better run!  
... Unless?  
    Unless what?  
What are you doing here?  
    I was about to ask you the same thing.  
So, who died? ... Oh.  
You're either very brave ... or very stupid.  
Oh, yeah? You and whose army?  
Now that's what I'm talking about!  
Don't call us, we'll call you.  
It's not you, it's me.  
This just gets better and better.  
This is not happening.  
Make it stop.  
Shut up and kiss me.  
I'll see you in hell!  
Lock and load!  
Oh hell, no!  
Not on my watch!  
You just don't get it, do you?  
I have got to get me one of these!  
I could tell you but then I'd have to kill you.  
It's called \_\_\_\_, you should try it sometime.  
That went well!

### **But wait, there's more ...**

Over time, people have added more cliché suggestions. So here is an update:

Listen to me, and listen good, 'cause I'm only gonna say it once.  
Let me guess—  
Fire in the hole!  
Did I miss anything?  
So, where was/were I/we?

On three. One, two ...  
Are you tryin' to get us killed?  
I've got a confession to make ...  
That's what she said.  
Over my dead body!

## How do you freshen up a cliché?

There are times when cliché dialogue can be a positive, not a negative.

For example, you may have a character whose personality is in part defined by the fact that they *do* speak in clichés. If they are a superficial or unoriginal person, the clichés portray that characteristic.

One blog commenter asked, "I'm guilty of using in my script three items from the abhorred list, but two of them function in a self-conscious, I'm-twisting-the-cliché way, so I guess they don't really count. Uh, do they?"

That's right. If you take a cliché and spin it in a new direction, it leads the reader to think the dialogue is going one way, but then the fresh twist surprises them.

Another Go Into the Story blog reader observed:

*If you subvert the cliché in an interesting way, you can surprise the audience with something unexpected. Joss Whedon does this a lot. There's three I can think of just in Serenity.*

*One is a spin on something from this list: "Remember, if anything happens to me, or you don't hear from me within the hour ... you take this ship and you come and you rescue me."*

*Another fun one: "I'm takin' your sister under my protection here. If anything happens to her, anything at all, I swear to you ... I will get very choked up. Honestly, there could be tears."*

*And lastly, the captain, after a crewman threatens mutiny:*

*"Do you want to run this ship?" This is of course the standard cliché threat that should shame the crewman into quieting down.*

*But instead the reply comes, "Yes!"*

*To which the flustered captain responds: "Well ... you can't."*

Another good use of cliché is irony. Here's a not-so-inspired example, but it makes the point:

There are two street toughs. Tough A likes to opine, "Danger is my middle name." Tough B loathes it when Tough A says the line because it's, you know, cliché.

Eventually in the story, Tough B whacks Tough A.

Standing over Tough A's body, Tough B smiles and says, "Danger *was* your middle name." Or, "Danger is *my* middle name."

Like virtually any narrative element, a writer can use clichés well or poorly. It all depends upon story circumstances and creativity.

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Scott Myers has written projects for every major movie studio and broadcast network in Hollywood. His screenwriting credits include the movies K-9, Alaska, and Trojan War. He hosts [Go Into The Story](#), the official screenwriting blog of the [Black List](#) and is co-founder of [ScreenwritingMasterClass.com](#), a unique online educational resource. Myers is a graduate of the University of Virginia and Yale Divinity School, and has been a member of the Writers Guild of America, West since 1987.

*This story [originally appeared](#) on the screenwriting blog, Go Into the Story. It is reprinted in Nink with permission. To read comments from readers suggesting a lot more clichés, go [here](#).*

# Hello, Nobody

## 10 Signs You're Introducing a Boring Character

*By Cate Hogan*



If there's one thing I've learned as an editor, it's that great writers know the rules and love to break them.

Applied with strategy and consideration, most principles can be thrown to the wind, but if you're guilty of more than one of the misdeeds below, chances are your opening scenes need to go back in the oven and bake a little longer.

### **#10: The forest from the trees**

What's the first sign your character intro needs work? You're certain it's a winner, but you've yet to draft your ending. You might be following an outline, but at the start of the writing process you haven't undergone the full journey from exposition to climax and finally, resolution.

Chances are you just don't know your protagonist well enough (yet) to present them in a truly authentic, strategic manner.

### **#9: Meet Anonymous**

We hit page three and we're scratching our heads. You've given us a setting, action, and dialogue, but you've forgotten to give us a name.

It often happens to authors writing in first person. Make sure you find a way to slip the character's name somewhere on page one (or soon after). It creates a little anchor in our heads so that they don't remain abstract, like a stranger we're following down the street.

Other key attributes, like age, race, and gender, should also be clarified as quickly as possible.

### **#8: Staring into space (sci-fi not included)**

Even established authors fall into the trap of introducing a character as they gaze into a mirror, take in a view, sit in traffic, partake in morning ablutions, or (insert banal, sedentary activity here). This is great for your background notes or character profile, but not the way to hook a reader into a riveting premise.

So, if your character isn't staring off into space musing, what is he or she doing? Start with intriguing action.

First Draft: A journalist sits in his office, ruminating about how he hates his job as a paid hack. He stares at the sprawling view before him, feeling empty and frustrated.

Pretty flat, right?

Second Draft: The journalist arrives at an accident. Instead of going to help the injured people, he chases down the witnesses, hunting for a story. People lie dying and he's on his knees, snapping pictures as the police arrive.

Whoa. You're [showing instead of telling](#) us he's a hack, and more!

In keeping with this approach, try to avoid opening with long, static descriptions of landscapes, weather, etc. That might have worked for nineteenth-century writers, but readers' expectations have shifted since then.

They want to get to the action, quickly.

## #7: Action overload

Now I'm going to contradict myself (because I can!). One of my favorite clients, a best-selling author, recently sent me an opening chapter that included a police detective and his partner caught in a violent shootout.

Two pages in, the partner was mortally wounded and I sat there thinking, *Why should I care? I barely know the guy!*

I might be a monster, but it's not enough to simply describe something sad; show us a character's vulnerabilities and dreams and we'll become invested in their welfare. It's the difference between frowning at a TV report announcing hundreds dead, versus sobbing over the passing of Milo, your scruffy old Labrador.

Empathy and emotion aren't logical; they're based in familiarity and understanding.

This also applies to info dumps. Avoid the long explanation of how the world was destroyed by aliens, and introduce us instead to young Harry, climbing out of the burning rubble of his home.

## #6: Red-haired green-eyed walking cliché

Unruly auburn hair framed a heart-shaped face, with deep green eyes the color of moss. She'd always hated her hourglass figure, but it seemed to attract lingering glances wherever she went ....

The description above fits half the female protagonists I encounter. Funnily enough, their male counterparts rarely have red hair so it's some kind of weird gender-based double standard.

Aside from being clichéd, these kinds of descriptions feel forced, as if we have to sit still and listen while the picture is set up for us. Readers should step effortlessly into your world via a thousand tiny brushstrokes that come together over the pages to create a single cohesive image.

Tie subtle hints into your action (she ran a hand through her spiky, jet-black hair) instead of reporting it all for us in one dating profile-style slog.

## #5: Off the leash

Who doesn't love a free spirit going along for the ride?

That might be charming in reality, but in Fiction Land, a character without a goal is the first sign of a plot lacking purpose and direction.

It's not enough for us to watch someone walk through daily life, dealing with problems and opportunities as they arise. Passive characters aren't driving the story forward; they're being pushed along by it.

Give them a [goal related to the novel's central theme](#), then let them off the leash.

#### **#4: Perfectionism is worse than boring—it's death**

Has your character been victimized throughout her life, and never done anything wrong? Or perhaps he's just all-around fun, sweet and thoughtful, lovable in every way.

Victimization and perfection equals boring for three reasons:

1. Perpetual victims make the narration sound self-serving and therefore, unreliable. And if the protagonist is perfect, the reader will envy them instead of empathizing with them.
2. Both types of character lack tension, so there is no simmering intrigue to pull the reader in. The victim is disempowered and lost, while Miss Perfect is too grounded to suffer from conflict.
3. They're phony. Do you know anyone who's perfect, or for that matter, totally blameless?

Bonus point for the romance authors out there: You can apply the same principles to creating a dynamic romantic hero. Resist the temptation to make him rich, handsome and kind.

These are the primary 'virtues' of a hero, but he's only allowed to embody two aspects of the trifecta. So if he's a wealthy, good-looking CEO, he needs to be an asshole. Or if he's the hot, muscled guy with a heart of gold, he also needs to be the penniless stablehand.

At the end of the book, a hero might embody all three virtues, but upon introduction he should be found lacking in some respect.

#### **#3 You kill them off**

One of my pet peeves is when good authors go for a cheap trick to achieve shock value.

Examples include the character who suffers some trauma but wakes up to reveal it was only a dream. Or, in chapter one, the character is killed, but chapter two reveals they were only a minor player anyway.

Readers trust in your ability to take them on a journey with integrity. If you make them feel surprise or sadness and they then find out they've been tricked, you've forfeited their trust for the remainder of the novel.

#### **#2 Prologue-schmologue**

There's a reason editors, publishers and agents hate prologues, beyond our worldwide industry conspiracy to save paper. Yeah, yeah, I can hear the collective slap of palms on tables, outraged authors leaping to the prologue's defense.

Sarah Gruen did just fine in *Water for Elephants*, didn't she?

Advanced authors are experienced enough to know the difference between a great prologue and a waste of space, but tread carefully if your plot can function without one, or if your prologue is delaying us from meeting the protagonist.

We connect with characters a lot faster than plot set-ups, and most readers don't want to start a story twice, losing themselves in a time and place only to be suddenly wrenched into a different set up.

Yes, fantastic books have been published with prologues, but prologues fail more often than they triumph.

#### **#1 Emotional purgatory**

Why get stuck on the who, what, when and where, if we can jump straight into a page of fast-

paced dialogue, or an emotional torrent of thoughts and feelings?

Noooo!

It all boils down to context. We can't *care* if we don't understand the basic dynamics of the situation. We might read the impassioned prayers of a woman calling upon Jesus, her hands trembling as she slips on a lacy red bra ... but if Rhonda's a sixty-year-old nun on the brink of sexual liberation, that's very different from meeting Rhonda, the twenty-year-old stripper preparing for a tiresome Friday night.

### **Bonus tip for NINC writers**

Advanced authors create characters they relate to on a fundamental, thematic level: The loner. The feisty go-getter. The ruthless Alpha male.

Each resonates with something drawn from deep inside the author's psyche. Problem is, once you have a lot of books under your belt, your readers start to notice when the same tropes appear across novels, undermining the characters' uniqueness and believability.

Dig deep, find a new idea to fall in love with, and your readers will gladly follow.

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*After long years of working her way into a fancy harborside office, Cate Hogan left the Sydney film industry on the verge of a manic breakdown. She found her passion for fiction development in beautiful Bali, and never looked back. These days she enjoys sipping from coconuts while developing tomorrow's bestsellers, and collaborating with today's most exciting authors. Learn more at [www.catehogan.com](http://www.catehogan.com), or email her at [cate@catehogan.com](mailto:cate@catehogan.com).*

# Rising Above the Noise

## Blog tour marketing effectively in a saturated market

*By Nazarea Andrews*



Nearly three years ago, when I first started working at InkSlinger PR, the market wasn't saturated. It was still fresh and new and hitting a list—though difficult—seemed attainable.

But the landscape has changed a lot over the years. It's flooded with books and it's hard for authors to stand out in a sea of stories. The landscape for promotions has also changed. Things that worked two years ago need to be tweaked to remain effective.

Blog tours and promotional events still have value. It depends a lot on what your goal is and who you're working with. Throwing everything at the wall and hoping something sticks is *not* how to market a book.

In my experience, it's just a matter of growing with the market. So let's talk about how to make the most of blog tours in today's marketplace.

### **Picking a company**

A few years ago, right around the time the self-publishing industry blew up, there was a sudden influx in promotional event companies.

It seemed like everyone was offering a blog tour, and with so many options, it's hard to know who is a good choice. I recommend selecting a tour company based on three things:

**Experience:** Who has the event coordinator worked with? Have you heard of that author (or their book)? What kind of books are they working with and are those similar to yours? As great as a company is, if they typically work with sweet contemporary romance and you just wrote a sexy space opera, it's not going to be a good fit.

**List:** This is important, and also a little tricky. A good event coordinator or publicist has a list. Contacts who know them, know their tastes and trust their judgment.

It's a long line of relationships that they can then leverage into promo for you. This is a twofold benefit—first, it puts you in front of blogs who wouldn't normally consider you because they've never heard of you. Second, it puts you in front of blogs you've never heard of, but that have an audience you want to reach.

Having a list of contacts and blogs is hugely important, but most event coordinators won't hand



over that list for you to verify. That's why it's good to ask for numbers, to have an idea of who will be seeing your new release and considering it for inclusion in their blog.

**Selecting new clients:** At InkSlinger PR, we don't work with an author—any author—before we read them. It's a company policy that extends to our events-only department.

And it's pretty simple. My job is to get people excited about your book. I can't do that if *I'm* not excited. I have to believe in the book as much as you do, which is our criteria when reading new authors and selecting who we work with.

So if an event company will take any book, without review, ask yourself whether they'll have the necessary clout and credibility with book blogs to be able to promote you well.

## Making the most of your promo

Once you've picked a good company, how can you make the most of your promotion? What type of promotion should you do? There is so much I could say here. *So much.*

**What's your type?** There are a lot of types of promotional events, and they can be effective at different times. A release day blitz (in which the book's release announcement and buy links are spread to dozens or sometimes more than 100 blogs) is great for a fast, hard punch of promo. It gets the word out across a wide array of blogs, but the content doesn't change and it typically doesn't include reviews.

I find the blitz works best with a blog tour that immediately follows the release and continues to keep the buzz rolling for a week or so after the release.

Unlike the blitz, a blog tour allows you to showcase different types of content, which should bring in different readers. There are other events—cover reveals, excerpt reveals, sales blitz, review tours, and more.

Social media tours are gaining traction, and not a bad option at all, if you're willing to think outside the box.

## The essentials

Every event is a little different and will need a different set of assets, and your coordinator will communicate that to you. Remember, you are *never* bugging your coordinator. Dumb questions don't exist and if you have a question, we'd rather you bring it to us so that we can work it out.

Our job is to make an event as smooth and painless as possible, and communication is key.

**Have an author kit.** This is such a basic thing: author bio, photo, all author-related links (*all* of them), and buy links to your book. (Having a different version with buy links to your entire backlist is never a bad idea.)

We're a visual society, as a whole, so brand your graphics to your title and cover. You can do the same to your banner, if that's something you're interested in.

This is important for a promo event. Easily sharable graphics and a kit with all the relevant information is essential—and it helps you later, when someone asks for the info, to have it already assembled.

## Avoiding white noise

So the market is saturated. We know that. How do we avoid tripping from enough buzz into the

white noise territory? (Spoiler alert—you don't want to be the noise.)

A good marketing plan should be more than one event—and it should be a variety of events. There is a use for review tours or excerpt tours, as well as tours that combine original content with review stops and excerpts.

When doing a traditional blog tour, *have original content*. Not just excerpts and playlists, although those are important. Content that is unique to your book is so important:

- Deleted scenes;
- Interviews with characters;
- Pictorial tours of your inspiration;
- Insights into the book's inspiration;
- Maps (real or fictional) of your setting;
- A variety of graphic teasers;
- A “dream cast” of actors, if you cast your book as a movie;
- Behind the scenes photos from your cover shoot, or early illustrations/iterations if your cover is illustrated; and
- A list of your character's favorite things.

You can create *anything* related to your book. Look through your research notes or photos—pull them out and use them.

The key here is to be unique and stand out in a sea of events and new books. Whatever you choose, it should create intrigue and interest in the characters and the plot—it should make your audience hungry to know more.

It takes a little extra time and thinking creatively, but hey—you wrote a book. *Creative* is your thing.

## Going the extra mile

The thing is—and this is the best advice I can give you—it's a partnership. You can hand your coordinator all kinds of tour info and she can leverage her contacts to give you an amazing tour, and it can be awesome.

But go the extra mile. Reach out to blogs and thank them. Network with them, and start relationships, because they are so important.

Interact with readers on your social media platforms, and be authentic. Also, reach out to blogs on your own. Invite them to the tour your coordinator is working on. Let her work out the details, once you've gotten them on board, but it *never* steps on toes to reach out and invite blogs on your own.

I love it when clients take that initiative. Clients have better tours when that happens. It takes time, but it's worth it. Partner with your publicist or coordinator, and work with them.

Remember that this—your career—is a marathon, not a sprint. Keep working, have a plan, and be willing to assess and change your plan every few releases if things aren't working. Discuss it with your event coordinator.

And don't be afraid to try something new.

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*Nazarea Andrews is the event coordinator at InkSlinger PR, where she works with authors on an event-only basis. Andrews*

*is an avid reader and tends to write the stories she wants to read, which means she writes everything from zombies and dystopia to contemporary love stories. When not writing or coordinating events, she can most often be found driving her kids to practice and burning dinner while she reads, or binge-watching TV on Netflix. She is always open to working with new authors. You can submit to InkSlinger PR by emailing your bio and first five chapters to [InkSlingerSubs@gmail.com](mailto:InkSlingerSubs@gmail.com).*

# Stock Photo Showdown

## Tips to make the most of stock photo shopping

*By Sasha White*



These days, even if you're not making your own cover art or promotional graphics, chances are pretty good that you're looking for the images you want used on those items.

So today I'm going to talk about the good, the bad, and the ugly of stock photo shopping.

Stock websites come in all sizes and shapes. Big ones like [iStock](#), [Dreamstime](#), [123RF](#), and [Bigstock](#) offer photos, vectors, video, and even music. These sites are full of items from various photographers all over the world, much like Amazon is full of books from authors all over the world.

And these sites work in a very similar way. Photographers submit images, and if they pass, they're put up for sale. If they're not up to the site's standards, they're rejected. Some of the pros of acquiring your stock from big-name sites like these are guaranteed quality, variety, and subscriptions.

I'm a big believer in subscriptions to stock sites where for a specific fee, you can download a certain number of images each day, week, or month.

Even if I don't need 50 images right now, if I'm only looking for one or two, I'll pick up a subscription for a month and download as many as they'll let me because I like having images on hand for promotion and spur-of-the-moment cover changes.

I always get high-res, larger files, and get a blend of images (people, backgrounds, random items) that will work for various projects, or I choose ones I just like.

Be sure to read the terms of the standard license for each site. Often, the standard one allows the images to be used in cover art if the image is significantly altered and less than 10,000 copies are sold. Which, in the day and age of indie publishing where we might change up our covers if the title isn't selling, is an awesome thing.

When it comes to subscriptions and memberships the important thing to remember is to read the terms before you accept them. If you're releasing books at a fast pace, or doing plenty of ads and blog posts, it's well worth it to build your own stockpile of images.

There's also the option of sharing a membership with a friend or group of friends. You can make it an official thing by having each person pay a portion of the subscription and a share of images. But my favorite way to do this is unofficially:

When I have a subscription, I download the images I like first, then I email a few trustworthy friends and tell them I have a subscription at such-and-such place, and if they want any to let me know. They do the same. The key to this is doing it with someone you trust to understand and honor the

terms of the standard license so as to not put yourself in an unsafe legal position.

But the big-name sites are not the only place to get your stock photos from, and sometimes they're not even the best place. The best place to find stock can often be decided by what you're looking for.

#### **Great places to find historical:**

- [Period Images](#)
- [123 RF](#)

#### **Great places to find interracial:**

- [Mosaic Stock Photos](#)
- [Black Stock](#)

#### **Great places to find genre fiction of all types:**

- [Novel Expression](#)
- [The Reed Files](#)
- [The Killion Group](#)

#### **Great places to get free images:**

Dreamstime has free images available all the time. Just make sure you select FREE when you do the search. iStock and [Deposit Photos](#) both have great quality free images of the week.

These are perfect to use for blog posts and promotional graphics, but always be aware of the license. You cannot use these on covers or anything you will be selling. You can also often find free, royalty-free stock photos at [Morgue File](#), but the true gem of free image sites is [Unsplash](#).

Unsplash is a blog-style site that offers free 'do whatever you want' high-resolution images. The trick to it is, you need to either check it regularly, or be patient in your search if you're looking for something specific.

A few other good quality images sites to add to your list to check out are:

- [Pexels](#)
- [Fotolia](#)
- [Wyllo](#)
- [Every Stock Photo](#)
- [Shutterstock](#)

Now that you have a bunch of sites to shop for photos, *how* can you make the most of your shopping time? Stock photo searches can feel a bit like a trip down the rabbit hole.

#### **Use your words**

According to iStock, three to five keywords return the optimum number of results offering some choice, but limiting the results to an easier amount to deal with.

If you're not getting what you want, change your words. Be sure to use the + symbol between search terms, not just a comma, in order to tell the site you want photos that match all of your terms.

If you're looking for people or objects on a typical white background that can easily be integrated into other backgrounds, add "isolated" or "cutout" to your search terms.

But beware—when integrating two photos, ensure the lighting roughly matches and the focal point stays on your subject. Most readers won't know what's wrong with a photo where the couple in the

foreground is as sharp as a farmhouse in the distant background, but their subconscious is likely to detect something fishy.

### **Be selective**

Next to where you are typing in your search terms, be sure to select “images” if you are looking for photos or “vectors” if you want illustration. This can help you exclude things such as a video that might match your terms, but is not what you’re looking for.

Think about it like searching on Amazon—if you search for *Supernatural*, and don’t select books, then you also get the DVDs and movies. Same theory on stock sites.

### **Exclusion can be good**

If there is an advance search option, you can also put words in the exclude area. For example, if you’re searching for a “blond man” you might want to put “senior” in the exclude area.

### **Watch for recommendations**

If you see an image that is sort of like what you want, check it out, and be sure to view the complete page.

Most sites have other recommended images below, just like online bookstores do. Even if the image you’ve clicked on isn’t the perfect one, it still might lead you there.

### **Search photographer portfolios**

Just like when you read a book and you find you might enjoy other works by that author, the same can be said for photographers.

So if you’re searching a site and you see a style you like (be it lighting, editing, or a specific model) follow that image to the photographer’s portfolio. That can be a wonderful gold mine.

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*Before Sasha White became a bestselling author, she was a professional photographer who got addicted to Photoshop and graphic arts when things went all digital on her. She now writes erotic fiction with an edge of kink full-time, and plays with her camera and photographs as a favorite hobby, doing sessions and graphics for friends and long-time clients. If you have any questions you can [reach her through her website](#).*

# A Taxonomy of Bad Editors

For your amusement or commiseration: misdeeds scraped off the editing room floor

*By Susan Lyons*



When I was asked to prepare a workshop on editing tips from published authors, where else would I turn for input but the Novelists Inc. members' loop? (Little realizing that our resourceful *Nink* editor would promptly ask me to write an article on the results...)

The flood of responses made it clear that some editors don't understand their jobs and others don't do them well. As authors, we should be skilled, reasonable, and professional.

So should our editors.

A good editor is a partner in helping you make your book as good as it can possibly be, and in making you a better writer. She respects you, your book, and your writing voice. She provides a revision letter that identifies problems.

She might suggest a solution—from removing the heroine's cats, to noting that you don't mention the cats enough (after all, it's all about the cats!)—but she understands that it's your book and you'll decide how to revise it. She is available to discuss her comments and your ideas. If you're really lucky, she tells you you're a fabulous writer.

Sadly, not all editors are good ones. Here's my taxonomy of bad editors, classified according to author reactions.

## **Did you even read it?**

It seems obvious that an editor is expected to edit, but some fail to grasp that, especially those who work at traditional publishing houses (as compared to freelance editors).

The editor might say he's "too busy" (to do the job he's paid to do?) or that the author's work is so clean it doesn't need editing.

Yes, we in NINC are accomplished writers and turn in manuscripts that are pretty darned good, but have we ever submitted a book that wouldn't benefit from a talented editor's input?

## **I'm shaking my head here.**

Sometimes edits are just plain weird, even humorous. Like giving the heroine a hairy chest. Or changing "cops" to "fuzz" in a contemporary novel. Or adding sound effects: Footfalls hurried down the corridor—thwock, thwock, thwock.

Or taking the in-character exclamation, "Stop! We've been tricked!" and replacing it with, "Halt! A

hoax has been perpetrated upon us!"

How about the editor who asked that the villain's name be changed to something more "villainy?" A reasonable request, perhaps—except that the villain's name had been established throughout the already-published previous book in the series, a book the same editor had acquired and presumably read.

### **You're wrong, wrong, wrong.**

Editors tend to think that they're right, so much so that they might not check their facts.

One editor rejected a book's snowbound-couple premise because, according to her, Texas was tropical—and that was six weeks before an ice storm hit Texas. The editor might be amenable to correction, or dig in her heels and refuse to budge.

Either way, bear this in mind: if the editor has that misconception, so might a number of readers. Perhaps it's worth revising to address it.

### **You bought my book, and now you want me to change it entirely?**

Such as, for one book: cut the first third, add a second ghost (there wasn't a first one), add another love interest, add another villain, kill off a character, and add some hot sex scenes (to a Victorian Gothic).

Or, for another book: the battle scenes are too realistic and violent, so remove them (all 300 pages) and cover them in brief narrative.

### **Would you please throw out the rule book?**

Some editors follow "rules" obsessively, even though many of the most memorable books break those conventions. Well, authors know those rules, too, and if we break them, typically we do it intentionally.

It's one thing for an editor to say that a flashback isn't effective; it's not acceptable to say *the rules prohibit them*.

### **You're PC-ing my book to death.**

Should wording be true to the time period and the characters' personalities, or should it be politically correct? Is there a way to retain authenticity without offending readers?

A bad editor can ruin a manuscript; a good one can help the author find that ideal balance.

### **Where was your mind?**

Like when the editor complained about a missing scene and a failure to introduce a character—when both the scene and the character had featured prominently in the preceding pages.

### **Whose book were you editing?**

The revision letter seems to be about an entirely different book, mentioning events and characters that don't occur in your book.

### **Make up your mind.**

Getting several sets of revisions can be annoying, especially when the editor has different suggestions each time.



### **Every freaking sentence?**

Some copy-editors take their job to ridiculous lengths, making changes in almost every sentence. Most of those edits are unnecessary or wrong, and they mess with an author's voice.

No author should have to waste time "stetting" a dozen edits per page.

### **Go write your own book.**

Rather than point out a perceived problem and ask the author to address it, these editors rewrite it. And may do so after the author has seen page proofs, so the book is published with the editors' changes.

As a bizarre example, one editor changed a secondary character (a troubled teenager) into a raccoon.

### **I want my old editor.**

When the editor who acquired a manuscript leaves, the new editor might hate the book or have a completely different vision for it. The author can go from being praised and wooed, to being trashed.

### **Have you heard of professionalism?**

There are editors who are months and months late with revision letters; who let personal issues interfere with the ability to edit the manuscript; who refuse to discuss revisions; who fail to respond to author/agent e-mails and phone calls; who out-and-out lie; or who sexually harass people at industry events.

### **All I want is a little respect.**

As authors, we put a huge amount of time, effort, and emotion into our work. If editors disregard that and are discourteous, order us to rework a manuscript to suit their personal taste, or mess with our voice, we will not be happy.

Problems with editors can range from amusing to stressful to so serious that the author becomes physically and emotionally ill.

One author said that her horrible experience left her shell-shocked and unable to write. Another author said her editor sent her into a black hole of depression.

This is just plain wrong. We deserve editors who "get" us and our writing, and treat both with respect.

If you hire freelancers, check their references, clarify your expectations, and ask them to do a sample edit. Enter into a contract. You're the boss, so ignore suggestions you don't agree with. If the freelancer fails to provide the services you need, sever the relationship in accordance with your contract.

If you're with a traditional publisher and have major problems with your editor, discuss a strategy with your agent, if you have one. You might be able to switch editors. Or, bottom line, you can pull the book, pay back your advance, and go to another publisher or self-publish. (A voodoo doll on your desk can also come in handy.)

But remember: editors have their own taxonomy of bad authors. You don't want your editor to have a voodoo doll of you!

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*Susan Lyons has published more than two dozen contemporary romances writing as Susan Lyons, Savanna Fox, and Susan Fox. As Susan Fox, she's currently writing the Caribou Crossing Romances series for Kensington, where she's lucky enough to be blessed with an excellent editor.*

# Setting Your Workshop Scene

How to build a syllabus and find a venue to teach writing courses

*By Patricia Burroughs*



NINC Members by definition have a wealth of experience and knowledge to share. Last month, we looked at teaching classes designed to have minimal impact on your writing time.

But where do you hold such classes?

## Community colleges

Check your local community college's adult or continuing education programs. They often offer noncredit creative writing classes. Because they are noncredit, your publishing experience may be the only credential you need, as opposed to credited classes where you will most likely need a degree in your field and will be required to have graded assignments and regular office hours.

Find out what is required to propose a class. You will most likely need to write a class description and syllabus.

## Writing a class description

You're a writer. Use your skills to craft a pitch for students. For example:

"Discover the path to publication with multi-published mystery writer Bellatrix St. Digitalis, who will take you from creating colorful and believable characters to researching and building the worlds they live in—all while crafting a killer plot that will leave your reader gasping."

Use enough creative "salesmanship" without overwhelming the nuts and bolts of what your class offers. Your description may need more detail than above.

Just remember to present solid content in an exciting way. Your continuing education director will love you for it, and students will find your classes too enticing to resist.

## Writing a syllabus

Some are more detailed than others. Sometimes the colleges have them online for potential students to see. Here's an example for a class titled "Let's Write a Mystery!"

Week One – Introduction; creative ways to build your worlds and corral your ideas.

Week Two – Characters: from killer to victim, with all the usual suspects in between.

Week Three – Plot: how to weave a story that compels, confounds, and delivers!

Week Four – Writing dynamic scenes—and how they grow one from another.

If your syllabus needs more details:

Week One: Introduction; Creative Ways to Build Your Worlds and Corral Your Ideas.

1. Student introductions.
2. Creative exercise in world-building.
3. Power-point presentation of several successful authors' approaches to collecting and organizing ideas.

Here's another way to tackle a syllabus, for a class titled "Writing Characters that Live, Breathe, and Die":

Week One: The Sleuth

Week Two: The Victim

Week Three: The Killer

Week Four: The Suspects

No matter where or how you teach, your class description is necessary to bring in students and the syllabus is your first step to designing your class.

### **DIY: Host your own classes**

What if you don't have the option of getting hired to teach, or prefer doing all the work and reaping all the rewards? You have a number of options.

**Local municipal buildings:** Library meeting rooms, recreation centers, and other public places are worth investigating. In some communities, they aren't available for profit-making events, but this can vary. Look for meetings of local groups, such as Toastmasters or other service organizations, for other meeting location ideas.

**Hotels:** Renting a meeting room at a local hotel can be easy and economical. Assuming you've checked out the facilities, a reasonably priced hotel that is centrally located with free parking can be perfect.

They generally will have projectors, microphones, and any other equipment you'll need as part of a rental package, though having your own backup is always smart.

You can ask for the room to be set up to your specification, whether with tables or rows of chairs. Will your class last three hours, or five, or eight? If needed, box lunches or some other catered fare can be negotiated as part of the fee.

**Restaurants:** If they have private dining rooms or meeting rooms, you might be able to arrange for a seminar or workshop there, with the side benefit of great food. They might have a minimum food charge, which you can cover by providing a meal of snacks and beverages, incorporating the charge into the class fee.

Be sure you check out the meeting room. Can you close the door? How quiet is it? Will restaurant noise cause you problems? Will your microphone or audio cause them problems? They may not be as likely as a hotel to have the special media technology you need, so again, have your own backup.

**Homes:** Some people are very comfortable offering classes from their homes, whether in a special studio or around the dining room table. Most people I know who have done this built private invitation-only classes after teaching elsewhere.

You may want to check with your insurance company to make sure you're covered if a student is injured while in your home for a for-profit event.

**Craft studios, dance studios, and more:** Check with friends who teach crafts, or business owners who have classrooms. Do local religious buildings sometimes rent rooms? Will the local needlework studio let you rent their classroom when they aren't using it?

### **Sharing the work and broadening your reach**

I've done it both ways. I have arranged single-day events where lunch was provided at a local hotel and I have also been part of a three-person team that taught full-day workshops, some local and some requiring travel.

Each of us did four separate, one-hour sessions, providing twelve different subjects for students to choose between. Attendees received a binder with all handouts, and throughout the day they were encouraged to move from one session to another if they were interested in more than one speaker or subject within a given hour.

The lunch hour (box lunch provided by hotel) and last hour were for casual conversation and networking.

Writers who live in rural settings with the appropriate facilities available sometimes offer weekend seminars with a more personal touch. Attendees are responsible for their own lodging at nearby B&Bs and motels.

### **What do you want to get out of teaching?**

My goal was simply to teach—to bring in a bit of extra money and—equally important—to share the dream.

Because I didn't want to carry work home, I turned down many requests from students who wanted to hire me for private critique, editing, or even ghost-writing.

But such opportunities are exactly why others choose to teach. Classes can be a great way to find private students and clients. You might even want to give free presentations to professional organizations and community groups in order to find those choice private students and clients.

As you might notice, for all that I promised the ability to teach classes without stealing from your writing time, actually setting up the classes does take some work.

The good news is that once done, you can keep it going with much less effort. Next month, I'll wrap up this series by discussing how to design classes that don't require the teacher to do homework, and how to 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](#).*

# Online Marketing Mistakes

Invest your time and money wisely—where it makes a difference

*By Fauzia Burke*



As authors, everything we do online builds our digital footprint. Since we all have limited time, here are some mistakes to avoid.

## **Mistake #1: Spending money on the wrong thing**

*Why it's a mistake:* Spending lots of money on a fancy website with all sorts of bells and whistles or spending \$10,000 on a video trailer are not always a good use of time and money.

You need a website for sure, and a professional one, because people will judge your writing and expertise by your website. But there is no reason to spend a lot right off the bat.

Start with a professional and informational website and add features as you need them. Videos are increasingly important for book promotion, but videos don't go viral for most of us, so no need to bet the bank on it.

## **Mistake #2: Starting too late**

*Why it's a mistake:* Many authors start thinking about their marketing a few months before their publication date. They should start making a plan one year (or more) in advance.

I use the following formula with my clients: Design + Engagement + Visibility = Success.

Start with the design elements by launching a website, newsletter, and social media profiles, created in a cohesive way to build your brand identity.

Engage by blogging, sending a newsletter, and building your following on social media. The more time in this phase, the better.

Finally, plan your visibility (distribution, marketing, and publicity). All this takes time and a thoughtful strategy.

## **Mistake #3: Not knowing your audience**

*Why it's a mistake:* Online marketing is customized and personalized. It is essential for you to know your audience so you can find them and serve them best. You should know your readers' age group, gender, interests, which social media outlets they use and where they hang out online. The more you know your audience, the better your marketing will be. Remember there is no everyone.com

#### **Mistake #4: Trying to be everywhere**

*Why it's a mistake:* Choose one or two social media platforms to start. Don't feel like you have to do the next shiny thing online or keep up with all social media platforms.

Just start conversing with your audience by selecting a platform where you think you will find your readers. Adjust accordingly as you build your community.

#### **Mistake #5: Being too promotional**

*Why it's a mistake:* You can't be a bullhorn. You want people to talk on your page.

Don't get wooed by big numbers. You want a smaller community that's engaged, as opposed to a large audience that's not engaged.

Look for ways to engage the audience you do have. Take good care of the people who have given you their permission to talk with them—whether that's through a newsletter, blog, or on Facebook. Give them your best content.

Authors remember consistency is one of the most important ingredients of your online marketing plan. Stay the course. Remember, if you don't show up, your readers won't either.

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*Fauzia Burke is the founder and president of [FSB Associates](#), an online publicity and marketing firm specializing in creating awareness for books and authors. She's the author of [Online Marketing for Busy Authors](#) (Berrett-Koehler Publishers, April 2016). Burke has promoted the books of authors such as Alan Alda, Arianna Huffington, Deepak Chopra, Melissa Francis, S. C. Gwynne, Mika Brzezinski, Charles Spencer, and many more. A nationally recognized speaker and online branding expert, Burke writes regularly for the Huffington Post. For online marketing, book publishing and social media advice, follow Burke on Twitter ([@FauziaBurke](#)) and Facebook ([Fauzia S. Burke](#)). For more information on the book, please visit: [www.FauziaBurke.com](http://www.FauziaBurke.com).*

# Profile: Trajectory

## Discoverability for a new age

*By Jennifer Stevenson*



*With Eve Henry*

Jim Bryant, founder and CEO of Trajectory Inc., connects publishers to retailers, libraries, and readers worldwide.

He developed an algorithmic recommendation system for books. He deals with Chinese markets and the Chinese Ministry of Culture. Scott Beatty, Chief Content Officer and cofounder of Trajectory, Inc., spent 27 years at positions in epubublishing and data companies focusing on product development, channel development, marketing and sales, and tech.

“Our goals right now are to process books through algorithms, gain understanding of what's going on in the book, facilitate discovery throughout supply chain, and allow readers, librarians, and retailers to help customers find books,” Bryant said. “Trajectory will let you interact with your own book in new ways.”

Specifically, Trajectory uses what they’ve dubbed the “sentiment index.”

The screenshot shows the Trajectory website interface. At the top, there's a navigation bar with links: Discover Great Books, Publishers, Distributors, Reading, and About Us. The main content area features the book 'Wuthering Heights (Collins Classics)' by Emily Brontë. To the left is the book cover. To the right is a synopsis and publisher information. On the far right, there's a 'Trajectory Index' section with a list of metrics:

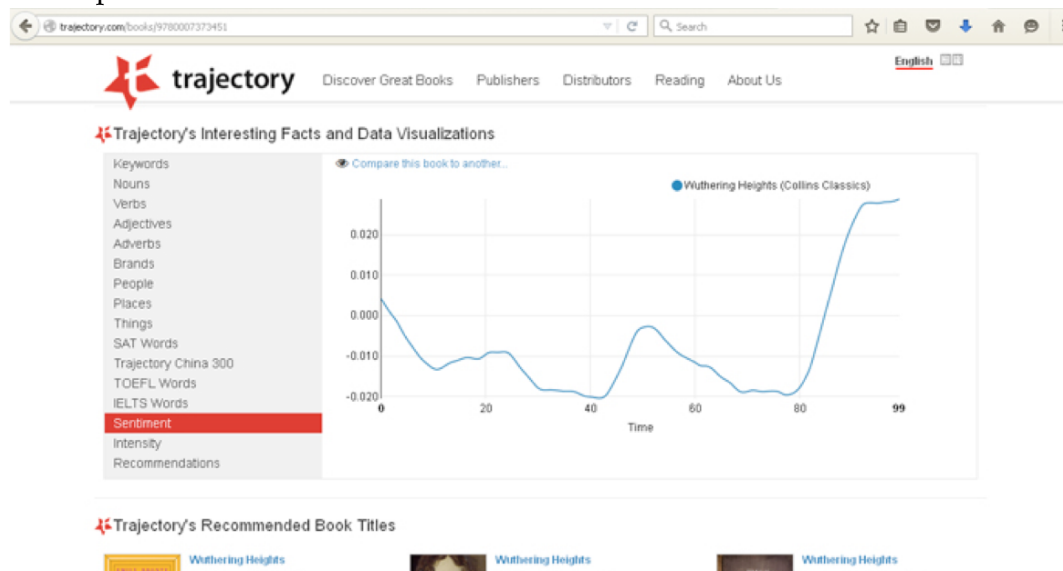
Metric	Value
Words	131,896
Unique Words	7,784
Flesch Reading Ease	69
Flesch Grade Level	9.2
Avg Sentence (words)	22.23
Avg Word (chars)	4.09
Chapters	44
Paragraphs	3,383
Adult Reading Time	8:48
Sentiment	-0.011
Intensity	0.094
People	222
Places	49
Brands	3
Things	74
Goodreads Rating	3.8
Goodreads Reviews	1,174,608
SAT Words	1,175

The sentiment index is most useful in fiction, according to Trajectory. It assigns a value of +5 to -5



to each individual word. For example, “spectacular” would be rated “+5” but “catastrophic” would rate a “-5”.

This type of rating system will answer the questions: How is my book experienced? How are books I admire experienced?



The algorithm also processes these indices: sentiment, intensity, keywords, people, places, things, brands, number of words, number of unique words, nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, SAT words, Flesch reading ease, Flesch grade level, Trajectory China 300 words, profanity, explicit activity, violence, compares words here to other databases, TOEFL, IELTS, as well as recommendations.

The index can translate keywords into four languages. Trajectory is currently processing Chinese language books. They have a relationship with the Ministry of Culture in China and at Frankfurt they will be announcing the German language version.

Their system helps publishers to identify books that may match their existing books in circulation to make future foreign rights acquisition decisions.

“This project evolves at light speed,” Beatty said. “Your suggestions [at the NINC conference] were new to us, but they were great ideas. Last night we wondered how to engage the NINC authors and decided to invite all here to submit your e-books and metadata, and we will process and put them up on the site, although probably not forever.”

Beatty added that NINC members should not tell people about this. “The site will soon require credentialed access, but for now we would be willing to [process for you for free](#). We don’t have enough people to process a lot of customers. We ginned this up last night at midnight. We work really fast. The whole deal may change as it evolves.”

Beatty cautioned the audience to only send them their books, not anyone else’s. Send metadata template info (see their form), a standard epub, and a cover image in format provided.

“You can take the book down anytime,” he added. “Trajectory promises they won’t distribute the book or pass it on to anyone else. Also, don’t upload a book unless you have the rights or have your publisher’s permission. The more books we get, the better. We like volume. Our thrust is, how can we sell more books for our partners, and you guys [NINC authors] are our partners. We need your help to help us evolve this for best use for authors. We have the best group here in the world to do that. How can we make this better?”

Q: *Is there a way for us to compare our own book to a group of other books? So a group that all does the same genre can compare amongst ourselves?*

A: Yes.

Q: *Can I say to a publisher or reviewer, “Here’s my Trajectory profile for this book”?*

A: Yes. You can compare yourself to yourself, or to a popular author. This is *Moneyball* for books. (Note: In Major League Baseball, scouts used to use intuition to choose players. *Moneyball* is a book, later made into a movie, about a statistician and a baseball manager whose statistics-based methods of choosing players blew the intuitive scouts out of the water.)

Q: *If we don’t have a book uploaded, can we still see your results?*

A: Yes.

Q: *How does this compare with “also bought” as a recommendation tool?*

A: We had to develop an explicit filter so that books about dinosaurs for kids and books about dinosaurs for adults were differentiated.

Q: *Who’s the main end user for this?*

A: It’s brand new right now, not intended to be available to the public, just to authors, libraries, e-tailers, and publishers. But along the way, we have had encounters to change this idea.

There’s a company that screens books for libraries. They provided us with a list of four thousand questions of things people are looking for, like, a library in Vancouver looking for books about Vancouver. Or a library in the Midwest interested in certain types of crops.

We built those questions into the system to easily identify books that match the criteria. Dangdang in China will be using this. A major publisher uploaded 20,000 books so they could find out which ones were relevant to a holiday release. You can supply this info to your webmaster to help them set up SEO stuff.

Q: *Re: miscategorizing a book under genres. Say my book is not erotica, and its Trajectory score for erotica is 4.0, not 7 or 8 or 9. Can I point to my book’s Trajectory score to prove that it’s been miscategorized?*

A: You can download a PDF of your book that tells us whether or how much profanity or explicit material is in it.

Q: *What is your Moneyball final measure?*

A: Good question. We’re using a lot of intuition. We thought there was value before, but we don’t know now. We’ll see how publishers, authors, and retailers work it out. We can see how adding it to external data sets will help, such as Nielsen.

With sales data and demographic data on a small number of authors, for example, we took a demographic profile of the typical Agatha Christie reader, narrowed it down inside 300 points of data to a profile of that reader. Here are 20 other authors with same stats as Christie where the same demographics will apply. This is a marketable set of data.

We have designed about 20 products that will make use of this information that will help sell more books, focus on discovery, and build audience. We don’t view things as an either/or—we see

everything as and-and-and.

If we have a title that maps really strongly to one we know, and we know how it was marketed, where the money went, that's a good way to design a marketing playbook for the new title.

*Q: You had great info from China. Do Chinese publishers go looking for new authors?*

A: Not yet. The Ministry of Culture asked us to build a data center to draw data together and maybe add some non-Chinese data for publishers to use. We want to match books across languages—currently Chinese and German.

*Q: Can you ask the site to show the closest matching books to your books?*

A: We soon hope to be able to do that.

*Q: Is censorship in China the same for e-books as for print?*

A: Yes.

*Q: Talk about the intensity metric for a bit please.*

A: If it's a positive number, it's a more positive book. If it's a negative number, the overall intensity [reader experience] is that this is a negative book.

Yesterday we did a job for a subscription service that was asking, why did people stop reading a book there? The economic part of the equation wasn't being considered. They asked, "What do these books have in common?"

We could look at a large number of books and see which books were not completed. Was there a pattern in the content? What would cause the reader to stop reading?

We did find some interesting signals. If the complexity of the language shifted, i.e. It became more complex, after a certain point in the book, combined with some other signals like new characters or a rapid shift in sentiment in either direction, people would stop reading.

The perfect customer for them was someone who was really satisfied with reading 20% of the book.

Trajectory's vision for its business is: "Under the covers, not known in any way, but powering the entire book ecosystem."

"Flesch reading ease" and "Flesch grade level" are measures for Common Core reading standards. Some commercial companies charge hundreds of dollars to authors to get a rating similar to those.

This matters for elementary and middle-grade readers. Generally, these companies only spot check the book. When we did a big comparison between Flesch-Kincaid and our system, there was a lot of difference between our analyses and theirs.

The level of complexity throughout the book will be a measure coming out soon.

*Q: What about a measure that classifies sweet-spicy-sensual-explicit-hot-red hot?*

A: We did something like this for a major romance publisher. Erotic vs romantic. The difference between them wasn't the constant occurrence of activity but the way in which it was described.

*Audience member: "We could have told you that!" [general laughter]*

Now we can prove it statistically. We're creating a Netflix for microgenres on the fly where we can parse out microgenres within a genre.

Q: *Could you use this data to use from a different angle, for branding new editions of very old books?*

A: Yes. It will tell us where the value points are.

Q: *How is this going to work for indie authors? As a subscription service or something?*

A: Right now it's free so that you can help us. We want to know where the value is in what we are doing. And we get to compare your books to the big publishers' books.

Q: *How?*

A: Right now it's open. You can currently download the info and share it. Soon we'll be closing it and allowing access on a credentialed basis. The idea is to price it in a way that makes sense to us.

Q: *Yesterday you said readers in China are voracious. Have you considered connecting readers to that market? Or what's your suggestion about best way to get in there?*

A: It would be very difficult for you to join an online literature platform because they're all in Chinese right now.

We also work as a distribution company. We have over 300 points of distribution around the world. We work with large publishers to get them into new markets. We're not working with many individuals, but we're helping some.

Q: *Would you work with us on that?*

A: Right now we don't have a streamlined process for this. We'd ask right now that you be very patient, because it takes just as much time to set up one title as it takes for 10,000 titles.

Q: *Re: the sentiment, I can imagine trying to tweak the important words in the epub and re-uploading it to see if the sentiment or intensity score changes dramatically.*

Q: *Related: Can we remove our book and then re-upload it, or do your people do the removal only?*

A: They envision a product called manuscript evaluator. Authors with books uploaded would have access to all the comparative information on the site, including the upload / process / delete / tweak / upload / reprocess you describe.

Q: *Can a bunch of NINC authors band together so we can upload a boatload of titles at once?*

A: We'd love that. We're also tracking time setting, such as the 1930s. This algorithm is rooted in machine learning, where a system over a period of time really begins to understand the nuances of the story.

We have a technology platform that we think can get us there, although we're not there yet. Initial false positives are words used out of context, or negative words such as "he didn't kiss her" or "he won't kiss her."

Connect with Scott Beatty on Twitter at @infojedi, and find Jim Bryant at @mytrajectory.

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*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.*

# Forensic Files

## What happens when a person is exposed to the vacuum of space?

By D. P. Lyle, MD



*Question:* What sort of damage does the human body suffer in the vacuum of space? How long can one survive and what will happen to the person who does survive?

My scenario involves an astronaut whose faceplate blows out, but not before he depressurizes his suit sufficiently to prevent immediate death.

*Answer:* First of all, the victim would not explode as was the case in the movies such as *Total Recall*. But some very bad things do happen internally and they happen very quickly.

Whether he depressurizes somewhat beforehand or not, his survival once he reached zero pressure (vacuum) would likely be measured in seconds.

Space decompression sickness is similar to the sickness that strikes a scuba diver who rises too rapidly after a prolonged exposure to the pressures of the deep. In that case, the diver is going from excess pressure to normal pressure. In space, the victim goes from normal pressure to zero pressure. It's the same thing physiologically.

In diving, the problem is that the pressure causes excess nitrogen (N) to dissolve in the blood. This N will come back out of the blood as the pressure is reduced. This should happen slowly to prevent decompression sickness, also known as the bends. If the diver rises rapidly, causing the pressure to drop rapidly, the N comes out of the blood quickly, forming N bubbles in the bloodstream.

This is similar to popping the top on a soft drink: the release of pressure allows carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>), which was placed into the liquid under pressure, to come out of the liquid and form bubbles. We call this carbonization. A good thing for your soft drink, but not so good for your brain, heart, and muscles.

In space decompression, basically the same thing happens, except the culprit is water and not nitrogen. With the sudden release of pressure, the water in the blood "boils," becoming a gas, and bubbles form in the system.

I should point out that in chemical and physical terms, boiling simply means the changing of a liquid to a gas. This can be accomplished by adding heat (boiling water on a stove) or by lowering the ambient pressure (popping open a soft drink).

In the case of space decompression, it isn't that the blood gets hot, but rather that the pressure that keeps the water in its liquid state is removed. The water changes to its gaseous state, or boils.

Doesn't sound very pleasant, does it?

Though studies on the effects of exposure to a vacuum have been done on chimpanzees, there are no real data on what happens to humans exposed to zero pressure except for a couple of incidents where an astronaut or a pilot was accidentally exposed. Rapid decompression caused deaths in both high-altitude flights and in June 1971, when the Russian spacecraft Soyuz 11 suddenly lost pressure, killing the three cosmonauts onboard. Survivors of rapid decompression are few and far between.

On August 16, 1960, parachutist Joe Kittinger ascended to an altitude of 102,800 feet (19.5 miles) in an open gondola in order to set a world record for high-altitude parachute jump. He lost pressurization in his right glove but proceeded with his ascent and jump.

He experienced pain and loss of function in his hand at high altitude, but all returned to normal once he descended via chute to lower altitudes.

In 1965 at NASA's Manned Spacecraft Center near Houston, TX, a trainee suffered a sudden leak in his spacesuit while in a vacuum chamber. He lost consciousness in 14 seconds, but was revived after a few seconds as the chamber was immediately re-pressurized.

He suffered no ill effects due to his very brief exposure, but stated that he could feel water boiling on his tongue. This was actually the above-mentioned boiling scenario in which water (in this case saliva) becomes a gas on exposure to zero pressure.

A case of partial, prolonged exposure occurred during an EVA (space walk) in April 1991 on the US space shuttle mission STS-37. One astronaut suffered a one-eighth-inch puncture in one glove between the thumb and forefinger.

He was unaware of it until later, when he noticed a painful red mark on his skin in the exposed area. It appeared that the area bled some, but that his blood had clotted and sealed the injury.

So, what happens to a human exposed to zero pressure? Since there is no oxygen in such an environment, loss of consciousness occurs in a matter of seconds. Also, if the victim held his breath (don't do this during scuba diving when coming up from depths either), the air in his lungs would rapidly expand and his lungs could be damaged, bleed, or rupture. Better to open his mouth and exhale the rapidly expanding gas from his lungs.

Water in his bloodstream would immediately begin to "boil," filling the bloodstream with water vapor (the gas form of water) and stopping his heart. Bubbles might appear in the blood stream and cause damage to the body's organs, particularly the brain. As a result, the brain and nerves cease to function. As more and more gas formed within the body, the entire body would swell, but it would not explode.

Exposure to heat or cold or radiation might also occur, but it will do little harm since the victim would already be dead.

But what if the exposure were brief and the person was rescued? Treatment would be to immediately return him to a pressurized environment and give him 100% oxygen. He may survive unharmed, or may have brain and nerve damage that could be permanent.

For your scenario, whether he partially decompressed or not, he would be in trouble very quickly. When your victim's faceplate ruptured he would hopefully begin to exhale air to prevent the expanding gases in his lungs from rupturing them.

As air, and thus oxygen, flowed from his lungs and into space, the oxygen content of his blood would rapidly drop and he would lose consciousness in 10 to 20 seconds. He would then die in short order.

However, if he were quickly rescued, he would be returned to the spacecraft, which would be

pressurized, and would be given 100% oxygen via a face mask. He could survive but might sustain brain damage.

It's your call. Either way works.

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*Along with Jan Burke, he is the co-host of [Crime and Science Radio](#). He has worked with many novelists and with the writers of popular television shows such as Law & Order, CSI: Miami, Diagnosis Murder, Monk, Judging Amy, Peacemakers, Cold Case, House, Medium, Women's Murder Club, 1-800-Missing, The Glades, and Pretty Little Liars. Learn more about his work at [www.dplylemd.com](http://www.dplylemd.com) and see his blog at <http://writersforensicsblog.wordpress.com>.*



# Ask the Creativity Coach

## Maintaining your creative integrity while working with editors

*By Denise A. Agnew*



What happens when your vision for a story isn't the same vision as the editor's?

How do you keep a bad experience with an editor from creating writer's block?

From a discussion on the Novelists, Inc. loop, the frequency of creative differences between editors and authors are common. Several authors shared their horror stories.

The main challenge for many authors was working with editors who wanted the author to rewrite the book to fit the editor's vision—not the author's.

Author Vella Munn had this experience to relate: "I'm working with an editor on a novella that takes place in a single day. In the first revision letter I agreed with some of the editor's points, not so much with others. I decided to follow her lead. Now I'm looking at revision letter number two. She still isn't satisfied with how I'm portraying the relationship. Where does a writer's creativity stand when it meets up with the employer's expectations?"

Sue-Ellen Welfonder had this to say about a similar experience: "My worst, near ulcer-and-stroke inducing edits came from editors who hated my writing style and sought to thoroughly erase my voice. The ultimate horror edits were made by an editor whose 'revisions' consisted of a red line she drew through nearly 75 percent of the manuscript, carving out huge sections willy-nilly with no regard for how her massive cuts affected the story, character actions, and development, or what my readers expect and love in my books. She also sought to modernize my medieval."

For Laurie Alice Eakes, a double whammy of line edits and an unsupportive editor went like this: "The line editor had nearly rewritten my entire novel. My editor just added more comments of her own. How did this affect me? I was shattered. That my editor didn't delete what the woman said, didn't even say she disapproved of what the woman had done, made me sure my editor thought my writing was garbage too, that I had no clue what I was doing despite the previous books and awards won and good sales. I was basically being told I couldn't write. I wanted to quit writing right then and there. I still open line edits with terror. I certainly became extremely insecure about my abilities as an author."

All three authors' creativity was impacted as a result of their negative editorial experiences. Established authors might stand up for their creative integrity. But many new authors do not.

Even for authors with substantial experience in publishing, an editor's wholesale slash-and-burn attitude can blindside or paralyze them.

How to react? If you stand up to the hatchet job, your creativity may still take a hit. If you're under pressure to write someone else's story or to write the same sort of story over and over, a creativity block can occur. The implication that your story is severely flawed can accumulate and poison your desire to write.

Here are three steps an author can take to maintain their creative integrity when an editor is being too intrusive.

### **Go with your gut.**

Your feelings are the first clue. Do you feel the revised version still contains the heart of your story or do you believe you've compromised too much?

Authors sometimes ignore their intuition and accept a complete overhaul of a story even when everything inside them protests.

Does this whole situation make you feel as if you can't write your way out of a paper bag? Is there respect in the conversation between you and the editor?

It's crucial to take time to see where you want to draw the line—and stick with it—once you understand where the line is. If a major overhaul of your story doesn't feel wrong, then your creative integrity is probably intact.

### **Fear is the enemy.**

If that gut check says an overhaul of the story doesn't feel right, fear can still keep you from speaking up. You might want to run screaming because you fear retribution from the editor or perhaps your agent.

Giving in to avoid conflict and fear is an easy way out, but it's likely a decision you'll regret in the long run. *Don't do it.* Pay attention to what your gut is telling you and honor it.

Think about what is important to you. Compromise can be a good thing, yet there is a huge gulf between compromising and a total collapse that results in an unrecognizable rewrite of your original story.

### **Make a pro and con chart.**

It might sound simplistic, but an old-fashioned list of pros and cons can help you see a clearer path.

Think deeply about what the pros are of following this editor's recommendations or demands. Do the same for the cons. See which side is longer—and which elements matter most to you—and judge from there.

Ask for a different editor for your next manuscript. If you've already buckled under once and your feelings and creativity are suffering, ask for a different editor for the next book.

In conclusion, the only way authors can create for life is to understand and trust their feelings.

Every author encounters challenges to their creativity over a lifetime. Trusting yourself more is an excellent way to mitigate those bumps in the road.

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*Denise A. Agnew is the author of over 65 novels. She has written paranormal, romantic comedy, contemporary, fantasy, historical, erotic romance, and romantic suspense. Agnew is also a paranormal investigator, Reiki Master, and Certified Creativity Coach. Visit Agnew's websites, [www.deniseagnew.com](http://www.deniseagnew.com) and [www.creativepencoaching.com](http://www.creativepencoaching.com).*

# The Mad Scribbler

## Sparkling Joy

By Laura Resnick



*"I tried that Japanese decluttering trend where you hold each thing you own, and throw it out if it doesn't give you joy. I threw out all my vegetables and the electric bill."*

—Mindy Kaling, author & actress

Last year, like a surprisingly large number of my friends, I read Marie Kondo's *The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up: The Japanese Art of Decluttering and Organizing*.

Kondo, an organizing consultant based in Tokyo, was on Time's 2015 list of the "100 Most Influential People."

Who knew that tidying would become such a big deal?

A bestselling author who has hosted her own decluttering-themed TV show in Japan, Marie Kondo's now-famous "KonMari" method of tidying advocates keeping only the possessions that bring you joy—and getting rid of everything else.

I'll bet you're thinking something similar to what I thought: "My stapler does not bring me joy, but I need it."

Or, as freelance author Kaz Weida wrote on ScaryMommy.com, "The KonMari Method has many, many problems. Including the fact that if I employed it, all of my toilet paper and at least one of my children would end up curbside."

The bitter truth is that there are many things that do not bring us joy but which nonetheless cannot realistically be shed. We've probably all got at least one relative, neighbor, colleague, and/or major household appliance that fits this description.

That said, Kondo's book gave me a whole new way of looking at my possessions. I keep a fairly tidy household and am not prone to clutter, but I have always decluttered in a utilitarian way, keeping or shedding items on the basis of questions like: "Have I used it in the past two years? Will I need it in the next twelve months?"

It had never occurred to me to keep or shed objects, instead, on the basis of questions like, "Does it spark joy? Do I love it? Does it make me happy?"

This method initially struck me as too impractical to work—but I was wrong. Following Kondo's

detailed advice, I realized I'd been holding onto quite a few things for utilitarian reasons (e.g. "there's still a lot of wear left in this item") that were, in reality, completely impractical (e.g. "there's a lot of wear left in it because I don't like it and never use it").

Additionally, Kondo's philosophy eliminates guilt about shedding items on which you spent too much money (let the object move on to find the person in whom it will spark joy, rather than hanging around here to remind you that you spent too much money on it), things that people gave you (embrace the love that accompanied the gift, not the physical item you don't want), and books you bought but haven't read (by sitting on your shelf unread for three years, that book entered your life to teach you that you didn't need to read it, after all).

That last one was a huge revelation to me, and, as a result, I promptly donated eight bags of unread books to my local library. Now that was life-changing!

Although Kondo advocates decluttering your entire home in one fell swoop, I prefer to do it bit by bit, as an occasional lifestyle tweak. Which has, in turn, led to me thinking about how to apply this question of "sparking joy" to other aspects of my life, too—such as writing.

One of the results of writing book after book, year after year, for more than twenty-five years, is that—at least in my case—writing a novel has stopped being something I "get" to do and has turned into something I "have" to do.

This is partly, of course, a realistic shift in perspective, since writing is my full-time, self-supporting income. I do indeed have to write, or else I won't earn the income that I need to pay for my life; and this has been true for many years now.

But I increasingly find that this utilitarian feeling about my work—that writing my fiction is something I *have* to do—is eliminating the joy. And without the joy that got me started writing and sustained my craft for years, it's increasingly hard to create when I sit at my keyboard.

In fretting and worrying about this, since it's been slowing me down (and I was not a fast writer, anyhow), it occurred to me that if a little shift in perspective (Kondo's advice about how to shed unread books) could get me to fill eight bags of books from my shelves in a few hours, when I previously thought I had already culled my library as much as I could, then a shift in perspective could also infuse my writing process with joy that has been seeping out of it in recent years.

So I have started experimenting with finding ways to spark joy again. One of the first things I realized in this search was that I needed to take some of the financial pressure off my writing, because the more I exhort myself to write faster because I need the money, the more unproductive my writing process gets.

So I got two part-time jobs, both of which I enjoy. A couple of days a week, I do dog-walking for a pet-sitting service; and I've recently started working as a tour guide for a company that does historic walking tours.

Both jobs involve walking and being outside, which is a healthy change from sitting in my home office, and I get paid to spend time with dogs and history nerds. I find that the change of pace and the income are both helping me feel better, which is good for my writing.

Much as I love the urban fantasy series I currently write, I'm also looking more seriously now at what else I want to write, how to vary my projects and mix it up a little.

I think that writing eight books in a row in the same series, with the same narrator and same characters, is part of why I've been struggling lately. For about eight years, I have consistently back-burnered and postponed any other project I want to write, in favor of getting more books-in-a-row out there in this series.

While that decision made commercial sense for several years, I've stayed in that mode for too long, and I've wound up dampening my own creativity by repeatedly putting off other projects.

Given my geological pace on my current book, that's obviously no longer a productive strategy, and it's time to change.

And it's really fortunate for me that the conditions of our profession have changed so much in recent years. I'm not sure I could revive my spark of joy as a writer anymore if I still had to ask myself about every new or potential project, as I used to, "Is it marketable? Can I sell it to a publisher?"

Thinking of every story through that frame really did suck the joy out of writing over the years (and is among the reasons I tried twice to quit writing). That utilitarian thinking, at least, no longer gets to throw a blanket over the spark a weary writer is trying to reignite.

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*Laura Resnick recently purchased Marie Kondo's newest book, Spark Joy, which discusses "whether to keep 'necessary' items that may not bring you joy," such as staplers and toilet paper.*

# Not Your Usual Writing Advice: Synchronicity

By JoAnn Grote



*"Chance is always powerful.  
Let your hook be always cast; in the pool where you least expect it, there will be a fish."  
—Ovid*

I wrote my first published novel, *The Sure Promise*, while living in North Carolina in the days before the Internet made it relatively easy to conduct research. The novel was set on the Minnesota prairie in the 1870s.

Prior to starting the novel, I had worked at an historical restoration in North Carolina for five years under the restoration's director of education. He taught me a lot about research and the importance of presenting historical information as accurately as possible.

So when I decided to write *The Sure Promise*, it was important to me that the story I wanted to write could actually have happened within the historical facts of the time period and setting.

Perhaps you've heard of the grasshopper plagues that hit the North American prairies in the 1800s. I wanted to set my story right after the grasshopper plagues in the area where I grew up on the Minnesota prairie.

The town was less than ten years old in the 1870s. The effect of the plagues on the town itself was central to the story I wanted to tell. I thought the destruction of crops in the area must have had a serious financial effect on the town, but was I right?

I conducted a lot of research, much of it long distance by phone and mail. I made trips to Minnesota and visited the local historical society and the Minnesota Historical Society in St. Paul.

I read books, including firsthand reports of the devastation the grasshoppers left in their wake across the affected states and territories. I scoured the few newspapers that were available from the 1870s in the counties near the area where my story was set; there were no newspapers remaining from the actual town or county.

The information I found caused me to lean toward believing I was right and the town would have been adversely affected by the grasshoppers, but to what extent? The grasshopper damage could be hit and miss, with some areas wiped out agriculturally and nearby areas barely touched.

I wrote and rewrote the first three chapters, but I couldn't seem to move further. What if my

assumption was incorrect? I wanted something more definitive to base my theory upon.

While I wrote and researched, a memory niggled at me. A number of years earlier, before I'd moved from Minnesota to North Carolina, a college student had visited my hometown. It was one of many towns she'd visited while researching the topic of her thesis—the grasshopper plagues in Minnesota.

I thought that if I could get in touch with this woman I would be able to obtain the information I needed. But how could I reach her? I'd already asked the director at the local history society if she knew who the person was, but the director did not recall anything about a person visiting the area for such a purpose and did not find any information submitted to their local archives.

I had so little information about the person that I hadn't bothered to ask at the Minnesota Historical Society. One day I screwed up my courage and asked anyway. I called the society and was put through to the library.

"I know how strange this will sound," I told the librarian who answered the call, "but I'm trying to find a thesis written on the grasshopper plagues in Minnesota. I don't know whether it's been published, or the author's name, or what year it might have been published, or the college or university the author attended. Can you help me?"

Silence on the other end of the line.

I almost hung up. I knew how crazy it was to ask the question. I could practically feel the librarian's restraint in not telling me I was nuts, breaking into hysterical laughter, or just hanging up on me with no response.

He was not completely successful in keeping the disdain from his voice when he finally responded. "If you don't know who wrote it, when they wrote it, or what school they attended, there is no way we can tell you whether the thesis on the grasshopper plagues was published."

Feeling sheepish, I started to thank him when he interrupted with, "Just a minute."

I heard someone speaking to him, but couldn't hear what they were saying.

Before long he was back on the line. "You aren't going to believe this, but that thesis has been published as a book. It just came out, and it arrived at our bookstore this morning."

Goosebumps ran over my entire body. If I'd asked even *one day* earlier, would I have discovered this? What if the other librarian hadn't overheard my call? I suddenly felt certain my book was meant to be written.

The librarian connected me to the bookstore, and the store sent me a copy of the book. The information in the book partially supported my theory and provided information on primary sources I accessed and in which I found the final verification of the theory so important to my story.

Until then, I hadn't known the grasshoppers plagued my setting for five straight years, or known for certain that the plagues caused many of the townspeople to give up on the area and leave, most to head further west. The book and the sources to which it led me provided a lot of other information that improved my understanding of the area and added to the background and plot of my story, and ideas and information for what became the next five books in a series.

If your progress on a story idea or manuscript has stalled because you don't know where to find or how to access the information you need, you might want to try this:

- Write a statement defining exactly what information you need so you will be prepared when you conduct a search or ask for assistance.
- Make a list of five ways you might obtain the information. Be sure to include ways/places/people you think are beyond the realm of possibility, especially if you think it or they are



the best source, and especially if it's something or someone that has come to mind repeatedly.

- Choose one from your list of five and act on it.

The first action you choose might not lead to the answer you want. Perhaps none of the five will directly provide the information.

Even so, it is my belief that you will have put your intention out there, and will have started to make a shift to the belief that it's possible to find the information.

By following your action steps, you might come across something elsewhere that leads you in an entirely different direction that provides exactly what you need. You might come across information that you weren't even aware you needed for your story, information which may not be related, or is only indirectly related, to the information you are seeking.

Think it's impossible to find the information you need? Take one step forward and set synchronicity in motion.

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

# You Might Have Missed This

## Great links for enlightenment or procrastination

By Ashley McConnell



If you're feeling really masochistic, you can check out [how much you've spent on Amazon](#) in your lifetime (or in its lifetime, which is shorter, although it doesn't seem like it). Warning: Have a stiff drink handy. (Note: The drink didn't work for me, possibly because over twenty years I've spent *way too much* there.)

For the more esoteric-minded among us, who know that the Scottish legal system is not identical to the English, and would like to know more about it, see [this site](#).

And related to this is the [Rare Book School](#), under the aegis of the University of Virginia in Charlottesville. Are you a connoisseur of law books? (Really, this is a thing!) Interested in critical bibliography? Digitizing the cultural record? (No, this is not a euphemism for piracy.) Into paleography? Medieval studies? History of the book in China? The RBS is for you.

Do you shop online a lot? Are you driven crazy when prices drop the day after you make a purchase? Early in March, NBC News ran a story about a company called [Paribus](#), which monitors your email receipts (yes, that gave me pause too) and price changes. They'll send you the difference, less 25%. [This article tells you more](#).

Related to this, are you aware of the sometimes drastic differences in the cost of medical procedures in the US? Now there's a company that will do [medical comparison shopping](#) for you, in 39 states.

London Skyline Along the Thames, 1616 vs. 2016: [this article](#) provides artists' renderings of the same points in each year (click on the illustrations).

Are you desperately trying to find a real human being to talk to about customer service? [GetHuman](#) is there to help. (There's even a number for Amazon, along with comments from users on how well it worked for them.)

Romance writers (indeed, all writers, but [this article](#) is about romance) are everywhere. Western or first-world countries might not recognize romance under sharia law (traditional editors certainly wouldn't!), but it's there.

[Money and wealth in Shakespeare's time](#): How much did a writer earn for writing a play in 16th century England, and what could it buy? (Answer: Not a lot and not much; no surprise there.)

And while we're at it, a similar infographic on [Love and Sex in Shakespeare's Time](#). Dozens of academics are punching the air, including my former writing partner.

In a dazzling display of Of Course This Makes Sense, the estate of Harper Lee has announced they're [no longer going to license mass market paperbacks of \*To Kill a Mockingbird\*](#). Maybe they think schools will buy hardcovers for their English classes?

Addendum: Harper is offering to sell *Mockingbird* (to K-12 schools only) the trade paperback at mass market paperback pricing. However, as Passive Guy points out, this [still isn't doing schools much of a favor](#).

Someone's using statistics to analyze the [impact of marketing strategies on e-books](#), much as Billy Beane used statistics to build a winning team for the Oakland Athletics.

Some people think that Chanel No. 5 is the best perfume ever. Others swear by signature scents developed by bespoke perfumiers. Booklovers have a different opinion, and now they've finally isolated the distinctive bliss that is [the smell of books, old and new](#).

Three writers of historical fiction (early Roman) don armor and [walk the Appian Way](#) from Padua to Rome—for charity. Narrated by Ian McKellan.

So, you're writing a historical set in London, and you're not sure where your semi-wealthy hero lives. There's an app for that! The [Charles Booth Online Archive](#) provides maps of London showing income levels for various parts of the city, 1886-1903, and a comparison map for the year 2000.

[Digital Book World](#) provides news, tips, and a conference devoted solely to digital publishing.

Kristine Kathryn Rusch talks about [dealbreakers in traditional contracts, and being published by one's agent](#).

Bookbub addresses [some ideas you may have](#) about them.

[Hachette has acquired Perseus](#), and the traditional world gets smaller still.

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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, McConnell 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*

### **NINC Statement of Principle**

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

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

## Nink Newsletter

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