



# MINK

FEBRUARY 2017

Volume 28, Number 2

The official newsletter of Novelists, Inc.,  
a professional organization for  
writers of popular fiction.

## *Nink* February 2017

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# President's Voice

*By Erica Ridley*



## Make the most of NINC: Important links

[Registration](#) for the 2017 NINC Conference: Discovery is now open! Take a moment to secure your place by [registering now](#).

You can find the important [Conference FAQ](#) and [hotel information](#) on our website and via these links.

Not sure how to log in to the new website? [Visit the login page](#). Your username is your email address, and your password was sent to you in an email with subject line "NINC: New website for renewals & more!"

If you didn't see it, be sure to check your Spam folder, or email [webmaster@ninc.com](mailto:webmaster@ninc.com) and we will reset your password for you.

Don't forget to sign up for the [email loop](#), [critique/brainstorming group](#), and the members-only [Facebook group](#) if you haven't already.

## NINC membership benefits

Our Discount Program Chair is working hard to get NINC new member opportunities for 2017, and the conference committee is doing a fabulous job recruiting speakers and sponsors for the Discovery-themed conference. This year is going to be great!

## Hitting the list

NINC released a joint statement regarding the recent changes at the New York Times:

*As organizations representing adult fiction authors, the undersigned believe the New York Times is making a tremendous mistake by abandoning its mass-market paperback and e-book bestseller lists.*

*With this change, the Times is choosing to ignore a significant percentage of US book sales. Further, mass-market paperback and e-book formats provide an entry point into publishing for new voices of every kind: women writers, writers of color and ethnic minorities, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender writers, young writers, and writers who are creating new genres.*



*This decision serves no purpose in fostering a thriving, inclusive fiction market or strengthening the state of publishing. Additionally, the change will make the lists less relevant to authors and readers, as well as the entire publishing and library community.*

*On behalf of more than 20,000 members and their millions of readers, we strongly urge the Times to rethink its extremely limited definition of what constitutes a bestselling novel.*

The above statement was co-signed by Novelists, Inc., Horror Writers of America, Mystery Writers of America, Romance Writers of America, Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers of America, and Sisters in Crime, and delivered directly to the *New York Times*, as well as released on the websites and social media of each organization.

## **Making a difference**

NINC is powered by members just like you who volunteer their time, ranging from a quick one-off Just One Thing volunteer gig all the way to a year-long role, such as a social media moderator or an associate newsletter editor.

We could use your help! Do you have a few hours you could spare for NINC? Please check out the full list of open volunteer positions and committees here:

<https://ninc.com/members-only/open-positions/>

Thank you for making NINC such a wonderful organization.

A stylized, handwritten-style signature of the name "Erica" in a dark blue or purple color.

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*Erica Ridley is a New York Times and USA Today best-selling author of historical romance novels. Her latest series, *The Dukes of War*, features roguish peers and dashing war heroes who return from battle only to be thrust into the splendor and madness of Regency England. When not reading or writing romances, Erica can be found riding camels in Africa, zip-lining through rainforests in Costa Rica, or getting hopelessly lost in the middle of Budapest.*

# Member Notes

## Volunteer opportunities abound at NINC

Get involved in making NINC the most vibrant place for sophisticated authors to hone their business, marketing and craft skills. NINC is seeking your volunteer support in the following positions:

### Membership Committee

NINC membership committee's monthly duties:

- Verify that new applicants' provided documentation meets the requirements for NINC membership.
- Create a list of names, pen names, and the location of qualifying applicants. Send this list of membership applicants to the Newsletter Editor for inclusion in Nink after verification, and then send a list of verified members after approval.

### Facebook Group Moderator

Facebook group moderator's duties:

- Be a member of the Novelists, Inc., Facebook group.
- Ensure requests to join are only granted to current NINC members.
- As necessary, remind members to avoid blatant self-promotion (e.g. posts simply linking to a book's Amazon page, etc.) as this is not the place for "drive-by" advertising.

### NINCLink Moderators

Novelists, Inc., needs a co-moderator for the members-only Yahoo group. The moderator's duties:

- Be a member of the NINCLink Yahoo group.
- Ensure requests to join are only granted to current NINC members.
- As necessary, remind members to trim posts.

### BeachNINC 2017 Moderators

This moderator supports the members-only conference Yahoo group. Duties:

- Be a member of the BeachNINC2017 Yahoo group.
- Ensure requests to join are only granted to current NINC members.
- As necessary, remind members to trim posts.

### Nink Associate Editor

Novelist, Inc.'s official newsletter needs an Associate Newsletter Editor. This person will work with the editor on:

- Editorial planning—seeking out Nink-exclusive content from authors and subject matter experts, planning each issue’s makeup.
- Editing—ensuring articles are at a level that speaks to NINC’s sophisticated membership, and working with contributors on proposed revisions.
- Formatting—Setting up articles in Scrivener for production in our six editions (PDF, epub and mobi formats, with versions for both members and nonmember comps).
- Distribution—Sending the newsletter via Mailchimp.

This is a great opportunity to sharpen your Scrivener and Mailchimp skills (training is provided), connect with top industry subject matter experts to produce articles, and stay in the know on the latest author news.

### **Workshop Submissions Wanted**

The 28th Annual Emerald City Writers’ Conference is now accepting workshop submissions for their annual conference, Oct. 13–15, 2017, in Bellevue, Wash. They are looking for workshops for attendees in all stages of their writing journey, from beginner to advanced.

Workshop Categories include:

- Self-Publishing
- Writing Craft
- Writers Life
- Research
- Business

Limited AV is available. Workshop lengths are 60, 90 or 120 minutes. Speakers receive a discount on their conference registration. Submissions are open Feb. 1 through March 31, 2017. Contact the [Greater Seattle Romance Writers Of America](#).

# Don't Look for the God in the Machine

## Cure your story's conflict with confrontation, not contrivance

By Jim Thomsen



There are roughly 74,883 craft articles on how to add conflict to your novel. But not nearly so many on how to *remove* conflict that doesn't work.

So I'm tackling the conflict issue from the other end of the telescope to talk about a problem I run across with regularity in the novel drafts I edit.

I'm talking about plot pivots that:

- A. Raise stakes; but
- B. Decrease conflict.

How can this be? Call it the *God In The Machine Syndrome*. I'll offer a couple of examples from books I worked on in the last year.

### **Cheating your characters out of the ending they deserve**

In my first example manuscript, a husband and wife love each other fiercely. But over time, the marriage develops more of a mother-and-son dynamic as the husband's comparative lack of life experience—thanks in part to a domineering mother—became more apparent.

And much as the man was afraid to voice his feelings to his mother, he let the growing inequality in his marriage go unaddressed.

Things seemed to be building to a boiling point, and I eagerly turned pages, awaiting the moment when the husband blew up and splattered his frustrations.

But it didn't happen.

Instead, in the draft I first read, the wife died while giving birth. Yes, there were *feelings* of assorted operatic pitches all over the place, as you might imagine, but nothing was resolved.

I told my client that I thought he cheated his characters out of the ending they deserved—the husband giving voice to his true feelings, and the wife being forced to confront her control issues—in favor of a trite *Love Story* ending that cheapened and undercut everything the characters had gone through for three hundred-some pages. (I put it in much more diplomatic language, of course.)

The client didn't like it. Sent an email less than a day later, angry and defensive. Didn't fire me, but it might have been close.

Later, much later, we had a talk about it, and the client admitted to hating *God In The Machine Syndrome* whenever he came across it in his own reading. Said he in an email, "I'm amazed at how often writers seem to take 'suspension of disbelief' for granted. That they can do anything they want after a few hundred pages on the assumption that we're hooked into the characters and their quests and will put up with anything just to find out what happens. Then I realized that's just what I did."

## Essential elements of conflict

Back to the craft issue at play here: The author raised the stakes but did not elevate the conflict.

As my favorite writing-craft guru, James Scott Bell, says, any good novel must have its primary character at risk of psychological, professional or actual death. And conflict (and resolving it), as I hope we all know, is where it's at.

Bell, in his *Writer's Digest* book, *Elements of Fiction Writing: Conflict and Suspense*, spells out the four building blocks of story:

1. A lead character worth following
2. An objective (with death following)
3. A confrontation
4. A knockout ending

Bell expands on this by explaining how to forge "links in the chain of emotional conflict:"

CONFLICT (possibility of imminent death)

ACTION (steps to avoid death)

+ SUSPENSE (unresolved tension associated with action)

= EMOTIONALLY SATISFYING EXPERIENCE

My client delivered the knockout ending without the confrontation—in fact, he did it to *replace* the confrontation. And that just doesn't deliver the satisfying emotional experience we expect from a novel in which we've invested money and time.

It delivers release, but not resolution, and an emotionally satisfying experience has to have both. For romance writers and readers, wouldn't you agree that the "I love you" moment means little if the characters haven't worked hard, and fought that work at times, to earn it? Without that hard work, such moments jerk tears they didn't earn.

As a reader, don't you roll your eyes when that happens? Maybe even toss the book aside?

Think about it. The husband and wife are locked into unbearable tension. He loves her. She loves him. But they come to define love differently: she sees it as fixing him, he sees it at face value.

That creates the unbearable—but let's face it, pleasurable—tension that must be resolved in order for both to grow. The sudden death is a shock, and like any form of shock, it has the effect of shutting things down. In this case, it destroys the necessity of having both characters grow from their adversity.



Nobody grows here. The ending falls flat.

### **The cancer cure-all**

Along similar lines, a novel draft I worked on featured a man on a personal quest stemming from a broken childhood. His wife, afraid of losing him to another woman, decided to indulge his wanderlust only so far.

And just as the two seemed to be building toward an epic blowup, the author decided to sidestep the brewing confrontation by giving the wife a cancer diagnosis. Instantly, the conflict was forgotten in a slather of tears and hugs and declarations of undying love.

Imagine this happening in real life. Does cancer really cancel out a conflict? Does it have the power to make real relationship problems disappear?

And if does, and it leads the husband and wife to lock their problems in a box and put it on a high shelf, is that really satisfying? Let alone for the characters, does it satisfy you as the reader? Can such an ending work in fiction or reality?

I submit that it doesn't because it denies the characters the opportunity to *earn* their resolutions. And what is more satisfying than seeing characters you come to care about reverse their reversals through the depth of their character?

Through doing hard but necessary things? Through exemplifying the courage and strength you as a reader long to possess?

That is why you become emotionally bonded to a story—because on some level, you're living it as well, and longing to make the leap from your reality to a deserved ideal.

That's what I think. How about you? Tell me if you see it differently.

Next month, we'll look at another flaw in foundational conflict: unearned beginnings.

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*Jim Thomsen is a manuscript editor based on Bainbridge Island, Washington. You can reach him at [thomsen1965@gmail.com](mailto:thomsen1965@gmail.com).*

# Crisis Communication: Who hears what and when?

How to write when everything goes wrong—part two

*By Allie Pleiter*



Crises rarely happen in a vacuum—they erupt alongside people we love and associates who irritate us. We cope with them in front of our dearest friends as well as the grocery checkout clerk.

If you're introverted like most writers, you'd like the world to just leave you alone. Yet, studies show community and connection are vital to healing. How do you let a support system into your life without letting well-meaning meddlers invade?

As an author, you've also got a public to manage. You should deal with that dynamic proactively, because public information can be an uncontrollable beast. You don't want that to add to your stress.

In this article, we'll look at the various levels of connection—from those who know you well to your (hopefully) adoring public—and review some strategies for handling them.

## **Your inner circle**

Your closest friends, immediate family, partners and spouses will hopefully be nearby when crisis hits. That's a good thing—you need them. Think about these points when communicating with your inner circle:

1. They get the unedited version. Now is no time to have to watch words. Ask them upfront for the grace of "unedited" communication.
2. Talk with your agent, *not* your editor. If you might blow that deadline or fear you will go to pieces during tomorrow's radio interview, have this conversation with your agent rather than your editor ... even if you're on very friendly terms with your editor.
3. Don't assume this is your family. You need people who can be agents of calm, and that isn't always family members. Anyone with a gift for drama—and every family's got 'em—should stay in the outer circle.
4. Include crisis and care professionals. Nurses, counselors, outplacement professionals,

and financial planners can all be effective here. Their objectivity can often be useful.

### **Your outer circle**

Writers are natural storytellers, likely to process our lives in narrative form. So, we might tell everyone too much of what's going on. Or, we may stuff everything inside until we can making sense of it by writing it down.

Such tendencies make it wise to think about communication to the rest of our world. As an extrovert, I need to tell the story frequently, and often with far too much detail—but that's not always wise. Conversely, introverts resist informing people outside the inner circle who should know what's going on. Here are a few guidelines for your outer circle:

1. Give appropriate, edited details. Write out a short version of what has happened, then edit it for brevity and clarity. Choose in advance which details the world should know.
2. Call your editor only when you're ready. A professional exhibits grace under pressure—wait until you can be informative but not panicky. If necessary, have your agent call your editor with the basic urgent details, saying that you will touch base as soon as you can. Remember, you are likely throwing a monster-size wrench into their plans.
3. Watch for new sources of assistance. A traumatic situation can connect you deeply with people you previously considered only casual acquaintances. Wonderful resources may lie outside your inner circle—share enough information to find them.
4. Extroverts should edit, introverts should proclaim. Stressed extroverts often overshare while stressed introverts clam up. Take time to think about how to wisely widen the pool of those who know what you're facing.

### **Everybody else**

As an author, you have a third dynamic to manage: the public. How will your audience, your readers, social media followers, and even the general public hear what's happened? Should they receive information or be asked to respect your privacy? Keep the following in mind as you plan:

1. Script your communication. Even excellent speakers aren't at their best under siege. Write out what you want to say and exactly the best way to say it.
2. Keep it short and possibly designed to end conversation. Come up with a one-sentence version of your situation that doesn't invite questions, such as "the project didn't meet my expectations."
3. Whose privacy is at stake? If several people have been drawn into the fray, decide in advance who needs their privacy protected.
4. What is gained by everyone knowing? The answer might be a profound motivator. Or the answer might be "nothing."

### **Why go public?**

Most of us want our pain to matter, and "going public" could help or inform others. If you are an extrovert, or speaking in addition to writing, going public might feel like the whole point

of whatever has happened to you. What's to be gained by going public?

1. Others can learn. So goes the saying, "If I can help one person...." Helping others aids us in making sense of our crises. It feels good to believe that some good can come out of our overdose of bad.
2. They might (eventually) know anyway. If you cancel events, drop off Facebook, miss deadlines, or demonstrate other unusual behavior, the public will likely notice. And wonder. Control your narrative instead of letting others create one for you.
3. Transparency takes less energy. Telling the truth always takes less energy than anything else. Secrets—even appropriate ones—take energy to keep.

### **Why stay private?**

There are some very good reasons why you might choose to keep your situation to yourself:

1. Are you prepared for the outcomes? People can be tactless, nosy, and even cruel. Not everyone will respond with kindness and compassion. The good usually outweighs the bad, but the bad will be there. If you aren't yet strong enough for it, keep the situation private.
2. You don't owe anyone an explanation. You don't. "It's personal," is a complete sentence, and all the explanation they need.
3. Your energy may need to be elsewhere. It saps time and energy to give everyone an explanation or update, and there are emotional costs of having to repeatedly relay difficult information. Sharing sites like "Caring Bridge" have made medical traumas easier to handle, but not every situation fits that medium.
4. You've chosen your career, your family has not. You sought readers and fans, you've worked to build a relationship with your audience. Your family has not. If you announce that your father is in his last days, consider that you take him public right alongside you.

### **Are you ready?**

If you have weighed the pros and cons of going public with your situation, here are some final thoughts to consider before moving forward:

1. Communication started can't be stopped. You can't change your mind; once information is out, it's out for good. That's not always a reason to fear, but it is a reason to stop and think.
2. Are you too raw? Even if going public feels right, going public too soon could mean still-fresh wounds keep you from withstanding challenges or attacks. You might need to wait and heal a bit more.
3. Grace and slack might be in short supply. You are going to have to cut someone slack for a thoughtless remark or show grace when someone attacks. Wait a bit more if you don't yet have the emotional stability not to rise to someone's bait.
4. Someone *will* say something stupid. Maybe even the last person you'd expect. You will be disappointed if you are hoping your sharing will produce only compassion and support.

Help yourself and those you love by thoughtfully considering how the world hears of your adversity. Wise communication buys you peace and progress as you face what's ahead.

In our next article, we'll talk about managing how your trauma shows up in your writing.

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*Allie Pleiter spends her days writing four books at a time and buying yarn to knit. Both a RITA and Carol Award finalist as well as a RT Reviewer's Choice and RomCon Reader's Crown Award winner, Allie recently celebrated her millionth book sold. She speaks nationally on writing, faith, women's issues, and time management. To obtain a free copy of the Chunky Calculator, visit [www.alliepleiter.com](http://www.alliepleiter.com) or text the word CHUNKY to 22828.*



# The Mad Scribbler

## "Complete"

By Laura Resnick



*Complete: having all necessary parts, elements, or steps;  
brought to an end, concluded.*  
—Merriam-Webster Dictionary

I received a distressed email recently from a writer who wrote and delivered a manuscript on time—and then received a response saying that the publisher had decided not to publish the book and was canceling the contract.

As any writer who has ever bothered to read their book agreements knows (though even in the 21st century, alas, one still meets authors unwilling to bother their pretty little heads with such stuff), publishers typically include a contractual clause giving the company the right to refuse to publish or pay for a delivered manuscript.

The potential reasons for refusal cited in my own book contracts from different publishers are vague and very similar to each other: If, “in the sole judgment” or “the sole opinion” of the publisher, the manuscript is “unacceptable,” then the publisher is entitled to cancel the contract.

Even if, in an attempt to salvage the situation, I agree to do what contracts usually call “reasonable revisions” (indeed, even if I willingly rewrite the book five times under editorial direction), the publisher is still legally entitled to cancel the contract by saying, on a wholly subjective basis, that they find the book unacceptable.

From the writer’s perspective, of course, this is a nightmare. But from the publisher’s standpoint, this clause provides a reassuringly easy exit from a legally binding agreement they’re eager to abandon.

Which is not to suggest that publishers ever worry overmuch about the parameters of abandoning their contractual commitments to writers. For example, an author who recently contacted me said their publisher gave a reason that wasn’t even mentioned in the refusal clause of the contract.

The writer asked me what the options were for opposing or reacting to what seemed like a

clear breach of contract, since the publisher was abandoning the agreement in a manner not covered by the cancellation terms specified in that self-same agreement.

"I can't believe that publishers just break contracts as they wish without repercussions or compensation of any kind," the author wrote.

Oh, my sweet summer child.

I've had contracts canceled because a publisher was going out of business, was shutting down an imprint, had laid off my editor, or was simply dumping a bunch of writers all at once. I know writers who've had contracts canceled upon delivering exactly the book they had outlined and which the publisher now realized it didn't really know how to publish, or because their editor was replaced with an editor who didn't want any "inherited" writers.

Writers tell me they've had publishing contracts canceled, or have been threatened with cancellation, due to engaging in self-publishing, or for auditing their publisher, or for participating in legal action.

I once had a contract canceled at a small press because, after seeing dozens of production errors in the hardcover edition of a book, I asked the publisher to make corrections before releasing the paperback edition. (And to be clear, I didn't throw a tantrum; I made a businesslike request.)

In their dealings with writers, publishers frequently get away with doing whatever they please. And when people say, "That's outrageous, and you should sue your publisher," it's usually because they don't know what they're talking about.

As Harlequin writers know, suing a publisher is extremely time consuming and expensive. The recently settled class action case *Keiler v. Harlequin* (which alleged that Harlequin deprived authors of ebook royalties owed to them under publishing agreements entered into between 1990 and 2004) went on for four years—and would have gone on still longer if Harlequin had decided to continue fighting rather than offer a settlement.

Even with many writers pooling their money, it's doubtful the case could have been pursued that long—let alone through a trial—if the attorneys had demanded up-front fees throughout those years rather than, at some point, agreeing to work on contingency.

Yes, despite the enormous amount of work involved for the lead authors in the case, as well as the overall cost, a lawsuit like that one can be worth pursuing. Not only because it involved a publisher allegedly cheating an enormous number of writers out of their incomes, but also because the sum of money involved was enormous—and that's crucial.

When people suggest a lone author sue a publisher over a rejected manuscript, they sometimes resurrect the twenty-year-old Joan Collins case. The actress, who has written a number of books over the years (and who is the sister of bestselling novelist Jackie Collins), was one of the most popular celebrities of the 1980s, winning awards, accolades, and ratings wars in her role as the seductive and vengeful Alexis Carrington on the long-running TV drama *Dynasty*.

Now in her eighties, Collins is still professionally active. After *Dynasty* ended, Collins signed a two-book, multi-million dollar publishing deal with Random House in the 1990s.

The association went sour after Collins delivered both manuscripts. The publisher declared the material "unreadable," canceled the contract, and demanded she return to them the signing

advance of \$1.2 million.

Collins responded by filing a countersuit in which she demanded that Random House pay her the rest of the advance. She won the case, and although she didn't get all of the money in question, she did get \$1 million—which certainly seems like a sum worth suing for. Especially if you're a major star who can afford the legal fees.

Such circumstances are substantially different from that of most authors, whose individual financial disputes with their publishers usually involve much smaller sums. It would make no sense for a writer—or anyone else—to spend \$40,000 in legal fees to resolve a dispute over a sum of \$10,000, for example. (Nonetheless, a friend who works in the court system tells me that such ill-advised lawsuits are very common.)

However, even when a legal battle involves seven-figure sums, pursuing it is a fool's errand if you don't have a case. Collins did have one, and her attorney's argument wasn't one that many writers can use—because most of us don't have the contractual language she had in that instance.

Her literary agent had been shrewd enough to negotiate a change in the usual language of Random House's delivery-and-acceptance clause. The original contract had used the word "satisfactory" in that clause, a standard which is as vague and subjective as "acceptable." The agent got it changed to "complete."

Ms. Collins' argument was that she had fulfilled her contractual obligations by delivering two *complete* manuscripts, and the publisher's assertion that they found the material "unreadable" had no legal bearing on whether they were obliged to pay her.

So the attorneys for each side argued over the exact meaning of the word "complete," debating whether it had a quantitative meaning (are all the pages there?) or a qualitative one (are the elements that make a book readable all there?).

The jury reportedly took less than two hours to decide unanimously that Random House was grasping at straws in claiming that a "complete" manuscript necessarily meant a good read, and the publisher was ordered to pay Collins a substantial sum. Which is why I'm guessing that no publisher since then has signed a contract whose refusal clause refers to a "complete" manuscript rather than an "acceptable" one.

When the disappointed writer who contacted me asked me what the options are when a publisher reneges on a contract, I suggested trying to get the company to pay out the rest of the advance. I know of some instances where publishers have done that if, for example, they were canceling contracts because they were shutting down an imprint, restructuring their program, or downsizing their list. The answer is likely to be "no," but it never hurts to ask.

However, the single most important thing, I told the author, is to get your rights back. A canceled book is a viable product that you can market to other publishers or self-publish—but only if you regain control of the rights.

Finally, as I told this writer, no matter how disappointed you are, and no matter what the contract says, you can't force the publisher to publish the book. If they don't want it, they're not going to release it.

After all, after paying a signing advance of \$1.2 million to Joan Collins, Random House then paid legal fees and court costs, followed by the court-ordered \$1 million payment to

Collins ... rather than publish her work.

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*Laura Resnick has yet to deliver a book that was rejected as "unacceptable," but her turn will come.*

# Self-Publishing Success Story

**How one writer took her income from zero to \$300,000 in two years**

*By Leeanna Morgan*



*Editor's note: While NINC members are sophisticated writers, some are just starting their self-publishing journey. This article on self-publishing fundamentals is geared toward beginning self-publishers.*

If anyone had told me two years ago that I would be able to resign from my management role and become a full-time writer and publisher, I would have smiled and thought they were slightly crazy. But believe it or not—that's what happened.

Like many writers, I thought signing a contract with one of the big New York publishing houses would be amazing. It didn't matter that I'd only been writing for a couple of years or that the chance of being contracted with an agency was a million-to-one—I had some wonderful stories to share and I couldn't do that without an agent or a publishing contract.

I was wrong.

I did sign with a New York agency, but a few months into the contract, I withdrew my manuscript and gave myself four months to self-publish my first three novels. During those months I created my website and Facebook page. I designed my own covers (more on that later) and learned how to use MailChimp and write a newsletter.

After substantial edits to all manuscripts, I was almost there.

Diana Fraser, a friend and successful indie author, formatted my manuscripts and showed me how to upload the files onto Smashwords and Amazon. Pushing the 'submit for publication' button was a scary moment!

Twelve months later, I decided to promote my ebooks to see if it made any difference to my sales. It did. After the first month, revenue doubled and kept building.

You're probably wondering how I built this business. It wasn't easy. There was an incredibly steep learning curve ahead of me. I'm still exploring different ways of doing things, sorting through the latest wave of marketing ideas, and working out what works for my current and future readers.

I'm looking at different ways of engaging with my readers, encouraging them to be part of



my heroes' and heroines' journeys.

There were many times when working full-time and building my writing career meant 15-hour days, missing time with my two children, and feeling guilty when I watched *Blacklist* with my husband.

Whoever said writing was a solitary career hasn't seen our home. I couldn't have achieved what's happened without my family and friends' support. Through thick and thin, we were on this journey together.

If I gave just three pieces of advice (and there will be more, I promise) it would be this...

### **Prepare to be empowered**

The more knowledge you have about the self-publishing process, the more informed you are about your options, the better the outcome. The decisions I made before I published any novels were critical to my success.

### **Being informed doesn't mean doing everything yourself**

There are companies that will do everything for you, from cover design to editing and formatting. Work out what you're good at and what you need help with. If you don't have the time or the necessary skills, contract out those parts of the process.

### **Work out what success means to you**

Do you want to sell a book to someone who isn't your mum? Do you want to become a *New York Times* bestselling author, or do you want to feel a sense of pride and accomplishment from publishing a novel?

Your answer will impact on the decisions you make going forward, but at the heart of everything is a great book. Don't sell yourself or your readers short by publishing a book you're not proud of. Edit that darn manuscript until you're sick of seeing it. Ask friends to give you honest feedback, employ a professional editor—do whatever it takes to hold your head high when your book hits the marketplace.

### **What's next?**

Once you have a great manuscript (or before—if that works better for you), design a great cover. You'll have milliseconds to convince readers that they need to buy your book.

Look at what the top covers in your genre look like. Pick out the elements you or your designer will use to create an amazing cover.

Successful branding will get your book noticed. It will create an instant emotion in potential readers. It will sell your next book.

I've included two of my series covers below. Look at the elements that are the same as well as those that aren't.

Do the images scream contemporary, heartwarming romance? Does each title say, "I'm a romance novel—you're going to enjoy reading me." Make it easy for a reader to choose your book.

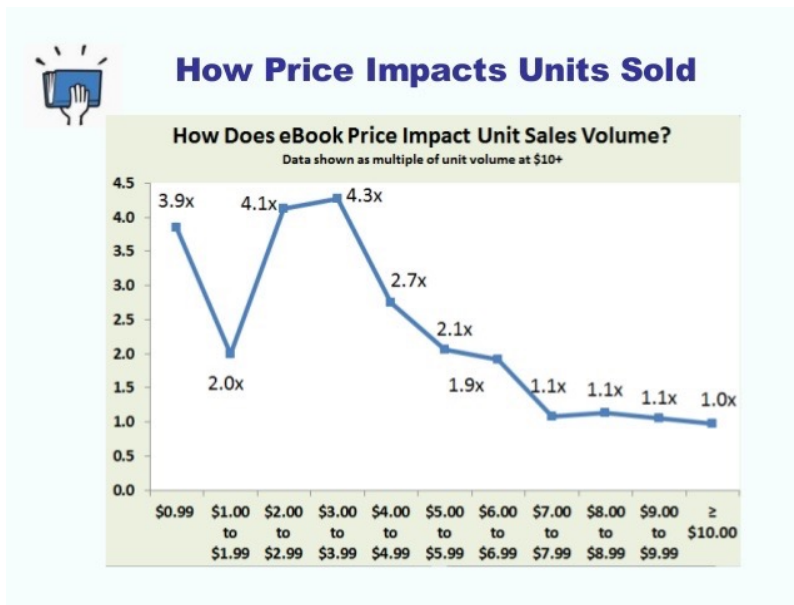


Branding doesn't stop at book covers. It flows through to your website, your Facebook page, and any other platforms you use.

For my Emerald Lake Billionaires series, I asked my designer (Steven Novak at Novak Illustration) to incorporate all the elements of my book covers into a banner for my website and Facebook page. We continued this theme through my Facebook ads, newsletter headers, and all digital content.



Once you have a great book, a great cover, and consistent branding, you'll need to think about the price of your book. Here's a graph from Smashwords that can help inform your pricing:



Did you notice the drop in sales at the \$1 to \$1.99 price point? I wouldn't recommend pricing your book in this bracket. For whatever reason, you'll sell more books at a higher or lower level than this. Remember—if you sell your book for 99 cents, you will receive a much lower royalty rate from most retailers (about 30%) than the usual 60-80% you will enjoy for books priced \$2.99 or higher.

When thinking about pricing, look at the cost of other books in your genre or category. Is your book competitively priced or over-priced? Pricing can vary within subgenres, based on word count, and for books in a series.

## Your author website

The very minimum an author's website should have is:

- Your author brand—keep it looking professional,
- Your books with buy links, by series,
- When your next book will be published,
- Social media links (share buttons), and
- Sign-up to mailing list.

Some additional things to consider for your website:

- Mobile-friendly formatting,
- Blog posts that keep content current and attract search engines, and
- Interesting and personal details.

## Pre-orders

A pre-order enables you to list your book for sale at retailers in advance of publication. Readers pre-order your book, and once the publication date comes around, their credit cards will be automatically charged and the book will be delivered to them.

Advantages of a preorder include an accumulation of sales over a length of time before

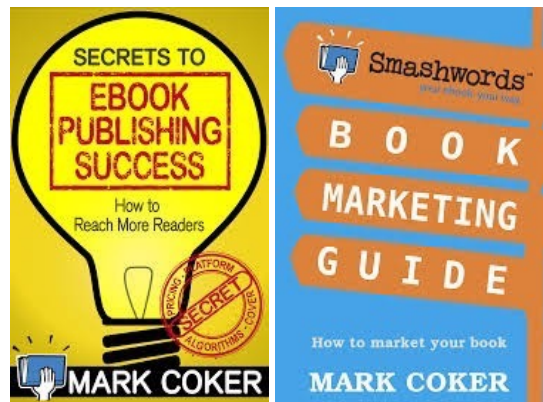
publication, and for some retailers, increased rankings either on the retailer's site or on major lists.

I strongly recommend using pre-orders, however be aware of the 90-day limitation from Amazon. If you do not provide the final copy of your manuscript to Amazon 10 days before a pre-order publication date, your pre-order customers will be sent an email stating that you did not meet your author obligations, their pre-order will be void *and* you won't be able to place another pre-order with Amazon for 12 months. If you choose to use pre-orders, meet your deadlines.

## Marketing your books

The good news is that if you've published a book (or you're nearly there) you've already started marketing your book. Cover design, title, price, branding, keywords, pre-orders, a website, and the categories you choose for your book are all forms of passive marketing.

There are many wonderful resources available on how to actively market your books. I recommend these books by Mark Coker, CEO of Smashwords, which contain great advice on building your author platform and marketing your books.



Once you understand the principle behind these ideas, you might want to delve into the world of Facebook, Twitter and YouTube ads for effective lead generation and book sales.

Look to experts such as Mark Dawson (who presented at the 2016 NINC conference), Joanna Penn, and Nick Stephenson for resources that will help you identify different marketing techniques you might want to try.

## Your next steps

Once you've published your first great book, write another one. Enjoy the process and try different things. As an indie author you have total control over the whole publishing process.

Be empowered. Be brave. And most importantly—be proud of what you have achieved.

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*Leeanna Morgan is a USA Today bestselling author of 15 contemporary romances. She lives in New Zealand surrounded by green hills on one side and the ocean on the other. Her novel, All of Me, which is free from all online*

*retailers, won the 2016 Koru Award for best New Zealand romance novel in the long category. Leeanna's books contain all of the things that are important to her; good friends, family, a strong sense of community, and a happy ending. Find her on [Facebook](#).*

*For more information on self-publishing, please view the writer resources on [Leeanna's website](#), which includes workbooks, many links for additional information on the process of self-publishing, and information on her workshops. This article originally appeared in the RWA Australia newsletter and is used with the author's permission.*



# Creativity as Play

## How I *don't* plot

By Denise A. Agnew



More than once I've had people ask me how I write a novel. Most of the time I sit there with a dumbfounded expression. Eventually I murmur that I don't have a clue.

I understand *why* I can't explain. I'm not a logically structured person when it comes to creativity. Minute details, structure, putting tab A into slot B, when to do X, how to do Y, and absolutely doing Z ... these aren't things I spend too much time thinking about consciously before I start writing a novel.

To my brain, following a logical path would mean forcing things to fit. And that's where my creativity rebels and begins shouting at the top of its lungs, "Oh, hell no! This is *play*. Play is the only way my creativity works."

I've tried the logical route. Tried to force-feed the story into my computer. Failed miserably.

For a while, I had myself convinced that if I truly knew what I was doing, I would *learn how to plot*. I'd certainly taken enough craft courses and workshops that I could regurgitate plotting principles until I was blue in the face.

I'd tried writing a synopsis before I wrote a novel and it was excruciating. If I write a synopsis before I write a book, the book will never happen.

In fact, almost every time I've tried methods designed to structure a novel into being, I hated writing. It wasn't fun. It wasn't play. I wasn't *creative*.

At that point, I could've convinced myself that I didn't have what it takes. After all, if I was a *real* writer, a *talented* writer, I could learn these plotting things and do them, right?

But it was only when I threw up my hands and wrote by the seat of my pants, with little planning, and only a burning inspiration of an idea that the magic happened. Wow, did I enjoy writing that story. When I was strongly inspired by an idea that was open, rather than structured, I was in a flow and knew I was working from a genuine place inside me.

Books written this way always became a book of my heart, and I received the most happiness and satisfaction from writing those stories.

## The “shoulds,” or, “Is there really a right way?”

Over the years I’ve heard (much to my chagrin) some writers say, “If you would only do this and that, you’d write faster. If you would only do this and that, your novels would be better.”

They might not have been talking to me personally, but they were talking to writers in general. When a new writer hears something like this (usually from very well-meaning writers, editors, or agents) they often automatically assume the well-meaning writer, editor, or agent is *right*.

Here’s the thing: They may be right. They also might be wrong.

Wait. How is that possible?

Well, if you are a genuine, deep-in-the-gut plotter, you need to plot. It’s the way your brain works and the way your brand of creativity operates. Because if you don’t, you’ll have trouble starting a book or perhaps even finishing it. You’ll need structure to feel comfortable and creative.

But if you’re a genuine pantsier and you go against your gut and start listening to “shoulds” that completely shut down your creativity ... well, chances are the creative juices you need to design that next novel will not show up.

You’ll stare at an outline or synopsis you wrote and the creativity will disappear. You’ll realize that trying to fit that square peg into that round hole doesn’t work for you.

I’ve heard pantsiers talk themselves out of being pantsiers. They’ll say, “But if I don’t plot, then the story goes all over the place and it takes me twice as long to revise when I finish the book.”

Is that a bad thing? Maybe not. The point is that if you are truly inspired and loving the story as you’re writing it, then the way you’re writing it (plotter or pantsier) is the right way for you.

Revising more at the end of the book isn’t necessarily a problem unless you’ve allowed someone or something else to convince you it is.

*Creativity is play.* If your mind is convinced that writing is “work” than it will feel like work. This isn’t to say that writing won’t feel like work at some point. But why circumvent what assists your creative flow with a bunch of rules about what you *should* do if those rules stifle your creativity and you stop writing the book?

Problems with inspiration begin when you talk yourself out of being who you are as a creator and you don’t allow yourself the play required for imagination to flow. Whether you are a plotter or a pantsier, there will be times when sitting your rear in the chair and forcing yourself to write is the only way you’ll get it done. You might hit that wall somewhere in the manuscript. But the idea is to make sure that you know what type of writer you are.

Plotter or pantsier?

Titles like *How To Write Your Novel In Thirty Days* always amuse me. Do you know how many clients I’ve encountered in my creativity coaching practice who now believe there is something wrong with them if they don’t write an entire novel in thirty days? If they don’t write twelve books in a year because XYZ best-selling author writes that many?

When they realize there isn’t necessarily something wrong if they write a book a year, and

not a dozen a year, the relief they experience is enormous.

As a creativity coach, I've broached the idea that thinking of a story as play time can be an inspiring and freeing concept even for people who are true plotters.

With clients who have writer's block, I've sometimes suggested they try this method: take thirty minutes or an hour per day and just write with the idea of fun and play. This is your time to be a child and just enjoy it.

It's incredible how many clients have discovered a breakthrough in their creativity by taking the attitude that writing their book is play.

## **How I don't plot**

Recently, while taking a creativity coaching class, I was prompted by a series of clever questions to realize that I can articulate how I write a book. It doesn't mean that my method is one anyone else would choose to use to create a story. It means the way *I* create fiction is entirely organic to the way my brain works.

It's been pointed out to me that as someone who likes to be on time and tends to plan trips, it's amusing that in my writing I can't stand to pre-load the structure of my novels upfront. I don't pretend to have a "way" for pantsers to create, because pantsers are just that ... people who write books while swinging from the trees, hair on fire, and ready to take on the tightrope without a net.

Most pantsers I know are also hybrid creators, where they plot some things here and there.

Articulating how I do things in any part of my life has always been an adventure. Here are some of the things that happen to me when I'm writing a novel:

It took me a while to figure this out, but I learn more from what I hear and feel than from anything else. Therefore, I make a music soundtrack for the story I'm ready to create. These songs sound like the story I'm designing.

I rarely use songs that have lyrics, especially for historical-based novels. I put that soundtrack on my iPhone so I can listen to it anytime I want, including times I'm not writing the book. This sort of "soaks my head" in the essence of that story. It's like a movie in my head and it's a feeling.

Because I write romance, I have mood music that I label with the first names of the heroine/hero to use during their love/romantic scenes.

If I'm writing a historical novel, I gather historical research from the internet and books. I read somewhere between five to 10 research books on average.

As I'm reading them, I highlight things that I want to remember or that might inspire an idea for the content of the book. I also write down ideas for things I think might happen at some point in the book. Where these things might go in the book, I don't know.

Some might call this plotting, but for me they are simply ideas and inspiration. I might or might not use all of the ideas ... a lot of the time I don't use the ideas I come up with while reading the books.

I might also watch documentaries about the events or time period of the book and will take notes while watching these programs. Before I get ready to write the book, I'll reread my accumulation of notes from all my research. After that I'm ready to rock.

With contemporary characters, I still need to do research, but it might not require as much work. I might write up some character charts, but rarely do I interview my characters. I tried interviews, but it never enhanced what I knew about the character and it meant I had to think too much about them beforehand.

While I have written stories from a prompt, most of the time I'm working only from a single idea that jumped into my mind. A place. A time. An event in history. I might have no idea at all, when I write those first paragraphs, why this character is even doing what he or she is doing. They just *are*.

I see my stories in my mind's eye. They're a movie I'm watching for the first time. What happens is a mystery to me until it happens. While I'm in a character's point of view, I'm experiencing that adventure with them, not forcing them to react. I have to look at them as organic, living, breathing people.

As I'm writing the story and listening to the soundtrack, I sometimes find that I'm overthinking and "forcing" things to happen. The less time I spend "rigging" the story, the less trouble I have with inspiration.

### **So the point is...**

The point I want to make to all writers is that there truly is no one right way to create a book. Find the way that honestly keeps you creative most of the time, and I truly believe your creativity will last a lifetime.

And if you find bumps in the road and your creativity just isn't flowing, it could be time to talk with a creativity coach.

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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).*

# Not Your Usual Writing Advice

## Back to the beginning

*By JoAnn Grote*



*The world is all gates, all opportunities.*  
—Ralph Waldo Emerson

My first “Not Your Usual Writing Advice” column was published in March 2010. My intention was to share things I’d learned by putting into practice things I’d heard from other writers.

I expected the column to run for a year. It’s run for almost seven years.

I wondered what had I thought most important to say in that first year? Would I still consider the topics among the most important advice/experiences I could share? The following topics were included that first year:

### **Visualization**

The power of visualization is well documented. I harnessed that power by making a mock-up of a cover for a romance before my first book was contracted.

I framed the mock up and kept it beside my computer. The romance line that published my book had a similar cover format. I’ve used the power of visualization throughout most of my career as I followed a practice attributed to best-selling mystery writer Sue Grafton: I spend the first five minutes of my writing sessions imagining a productive writing period.

I also use visualization before discussions with editors, seeing the conversation as calm and clear, and a win for both sides.

### **Going into the silence and trusting your instincts**

These were two topics originally, but they work together. Where do we get our best advice on what to write next, how to improve a work in process, whether to traditionally or self-publish, and how to market our stories?

First, we gather information from places like *Nink* and fellow writers. Then we take time to



shut out everyone else and pay attention to how we feel about the situation.

### **Career planning by joy, not fear**

My suggestion is that we make our decisions in the direction of joy, energy, and peace.

As I quoted NINC member and *New York Times* bestselling author Tina Wainscott in my column on this topic: “Anything done out of fear will amount to no good. I always sit with an idea and see how I feel about doing it. Tight stomach? Forget it! Enthusiasm? OK, let’s roll with it!”

Amen.

### **Just take the next step you see**

In spite of the power of visualizing a career goal, we can only make things happen by taking one step at a time. Don’t allow not being able to *see beyond* the next step prevent us from *taking* that next step.

It’s rather like walking through a thick fog; we need to trust that once we do take the next step, the step after it will appear.

### **Power of intention**

Writer Dennis Hensley once autographed a book for me with the comment, “Make this the year you sell your first book.”

That was when I realized that I might have the power to determine when I would sell a book. I took the challenge, and because of that I made different choices than I would have made otherwise during the next months.

I didn’t sell my first book within a year; it took 18 months.

### **Protect the work**

This was an idea explored in an article on how to keep writing when we have a day job. I didn’t create the term; I was first exposed to it in a column by bestselling author Jennifer Crusie.

We protect our work by choosing where we spend our emotional energy, how we use our time, and choosing our thoughts. By choosing what we think about, I do not mean that we choose positive thoughts, though I do believe that is important.

Instead, I mean that we choose to *think about our stories* rather than things that are destructive to our writing time. I strongly suggest checking out Crusie’s article, “[Taking Out the Garbage: How to Protect Your Work and Get Your Life.](#)”

### **Productive procrastination**

We tend to think if we aren’t in front of the computer screen, we aren’t writing. Sometimes our creativity needs a break from the monitor.

I follow the same pattern with every book I write: I start out with my house, desk, and writing area in order. As I get further into the manuscript, the notes, research books, and my manuscript pile up around me. House cleaning goes by the wayside.

By the time I'm to the last couple chapters, I can barely walk in my writing area and the rest of the house is not in acceptable shape for anyone else to view. It's at this point, when I'm almost done with the first draft and the deadline is beginning to loom, that I cannot stand the chaos one moment longer.

Even though I feel I need every waking moment to work on the book, I clean the house. I berate myself almost the entire time for not writing instead.

Then comes that moment, the *aha!* moment. Something regarding the manuscript clicks; a plot point I hadn't even realized was missing shows up, or an absolutely necessary scene appears full-blown in my mind. It never fails; the manuscript is always better because I took time to clean house.

### **Act as if**

When worry and fear stop one in one's writing tracks, it's a good idea to practice another form of creativity-acting. We can act *as if* we cannot fail in writing a good book, one readers will love, one our editors will love (if we are writing for the traditional publishing market).

Acting *as if* we will succeed sets us in motion and gets us back to the action of writing; that's the magic in the advice.

Remember high school physics? It takes more energy to set an object in motion than it does to keep it in motion. That law is true when throwing a baseball and it's true when writing a book.

I do still believe in the things I shared that first year. I think each item is important at every stage of a writing career. If I was starting the series now, I'd start with my third article, where I included one of my favorite quotes of all time, from Johann Wolfgang van Goethe: "As soon as you trust yourself, you will know how to live."

*Editor's note: Nink sends a special thank you to JoAnn Grote for her many years of wisdom as a Nink columnist, colleague, and friend, and we look forward to continuing to hear from her on NINClick and the NINC Facebook page.*

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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 by [email](#).*

# The Nink Wish List

NINC's generous and wise membership is largely responsible for the content of our newsletter.

## How can you contribute?

We're always looking for subject matter experts to write for Nink—articles are paid and the authors retain copyright to use them again for their own purposes.

If you or someone you know has special skills, we'd love to hear from them. Email [ninkeditor@gmail.com](mailto:ninkeditor@gmail.com) with a few sentences of an article proposal, or introduce us to an expert we can interview or request to write for Nink.

Here's a wish list of article ideas we're considering for the future:

- How to **retain readers** and keep them engaged while waiting for your next book
- Deep insights from various **advertising platforms**, including Facebook, Instafreebie, Bookbub, and more
- New tools to track books or marketing **campaign performance**
- How to make the most of working with a freelance **editor, publicist**, or other author support professional
- Trends in book **cover design** and packaging your book
- **Tips and how-to** guides for ebook and print book production
- How to write a more enticing **author bio**, with lots of examples
- Maximizing Amazon **Affiliate income**
- **Legal and tax** considerations for author business
- Emerging changes in **contracts** from traditional publishers; pitfalls and recommendations
- Genre-specific **trends**
- **Series** marketing techniques
- Bridging from one series to another to earn **crossover readership**
- Borrowing **craft concepts from screenwriting** to improve the plot and pace of your novel
- Setting **deep hooks** throughout your novel to drive readers on
- **Scrivener tips** for plotters and pantsers; advanced uses of Scrivener
- Compare/contrast various **ebook production tools** (Jutoh, Calibre, Scrivener, etc.)
- Marketing a **backlist** and refreshing old titles for current readers
- **Front and back matter** recommendations to gain more reviews, newsletter signups, and clicks to purchase the next book
- Making the most of **NetGalley**; working with a co-op
- Fresh ideas for author **newsletters**
- Recommendations for recently published **books on author business**, author marketing,

and craft

- **Industry insights** on what's changing in traditional publishing and for the major ebook distribution platforms
- Great **research** sites to go deeper into the story
- Tips for choosing and launching a new **pen name**
- **Advanced craft** techniques that are applicable to all genres of commercial fiction

## NINC editorial policy

What guides our choices for Nink content? The NINC board of directors adopted this editorial policy to articulate our approach:

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

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

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

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



*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.

### **Founders**

- Rebecca Brandewyne
- Janice Young Brooks
- Jasmine Cresswell
- Maggie Osborne
- Marianne Shock

### **2017 Board of Directors**

*If you have questions regarding Novelists, Inc., please contact a member of the Board of Directors.*

- President: [Erica Ridley](#)
- President-Elect: [Julie Ortolon](#)
- Secretary: [Gillian Doyle](#)
- Treasurer: [Mindy Neff](#)
- Newsletter Editor: [Heidi Joy Tretheway](#)
- Advisory Council Representative: [Victoria Thompson](#)

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- Pat Rice
- Marianne Shock
- Vicki Lewis Thompson
- Victoria Thompson
- Steven Womack

## 2017 Committees

*Complete committee member listings are available on the website. Many committee positions are open and looking for new volunteers.*

- 2017 Conference **Chairs**:
  - Programming Chair: Julie Ortolon, assisted by Diana Peterfreund
  - Sponsorship Chair: Rochelle Paige
  - Logistics Chair: Karen Fox
  - Registration Chair: Pam McCutcheon
  - Communications Chair: Laura Hayden
- Authors Coalition Rep: Open
- Social Media Coordinator: Open
- Membership Chair: [Mallory Kane](#) - Open for 2017
- Nominating Committee Chair: [Victoria Thompson](#)
  - C.J. Carmichael
  - Phoebe Conn
  - Pam McCutcheon
  - Laura Phillips
  - Steve Womack
- Technology Chair: Open
- Volunteer Jobs (Just One Thing) Coordinator: Lois Lavrisa

## Central Coordinator

Novelists, Inc. c/o Terese Ramin

P.O. Box 54, Hartland MI 48353

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

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

## Nink Newsletter

February 2017 edition – Vol. 28, No. 2

Copy editor: Eve Henry

To request reprint rights or to submit an article proposal, please contact [the editor](#).

Publication: 10 to 12 issues annually. Available in PDF, mobi and epub formats. Public issues

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