



The official newsletter  
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of writers of popular fiction

 novelists,  
inc.

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# *Nink* March 2021

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# President's Voice

*By Tawdra Kandle*



Here we are in March! I don't know how you feel about the month that comes in like a lion, but this is an exciting time for us at NINC leadership. We're opening registration for the [conference](#) in a few weeks (see Conference Chair Lisa Hughey's update in this newsletter), and it's going to be amazing.

One of my favorite aspects of our organization is our group sharing, which is definitely part of the conference experience but can also be enjoyed year around via our Facebook group and our NINC Loop. While we are all professional-level published authors, Novelists, Inc., includes an incredible variety of experiences, from authors whose work spans many decades to those who are still within the first ten years of their publishing journey. And we all have something to share with everyone else.

I remember my very first NINC conference experience. I was thrilled to meet writers who could tell me stories about their early days in traditional publishing, with fascinating details about what it was like to be an author then. At the same time, those of us who came of (professional) age in the midst of digital/indie publishing had knowledge to share too.

If you ever doubt this truth, read the NINC Loop—it's so gratifying to see questions asked and answered, experience and opinions generously shared. Among topics discussed in recent weeks were updates on Facebook Pages and a blog post by BookBub on why some books are not selected for Featured Deals. It's all fascinating reading, and I know I've learned a great deal by reading the emails.

Speaking of writing our true experience, this month the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee is happy to present our first quarterly article, this one penned by DEI member Pooks Burroughs. This piece was crafted thoughtfully by Pooks and reviewed by our committee. We hope that all NINC members will read it and carefully consider the topics discussed.

An on-going thank you to all of our hard-working volunteers who contribute their time, talent and energy to our organization, be it in leadership, in communication, advising committees or as part of the conference planning group. We're all grateful for your generosity.

Until next month ... may your March be more lamb than lion.

~ Tawdra Kandle

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*Tawdra Kandle is a USA Today best-selling romance author with over 80 books released. Her titles include new adult and adult contemporary romance; under the pen name Tamara Kendall, she writes paranormal romance, and under the pen name Tessa Kent, she writes erotic romance.*

## **About NINC**

NINC remains committed to serving all of our members, regardless of gender, race, sexual orientation, religious/spiritual beliefs if any, ability, nationality or age. It is NINC's desire and goal to make sure that every author member feels welcomed and accepted and heard.

## **About Nink**

*Nink's* goal is to provide our readers with high-quality articles that offer critical business advice, marketing how-tos, advanced craft coaching, or strategy to continue building a career, all geared to established authors. All members should feel confident that *Nink* provides something for them. We welcome pitches and submissions from all members; [propose an article](#) or submit a [letter to the editor](#).

## **NINC Member Benefits**

Don't forget to sign up for the [email loop](#), [critique/brainstorming group](#), and the members-only [Facebook group](#) if you haven't already. The Pro Services Directory, member [discount page](#), and [sample letters](#) are also great resources.

Missing a newsletter? Past issues can be found [here](#).

## **Accessing the NINC Website**

Not sure how to log in to the NINC website? Visit the login page here: <https://ninc.com/membership-overview/login-to-ninc/>



Mark your calendars!

Registration for the [2021 NINC Conference, Level Up](#), will open on **Tuesday, March 16th**.

Conference dates are **September 22–26th**.

Conference fee is \$425 for members (\$325 for industry guests) and includes a welcome reception, lunch on Thursday and Friday, and the Beach Blowout on Saturday evening.

We are once again at the [Tradewinds Resort](#) in St. Pete Beach, Florida. Once you register you will get a link to make your hotel reservations at the conference rate.

At the moment, we are restricting registration to 200 members and 75 industry guests. We are hopeful that we will be able to expand our conference capacity. We will make that decision based on federal guidelines and recommendations.

We look forward to seeing you at the beach!

Lisa Hughey

NINC 2021 Conference Programming Chair

## From the Editor

*By Harper St. George*



As your new *Nink* editor, I would like to introduce myself. I write under the name Harper St. George and have been published with Harlequin, Simon & Schuster, and most recently, Berkley. My primary genre is historical romance, but I have also co-written a few contemporary romances whose rights have reverted, which means I am now braving self-publishing as well, and hope to delve into it more in the future. I live in the Atlanta area with my husband and two daughters.

I would like to thank everyone at NINC who has been so welcoming since I've come on board this year. This is only my second year of being a NINC member, but I've already come to value and rely on the people who make up this organization and the wealth of knowledge that you all have. I especially appreciate how willing everyone is to share and support one another. It is my privilege to serve you as editor of *Nink*.

I'd like to give a special thanks to Michele Dunaway who served as *Nink* editor since 2017. She took over at a time when the newsletter wasn't published regularly and made it into a real asset for NINC. Her contributions cannot be overstated. Thank you, Michele! Of course, she didn't do it alone. Laura Resnick, our production manager, and Cynthia Moyer, our copy editor, keep *Nink* running like a well-oiled machine. They are both invaluable members to the newsletter team, and we are lucky to have them. A huge thank you to both Laura and Cynthia! I am so happy to report that they will both be staying on.

I am thrilled to announce that we have hired NINC member Cheré Coen as our acquisitions editor. Cheré brings a great deal of journalism experience to her position and we are happy to have her onboard acquiring articles for *Nink*. If you'd like to pitch an article, she can be reached at [ninkacquisitions@gmail.com](mailto:ninkacquisitions@gmail.com). Please feel that you can also reach out to me with any questions, concerns, ideas for future *Nink* content at [ninkeditor@gmail.com](mailto:ninkeditor@gmail.com).

If you are a frequent contributor to *Nink*, please know that we value your input and hope that you will continue pitching articles for our newsletter.

If you haven't written for us before but think you might have a topic, please feel free to reach out.

~ Harper

# From Cancer To COVID

## 12 tips for surviving and thriving at writing while stuck at home

*By Gigi Pandian*



When COVID began to spread in early 2020, we were all shaken by our distressing new reality. For most of us, lockdown was a new experience to navigate. For me, I'd gone through something similar a decade ago, so I had a jump-start on figuring out how to keep writing, both emotionally (writing through incredibly stressful circumstances) and physically (writing at home in a small house I share with my husband).

Nearly 10 years ago, when I was just beginning my writing career, I was diagnosed with aggressive breast cancer. I was 36, with no family history of the disease. Needless to say, I was not prepared for this news, nor the year of cancer treatments that would follow and knock out my immune system. I was forced to stay home, isolated from the world, for much of the year.

A dramatic life event, like cancer or COVID, can help put priorities in perspective. I knew I needed to focus on my health and my loved ones, and also my dream of being a writer. But how?

Before cancer, I was *not* someone who could write at home. By trial and error, I learned many things that year that have served me well in this year of COVID.

Below are a dozen tips that helped me successfully complete a novel during my year of isolated illness during cancer treatments and write two novels during lockdown—while keeping my day job. That cancer-year novel was the one that propelled my career to the next level, and one of this year's novels sold at auction, which was a first for me.

**1. Stay offline. Install an app on your computer that saves you from yourself by turning off the internet.** I don't know about you, but I cannot be trusted to do this myself. I think I'll look something up for book research or to check the news "for just a minute." It inevitably turns into 30 minutes—or longer. To save me from myself, I use an app that turns off the internet for a specified amount of time, such as a 45-minute work block, or even for the whole morning. If I



forget and try to view a browser, my app shows me an inspirational quote instead, such as *A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step*. (I use Focus on a Mac, and many writers I know enjoy Freedom. There are others too.)

**2. Put your phone in the other room.** This was difficult for me at first. *Very difficult*. But I promise the world will not end if you don't look at your phone for an hour.\* Especially if you have any notifications that will pop up and distract you, leave your phone in the other room, or at the very least far enough away you cannot reach it from your chair. (\*If you really do have a reason you need your phone, such as awaiting a call from a doctor or elderly parents, change your settings so your phone will ring for preset priority callers even if your sound is off for everything else.)

**3. Create your own background noise. Listen to café sounds, rain sounds, or instrumental music.** While experiencing stressful circumstances, it's especially easy to get distracted by small noises around you. It helps if you control the noise. iTunes and other apps have background sounds of all kinds, including café sounds (I found one that reminds me of my favorite café where I used to write). Some days you might feel like visiting a café, and other days a rainstorm will do the trick. Thunder on the speakers can give your creative brain a boost, whereas hearing the laundry cycle stop will throw you out of the story. Maybe you like classical music or some other type of music that serves as relaxing background music.

**4. Join an online writing meet-up.** It's amazing how much you can get done in 30 minutes to an hour, and it's so much easier to get *started* if you know there are online friends waiting for you. There are a lot of public write-ins organized online, many through writing organizations, or you can form one yourself with writer friends at a time that works well for you. My favorite is one I organized with a few writer friends because we agree to chat about life for 15 minutes before we start writing. It's a good balance of having support for the stresses of life and being productive.

**5. Find an accountability partner.** Beyond online meet-ups, tell someone your goals. It's much easier to keep them if you've said them aloud to someone else. See if you can find a writer friend to check in weekly to report back to each other about your progress. Or perhaps you want to tell your spouse or post your goal publicly on social media.

**6. Try a writing prompt.** A writing prompt can help your fingers start moving when you don't know what to write next, or when you can't still your mind from the real world around you. A prompt can be something like "take away one of your main character's senses" or "an unexpected package arrives on the doorstep." You don't have to come up with them yourself; there are many online resources and books. You can experiment with what type of prompt works for you.

**7. Pick up a paper notebook.** The brain works differently on paper than on a computer, so if the words aren't flowing on screen, try putting a pen to paper. If you're having trouble writing the first word on that blank notebook page, because the stressors of the world around you are vying for attention, my personal trick is to write the word "perhaps." That way, your brain knows this doesn't *have to be* the way the story goes, but "perhaps" this happens. On paper, you might be able to write wild ideas that you were too afraid to write as "real" words on the computer.

**8. Go outside. Step into your backyard or balcony.** Sitting inside next to a window isn't the same as fresh air, so take that paper notebook outside. Even when you can't go far, a little bit of fresh air does wonders. When I was going through cancer treatments, I didn't always have the energy to go far, but even looking up at the trees (in my small, semi-urban backyard) did wonders for my mental state.

**9. Shift your view inside the house.** This is for those of you who don't have a dedicated writing room. I have a desk in a room that needs to serve multiple purposes. I sit at one side for non-creative work, then switch to the *other* side of the desk, with a different view out the window, for my writing. The small physical change can lead to a big mental shift.

**10. Take a break to move your body.** Yes, this tip is obvious, and I know you already know this. But as writers, all too often we forget this, so I'm including it here. It doesn't have to be exercise. Stretching for a few minutes counts too. However, simply refilling your coffee mug doesn't!

**11. Ritual. Find something that signals your brain you're writing fiction now.** My ritual is that I plug a typewriter keyboard into my laptop when I'm going to write fiction. The clacking of the keys tells my brain it's time to be creative. Maybe you light a candle with a particular scent, or drink coffee from a special mug with an inspirational quote. Whatever it is, give yourself that signal that it's time to push aside the real world for a dedicated amount of time, however small. This is your writing time.

**12. Go easy on yourself if you've had a bad day.** This is the most important tip. Even with all of the lessons I learned in 2011 and 2020, I've had some lost days. A lot of them. I didn't stick to the beautiful schedule I planned in my calendar, but I still got new books written that I'm proud of. Now it's time for me to get back to work on the next one.

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*Gigi Pandian is a USA Today best-selling and Anthony Award-winning mystery author, breast cancer survivor, and accidental almost-vegan. She writes lighthearted mysteries a cross between Indiana Jones and Agatha Christie. Stay in touch via her monthly email [newsletter](#) and find her on Instagram [@GigiPandian](#).*

# Indexing Your Own Book

A guide for non-fiction authors

By Nicole Evelina



As a researcher/reader, I love indexes, those handy lists that allow readers to locate information within a book. As a non-fiction author, they are the bane of my existence. (Think the equivalent of a synopsis for fiction writers.) You may still come across old books that don't have them, but today indexes are pretty much standard in serious non-fiction books.

Indexing takes place at the very end of the publishing process, once you have page proofs and are certain your page numbers and content will not change in any way that could affect the index. (You can still check for typos, but you're past the stage of moving text around and have the final layout.)

You can, of course, pay a [professional indexer](#) to do the work for you; most indexers work on a freelance basis and the way they charge for their services can vary. Some charge per page, some per entry in the index and others per hour. How much you pay will be determined by the indexer's fee and the length of your book. According to [IndexBusters](#), a site run by two experienced indexers, "Indexers usually charge between USD \$2.50-\$6 per 'indexable page' (which is any page with text on it that needs to be indexed). If a 250-page book, for example, has 210 indexable pages, then it could cost between \$500-\$1,200 to index the book. But in most cases, the cost will probably be closer to \$500."

Many traditionally published non-fiction authors use a portion of their advances to fund this service, as most publishers consider the index the responsibility of the author.

But what do you do if you're self-publishing your book or you didn't get an advance? Dig in your heels and do it yourself. Not only will you save money, but no one knows the content of a book better than its author, so you can be sure your index is exactly the way you want it.

## DIY indexing

When I finished my first non-fiction book, *The Once and Future Queen: Guinevere in Arthurian Legend*, there was no question in my mind that it would have an index because I wanted to make it easier for other researchers to use. And there was no question I would be doing it myself.

Before you begin, here are a few tips that will help keep you sane:

- **Give yourself plenty of time.** Indexing takes a long time, so make sure you have time blocked out for it. It's best to do it in small sessions, two to three hours at a time, to keep your brain fresh. How long it is going to take will depend on how long your book is and how detailed you choose to make your index.
- **Get a copy of the *Chicago Manual of Style*.** The [section on indexing](#) is invaluable if you are going to do it yourself. It's like a crash course. You can get an online [subscription](#) (they even offer a 30-day free trial) or, if you don't want to buy a copy, your local library will likely have it in the reference section. If they don't let you check it out, I recommend photocopying the whole chapter.
- **Study the indexes of a few of your favorite sources.** Look at how they are put together. What topics and subtopics are indexed? What is cross-referenced and why? What style is used? Can you see the logic the indexer used to create it? As a reader, what do you like about how it is put together? What would you do differently?
- **Decide how detailed your index will be.** Some indexes only include major topics and page numbers, which might be all you need. But many go at least one level deeper to help readers find exactly what they are looking for. Personally, I think two to three levels work well or you may confuse your reader more than you help them.
- **Map out the steps you are going to take.** This not only helps keep you on track, but breaks the project down into manageable increments. Seeing it in bits and pieces and then crossing them off when you are done will reduce stress and give you a feeling of accomplishment as you go along.

## My indexing process

Every writer will develop their own process for indexing, so please do whatever works for you. This is just an example of how I approach it to give you an idea of the work involved. I used Word to create my index and Adobe Acrobat to search the PDF of my final manuscript, but there is also [indexing software](#) available to help you.

**Step 1: Make a list of topics.** This is exactly what it sounds like. Go through your book page by page and note down the main topics. These can be people, places, themes, concepts, time periods, etc. For example, in *The Once and Future Queen*, some of my topics included Guinevere, King Arthur, Thomas Malory, Avalon, Brittany, incest, agency, Celtic myth, Middle Ages, contemporary fiction, etc. Write them down in the order you find them or think of them. You can organize them later.

You may also want to include variant spellings of names (e.g. Guenever, Gwehywfar, etc.) or other ways a name could be listed (e.g. King Arthur; Arthur, King; Arthur Pendragon, etc.). These should be listed on their own and could be listed at the end of your main entry. (e.g. For the entry “Arthur, King” after the subtopics, you would write “*See also* King Arthur, Arthur Pendragon.”)

Don’t stop at the obvious keywords. Try to think like a researcher using your book. What questions would you be trying to answer? What topics would you be looking for? Just like when you’re choosing your keywords on Amazon, ask what variety of ways would a reader go about looking for the topics in your book.

**Step 2: Alphabetize your topics.** This will not only give you the framework of your index, but also make the rest of the steps a lot easier.

**Step 3: For each topic, list any subtopics.** These are subjects that fall beneath a major topic. They can also be listed on their own elsewhere if you need to get into more detail. Some have a third or fourth level that categorizes subtopics of subtopics, but as a reader, I find more than three confusing. I’d rather see the subtopic listed as its own topic with its detail beneath it. For example:

*Main Topic:* Guinevere

*Subtopic:* as symbol of

*Sub-subtopics:*

- Eve
- ideal woman
- Mary Magdalene
- sovereignty

If any of these had additional detail you wanted to index, you could list them on their own. For example, under “ideal woman,” you might list “docile,” “silent,” “angel in the house,” etc.

**Step 4: Add in the page numbers.** I recommend doing this in two rounds:

1. The easiest way to begin is to use the Find function in Word or Adobe or whatever program your final manuscript is in. Be sure to cite the actual page number printed on the page, not the page number listed at the top of a PDF or at the bottom of a Word document, as that usually includes front matter that is not indexed. And don’t forget your footnotes. Those that are more than citations should be indexed.
2. **Go back and re-read the book.** Not only does this give you one more chance to spot typos, but you will likely see page numbers that need to be included because of an allusion to a person or theme that can’t be picked up just by using Find.

**Step 5: Format your index.** There are all kinds of little rules about how indexes are formatted, including indentation and style. For example “*See also*” should always be italicized and footnotes are written as 245n3 for page 245, footnote 3. This is where the *Chicago Manual of Style* will help. Also include in this step one more check on proper alphabetization and numerical listing of page numbers.

### **The last word**

If you’re anything like me at this point you will never want to see your book again and you will vow to never do your own indexing in the future. (Even though you likely will.) But you will also feel a great sense of accomplishment and pride.

If you find you like indexing or want to learn more about it, many colleges/universities offer courses in indexing or you can take [online courses](#) to further your learning.

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*Nicole Evelina is a USA Today best-selling author of fiction and non-fiction. Her second non-fiction book, a biography, is currently on submission. She dreads indexing it but is looking forward to getting it under contract.*

# Walk a Mile in My Voice

## #Ownvoices explained

By Patricia Burroughs



In recent years the #ownvoices hashtag has been popping up throughout publishing and its usage is growing. Whether you have been using it yourself or had not heard of it until you saw this article, this article is for you.

And with that — let's dive in!

### What is #ownvoices?

The hashtag #ownvoices indicates that the author of a book shares a marginalized identity with the protagonist.

### What does marginalized mean?

Being marginalized means being relegated or confined to a lower or outer limit or edge, as of social standing. It means being treated as if not important. This includes bearing the stigma of a marginalized class.

The [We Need Diverse Books](#) website definition is:

*We recognize all diverse experiences, including (but not limited to) LGBTQIA, Native, people of color, gender diversity, people with disabilities,\* and ethnic, cultural, and religious minorities.*

### Who made #ownvoices a Thing?

On Sept. 6, 2015, Dutch Young Adult author [Corinne Duyvis](#) suggested using the #ownvoices hashtag to aid an ongoing Twitter discussion about diversity in kidlit, commonly used shorthand for Children's and YA literature. The hashtag #ownvoices indicated the tweet was recommending a book that was "kidlit about diverse characters written by authors from that same diverse group."

In Corinne's case, she and the heroine of her novel, *On the Edge of Gone*, are both autistic. She has been instrumental in creating a community of kidlit authors who are disabled and the hashtag began in that community before spreading.

Twitter being Twitter, #ownvoices took off and is now used as an identifier in other media.

Corinne was bombarded by people asking if it was okay if they used the hashtag for their adult novels, in their screenplays, comic books, picture books, and short stories. Her answer to all such questions?

*"Go for it."*

She was asked if #ownvoices only referred to race. To Queerness. Only to disability?

Her answer?

*"#Ownvoices has never been and will never be 'owned' by any single group, condition, or interest."*

**Corinne Duyvis also has no intention of being some sort of "guardian of the hashtag."**

She did, however, create a [FAQ](#) to establish a few basics, including these definitions:

*Author: The actual author has this identity.* Not the author's child, sibling or other family member, friend, students, etc.

*Identity: A specific marginalized identity.* Ex: Not a Latinx author writing about a Black protagonist because they are both people of color.

**What if an author and protagonist are marginalized for more than one reason — but they are not all the same reasons?**

Ex: Author is Korean American and deaf but is writing about a protagonist who is Black and deaf.

In that specific situation, the book can be labeled #ownvoices because of the shared deafness.

But it's important that anytime the hashtag is used, it is used specifically.

In the case above, it should be used specifically about deafness and in a way that doesn't imply that since the character is Black, the author is as well.

*"Sizzling Roaring Twenties romance with a deaf Black heroine! #ownvoices"* is not specific to the situation and can be misleading.

*"Sizzling Roaring Twenties romance with a deaf Black heroine and deaf author! #ownvoices"* is one way it can be made specific.

**What about the LGBTQ+ group?**

Ex: Can a lesbian use #ownvoices to describe her book because her protagonist is a gay man, and they are both LGBTQ+?

That would *not* be the intent of #ownvoices. This is why Duyvis defined "identity" as "specific." People of color, LGBTQ+, and the disabled community are all big umbrella terms that require more specificity than just the group.



## **What about people who say non-marginalized writers shouldn't write about marginalized protagonists?**

"Should" is a totally different conversation.

But again, nobody can tell anybody what they *have* to write or *can't* write. The term #ownvoices doesn't make that kind of judgment.

#Ownvoices describes a commonality between author and protagonist, nothing more.

## **It's nobody's business how I identify.**

It absolutely is not, which is why you probably won't choose to use the #ownvoice hashtag for your novel.

And, it should go without saying but let's say it anyway: Nobody else has the moral right to use #ownvoices for you.

For example, if an author isn't out yet but writing about Queer characters, being identified as the author of #ownvoices books is the same as being outed, and could have far-reaching negative and even fatal results.

So, even though you personally know an author shares the identity of their protagonist, don't add #ownvoices to your tweet or discussion about them. Just don't. You don't know their reasons for not using it.

## **Are you saying if I am from a marginalized group, I always have to write books about characters who are also in that marginalized group?**

No. Nobody can tell you what to write. In fact, this is one reason Corinne Duyvis makes it a point to use the hashtag to refer to novels, not authors.

"Corinne Duyvis is a Dutch SFF writer whose #ownvoices novel has an autistic girl protagonist."

## **Are you saying that because I'm not a member of a marginalized group, I can't create protagonists who are members of that group?**

No. Nobody can tell you what you can't write, either. #Ownvoices is not intended to police or pressure authors.

## **#Ownvoices novels are a subcategory of diverse novels.**

Like all subcategories, some readers will seek these novels out. The same could be said for Space Opera, a subcategory of Science Fiction.

However, the hashtag was created to identify a group of marginalized voices—to give them a presence from which to be heard, empowered, and to find each other and support each other. It can mean much more than just defining a subcategory.

## **But isn't the point that #ownvoices books are better than other books about diverse characters?**

Define "better." Better is subjective and is decided by each individual reader.

More importantly, #ownvoices is not an indication that the book is better than other books.

It is not an indication that the book is better than books about characters who aren't marginalized.

#Ownvoices doesn't make any claim except what it says: this book's author shares the same marginalized identity as the protagonist.

It is indisputable that a marginalized author who shares the identity of their protagonist can bring authenticity and insights to the book that others can't. Don't you expect to find experiences and insights in an autobiography that you may not find in a biography about the same person? Do you always find those insights? Not always, but you are certainly justified and usually rewarded for making that assumption.

A Black author writing about a Black character has lived and breathed being Black and all that entails for a lifetime. A blind author writing about a blind protagonist brings experiences and knowledge and pain and joys unique to being blind. These "insider" differences may be subtle or profound, but there is a justifiable expectation that they exist.

Writers who aren't part of a marginalized community may have strong empathy for the marginalized character they're writing about. They may do intense research, read firsthand accounts. Such an author may be the parent to a child who is marginalized like their protagonist. They may have witnessed the pain, the frustrations, the celebrations. They may have fought alongside their child.

They may even write a terrific book, a superb book.

But a writer who hasn't lived in the heart, soul, and body of that marginalized character has not written an #ownvoices book.

Which doesn't mean the parent's book about that kind of protagonist can't be written too. (This is one area where there can be debate about "should." Remember, this is not that conversation.)

## **#Ownvoices began in kidlit and is still most broadly used there.**

But its usage is spreading into adult novels as well as other media.

Because of this, one thing has been made clear.

## **Readers are seeking diverse books.**

Marginalized readers are starving to see themselves on the pages of novels as characters, as protagonists, and as authors.

But this is not only an issue for marginalized writers and readers.

Other readers are hungry for new stories, new characters, new worlds.

The marketplace is proving that diverse books are needed and the demand is growing.

#Ownvoices is one kind of diverse book.

## **Readers read novels to live another life.**

Reading #ownvoices books provides an opportunity to a deeper view of lives and worlds beyond non-marginalized or differently marginalized readers' own experiences.

This expands our knowledge and understanding of one another in times when such understanding is vital.

#Ownvoices is a new identifier but it is hardly a new idea. We have long known that to know a person we must "walk a mile in their shoes." #Ownvoices books do just that.

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*Patricia Burroughs is a novelist, screenwriter, and sometimes short story writer. She is neuro-divergent, having ADHD, dyscalculia and other associated cognitive disorders. [Revenge of the Killer Flamingos: A-D-H-D! Oh! Look! A mystery!](#) is the first in her #ownvoices MJ's Dys-Daze Mysteries series. Her proudest writing achievement to date is being awarded an Academy Nicholl Fellowship for Screenwriting by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts & Sciences.*

*Corinne Duyvis is a SF/F Author and co-founder of [Disability in Kidlit](#) in 2013, as well as instrumental in the development of [We Need Diverse Books](#), and originator of the [#ownvoices](#) hashtag. She is aware that she has no control over how the hashtag is ultimately used and most assuredly doesn't want to be put in the position of deciding who can and can't use it, but she requests link-backs to her FAQ from articles and blog entries so that the origin and intent don't get lost in subsequent discussion. Her guidelines are commonsense and worth adopting.*

# Common Barriers Writers Face

## And how to overcome them!

*By Joanne Grant*



I have worked with writers long enough to recognise that the key to success relies not only on skill and talent, but a strong self-belief and a mindset for growth. I have also noticed a number of common barriers that writers face that threaten to hold them back. In this article, I am going to focus on three of these barriers and offer some tips on how to identify them and overcome them.

### **Perfectionism**

There is nothing wrong with an attention to detail when it comes to your writing. It shows care and professionalism, and your editor will thank you for it! However, perfectionism in its most extreme form is toxic, inhibiting, and can not only hold you back, but sap potential joy from your writing too.

### **When perfectionism becomes problematic**

You may describe yourself as a perfectionist because you always try your best, or are striving to improve—these are pursuits to be encouraged. It becomes problematic when you're torturing yourself with another proofread, or editing to such a degree that you can't move forward and it becomes detrimental to you and/or your work.

At its worst, perfectionism can prevent work from being finished, but for the published perfectionist, it doles out a punishment of a different type.

If you're always striving for perfection, feedback wounds deeply, and there is a nagging feeling that you could've done better. But no book will ever be "perfect" because nothing created is beyond criticism. As a result, these writers never feel satisfied with their achievements as they strive for the impossible: perfection.

## Overcoming perfectionism

If you can relate to this, then don't worry—you can make steps to wean yourself off this unhealthy habit whilst maintaining quality, because the likelihood is your perfectionist tendencies are contributing little, or any value to your work.

**Step 1:** Ask yourself, what is the worst thing that could happen if you were to dial back on your perfectionism a notch? Be honest about it.

**Step 2:** Commit to dialling back your perfectionism a step or two. For example, if you habitually proof your manuscript five times before submitting to your editor, reduce it to three times.

**Step 3:** Sit back and analyse the results of your experiment through the lens of your worst-case scenario. Has your editor actually sacked you because you *only* proofed your manuscript three times? No, didn't think so!

Recognise that perfectionism can slow you down, cause you pain, and the amount of time you're putting in is likely disproportionate to the outcome.

As with anything, the more you practise reducing your perfectionist tendencies, the easier and more natural it will become.

## Inner critic

Whether you call it your inner critic, your inner editor or something else, that voice that crops up when you're writing and makes you doubt yourself can be a real barrier to creativity. But how can you tell the difference between your own voice and the inner critic?

## Identifying the inner critic

The inner critic is sneaky. It often sounds like your own voice, but it can sometimes take on the tone of someone you know such as a teacher, parent or editor. This can make it easier to identify. Either way, the inner critic is usually negative or downright mean, with its agitated or worried tone. It speaks in definite terms that welcome no discussion; there are no shades of grey and things are either good or bad.

Underneath it all, your inner critic is trying to keep you safe by holding you back from something you are fearful of. It taps into that fear, exploits it, and sadly, if you believe these negative statements, can become self-fulfilling.

The good news is once you've recognised your inner critic, you can tackle it!

## Overcoming your inner critic

The key thing to remember about your inner critic is that it offers opinions, not facts. If you question these opinions, you'll discover there is little or no evidence for them. Next time your inner critic shows up, try this exercise.

**Step 1:** Distance yourself from the inner critic by referring to it as “you” rather than “I.” For example, change:

*“I’m the worst writer in the world!”* to *“You think I’m the worst writer in the world.”*

Naming your inner critic can further help create this distance.

**Step 2:** Address your inner critic calmly by thanking them for their opinion, then ask them politely to leave. They’re less likely to argue back if you take this approach.

**Step 3:** Replace the negative statement with one that is more balanced, rational and realistic:

*“I may not be the best writer in the world, but I can work to improve!”*

Once you start to recognise the inner critic at work, you can unravel these negative statements by questioning the truth of them and replacing them with a realistic, proactive thought to keep you moving forward, rather than holding you back.

## Comparison

Have you ever seen a post, blog or tweet from a writer sharing how quickly they’ve finished their first draft, or they’ve just landed (what seems like) *another* book deal and it’s made you feel bad? I don’t mean a pang of jealousy, that you soon forget, I’m talking about a reaction that lingers and negatively affects you and your writing.

Maybe it triggers your inner critic on all the reasons why you’ll never be like those other writers. Or the green-eyed monster is in full flow commenting that some writers get all the luck.

Whatever the reaction, it sucks away your motivation, confidence and creativity. You know logically there is no malicious intent directed at you, and that what is posted on social media isn’t always the truth or the full picture, but the damage is done all the same.

So, what can you do to address this?

## Overcoming the comparison trap

You now have some tips to quieten down the inner critic, but if this is something that really affects you, next time something sets you off, try this exercise.

**Step 1:** Ask yourself, *why* does it make me feel this way, what is *really* going on? This may be uncomfortable because you’re taking the focus internally, rather than blaming your feelings externally on the post or the person, for the way you feel.

**Step 2:** Take whatever it is at the root of what affects you and decide what you can do about it.

For example, if those posts about high word counts make you feel inferior before you’ve even started writing for the day, then explore ways to increase *your* productivity. Avoid social media first thing and set your own realistic goals for success.

**Step 3:** You’ve identified what it is you can do, now make it happen! Put a plan in place to achieve your goals so next time you see a post about word counts, you can think: *“That’s great – they’re hitting their word count goals and so am I!”* Goodbye inner critic and green-eyed monster!

The truth is, what underlies these common barriers is fear and self-doubt.

Recognising how they show up in your writing is the first step to learning how to overcome them followed by putting into practise techniques to help.

The other big truth here is: often the biggest thing holding you back is yourself. Lean in to your fear and choose to do something about it in a proactive, meaningful way because you can take back control of *your* writing journey.

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*Joanne Grant is an editorial coach with over 16 years of editorial expertise working for the global best-selling publisher Harlequin. She has edited hundreds of romance novels over the years and understands how to coach authors of all genres to deliver their best work. If you're interested in finding out how she can help you achieve your writing goals, get in touch—Joanne loves to chat! For inspiration, tips and offers why not sign up to her [newsletter](#), join her Facebook group [Motivation for Writers!](#) or connect on Twitter [@JoanneMGrant](#).*

# The Mad Scribbler

## Agents & You, Part 2

By *Laura Resnick*



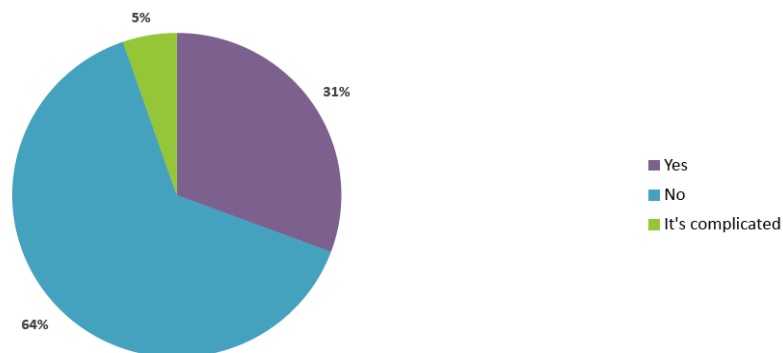
*“Fasten your seatbelts – it’s going to be a bumpy ride.”*

—Christopher Buckley, writer

NINC member [Lenora Worth](#) has been with her literary agent for more than 20 years. “I’m traditional with a little indie on the side. [My agent] stays out of my indie projects, unless I ask for her advice on something. But she is good about finding contract language that she thinks is concerning, and she is also good about negotiating a fair deal. If we don’t agree on something, I make the final decision on how I want to handle it. I plan to keep my agent until I ‘retire’ from trad a few years from now. Then I hope to go all indie and only work when I want to work.” Worth adds with a laugh, “And I’m sure that will work out perfectly.”

Worth is among the roughly one-third of NINC members who currently work with a literary agent. Here’s the pie chart, which reflects that statistic, from the 2020 NINC/*Nink* survey report produced by [WTH Analytics](#).

Members Currently Working with a Literary Agent





As discussed in Part 1 of this topic in February, two-thirds of NINC members working without a literary agent is a big sea-change from where our profession was a decade ago, when agents were widely perceived as being essential to a writing career.

A similarly big change from a few years ago is the situation that Worth describes: her longtime agent accepts that Worth's career as a novelist includes a publishing stream that excludes the agent.

For most of modern publishing, literary agents have usually objected to clients excluding them from any book income. A couple of NINC members, for example, recount that they eventually left agents who were just too expensive to maintain because they insisted on getting a 15% commission on the authors' category romance sales, despite the authors not wanting or needing representation in that portion of their careers.

The 21st century iteration of this position was the effort that many agents made to get involved with their clients' indie earnings in the early years of the ebook boom. Some agents, for example, set up e-publishing divisions within the agency, which ensured they could participate in the income generated by their clients' indie books. There were also some writers back then who offered their agents a commission on indie work, believing it was proper to do so as part of the agent-author relationship. There was much discussion and some tension in the first few years of the indie boom about how to deal with an agent if you were self-publishing any of your work.

It's clear from NINC members' contributions to this month's column that this has changed in recent years, and the situation that Worth describes with her agent seems to be common now.

For example, best-selling mystery writer [Lynn Cahoon](#) reports, "I am a hybrid author with an agent. I started traditional without one but when I got interest from a film company, I went out looking again and got one. She's been a helpful sounding board for my career. And, hopefully, she'll help me break out. She supports my indie work but doesn't take a cut."

Popular Christian fiction author [Rachel Hauck](#) says, "I'm trad doing some indie work. I've had my agent for 11 years and am still his client. He believes authors should take time to do an indie book or two. He also works movie rights, and we have some of those in the hopper. My guess is he'll stay my agent unless I continue to do indie work, of which he gets no cut."

Award-winning best-selling author [Mary Jo Putney](#) has a busy traditional career for her new fiction, represented by her agent. She also actively self-publishes her large backlist in ebook, print-on-demand, and audio formats. Putney says, "I got in on the ground floor with backlist publishing in 2011, and my agent has never tried to interfere with my self-publishing."

In the "it's complicated" segment of agented NINC members, [Elaine Isaak](#) says, "I am pursuing small press submissions on my own for the works that didn't stick at the big publishers." Her agent represents the material she (the agent) is enthusiastic about, and she doesn't discourage Isaak from pursuing opportunities with other material or intrude on the publishing relationships and income that Isaak generates on her own (including indie work).

Meanwhile, it should certainly be noted that among the two-thirds of NINC members who do *not* have an agent, this isn't always because they don't want one. However, even if you're an accomplished career writer, it's often still very hard to get an agent.

Prolific indie author [Mindy Klasky](#) writes, "About a year ago, I wrote a book in a new-to-

me genre that... I believe will do better as a trad-pub book. I attempted to get an agent, spending about six months sending query letters. While I got several full reads, I was unable to find an agent interested in taking me on... While I'd still love to land that new agent, I'm likely going to publish the new book as an indie project next year. While I fear it won't meet its full potential, it'll do better than if I leave it on my hard drive forever."

A NINC member who prefers not to be named had a prolific career in traditional publishing, as well as so many bad agent experiences (one of her agents simply disappeared, another was sentenced to federal prison, etc.) that she eventually turned to writing indie full time, where she has also been prolific. However, she eventually decided she'd like to return to the traditional market. So, "I thought I would like to try getting another agent and worked at it quite assiduously. For three years. I queried (not always the same book, either) over 250 agents and never once got a request for a full [manuscript]. Never! *Not one*. The books I submitted to agents did go on to do rather well when I self-published them, by the way."

Some members think age is likely a factor in agents' complete lack of interest in representing a steadily working career writer. [Shirley Parenteau](#) writes, "I've been traditionally published for about fifteen years with a children's press, after years of writing women's fiction, and am very happy there. I was not happy with my agent and had been meaning for years to make a change. When I did, I found I could not get another, although I continue to publish a well-received series. I suspect that my age is the problem and that agents are looking for young writers with many years ahead to come up with a blockbuster. I'm happy where I am and no longer wish for an agent."

[Sara Fitzgerald](#), a retired *Washington Post* journalist, has won awards in both fiction and nonfiction and was previously agented. She has invested considerable time and effort in trying to secure another agent, and by now wonders if her age is a factor in the lack of interest her queries encounter. "I would still like to find an agent," she says, "but I find it is very time-consuming to hunt and track agents, and also demoralizing, and thus I decided to continue focusing on the writing and researching for the time being."

Demoralization is a common experience when agent-hunting. A member who asked not to be named started out as a successful romance writer for a number of years, but after St. Martin's Press closed an imprint and dropped the writers, including her, "My agent dumped me because figuring out where to take me was too much work—she was always about the sale and not really what followed." Although interested in the indie world, this writer is a single mom with a full-time job who can't carve out the time to write *and* also be her own publisher. "Which means, off I go to agent search," she tells me. "Which is depressing. Rejection over and over and over again. Doesn't matter that I've sold over 1.7 million copies globally or that Harlequin keeps putting [my backlist books] out in one reprint or another (can't get rights back—I've tried). It's always something really small that's wrong with the manuscript. Everyone wants it to be 'perfect' before they take it on, and what book is ever 'perfect' immediately? I keep getting 'I love your writing so send me something else' or 'The market is too tight.'"

She adds, "The second part is really it. Because of indie, the market is really tight. Agents want the next *Red, White & Royal Blue* or *The Bromance Book Club* or *The Hating Game*. They don't want category or midlist. They only want the star who will break out. They want the auction. I

mean, I know I can revise and write. I know my audience is still there. But even new agents who haven't made sales have turned my work down... It's just so damn frustrating."

Yet there are still examples among us of the agent-author business model working the way we once believed it would—the way those who still look for agents hope it will eventually work.

Mary Jo Putney says, "When my first great agent retired after nineteen years, I was lucky enough to find another great agent. Both of them were quick, responsive, and worked to help me have the career I wanted rather than what they thought I should have. I prefer having an agent take care of the contracts and the boring business stuff, and when needed, be the buffer between me and my publishers if there are disagreements.

"My indie audiobooks I handle directly, but most of my audiobooks had been subrights deals arranged by various publishers, and they were a tangled mess. (Think two kittens and a ball of yarn.) My agent recently handled a complicated sorting project that moved all my commercial audiobooks under one roof and expanded them to world English rights to make access easy for foreign readers and listeners. I would never have had the patience for that! My agent and I have a good partnership that simplifies my life as well as making it more profitable, and is totally worth the 15%."

Another agented NINC member says she did fine for a few years selling to traditional publishers without an agent, but now works with an agent again because she much prefers having someone else handle the "dirty work" of arguing with the publisher over various business matters that arise: "To me, after years of tearing out my hair over these things, it's worth 15% to send someone else to argue my case... The biggest value [my agent] brings to me is this (actual) email response: 'I'm on it! I will handle this.'"

A couple of years ago, bestselling author [Cindy Dees](#) fired her agent of 17 years, who had fallen out of touch with the evolving market, and hired an agent who is "aggressive as all get-out at marketing my work, which is my favorite thing about her. Second fave thing is she's extremely dialed in to content that's not straight books—mobile phone publishing, gamification of content, content sharing sites, assisted indie publishing, etc. She has a spectacular foreign rights agent working for her, she's connected to all the audio companies, talks all the time to TV/film producers. So far, she's made me more money on each of my trad-pubbed books by selling subsidiary, non-print book rights than I've made on the actual print and ebook sales. She's all about expanding markets, expanding audience, expanding exposure. She gets how to survive in this fluid marketplace."

Dees adds, "In my experience, the old adage still holds true: Having no agent is better than having a bad agent, and having a great agent is still worth his or her weight in gold. It's just that what constitutes a great agent today is wildly different than what made for a great agent 10 years ago."

And 10 years from now, it will be interesting to see how the relationship between agents and authors has continued to evolve.

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*Laura Resnick, who gave up on literary agents after her fourth one, writes fiction, nonfiction, and short fiction.*

# Membership Benefits

Need industry intel, software, or legal help? We've got you covered.

Are you taking advantage of all your member benefits?

As a NINC member, your benefits include industry discounts, newsletter and website articles, professional services directory, networking opportunities, and more.

We've compiled all of these—which you can also find on our website—into this list as a helpful reminder.

## Networking

The email list for Novelists, Inc. Members: <https://groups.io/g/NINCLINK>

Join our Facebook group: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/NovelistsInc/>

We offer a critique/brainstorming group: <https://groups.io/g/NINKcritique>

Follow NINC on Twitter: [https://twitter.com/Novelists\\_Inc](https://twitter.com/Novelists_Inc)

## Conference:

Conference information: <https://ninc.com/conferences/about-the-ninc-conference/>

## Newsletter

Propose an article: <https://ninc.com/newsletter/propose-an-article/>

Submit a letter to the editor: <https://ninc.com/newsletter/submit-letter-to-editor/>

Newsletter archives: <https://ninc.com/newsletter/news-archive/>

## Website (you must be logged in to access these services)

Legal Fund: <https://ninc.com/member-benefits/legal-fund/>

Pro Services Directory: <https://ninc.com/member-benefits/pro-services-directory/>

Sample Letters: <https://ninc.com/member-benefits/sample-letters/>

Articles & Links: <https://ninc.com/member-benefits/articles-and-links/>

Welcome Packet: *A link to the new member packet will be included as soon as it's been updated.*

## Member discounts

NINC members are eligible for certain professional discounts. A complete listing of these can be found at <https://ninc.com/member-benefits/member-freebies-discounts/> along with other member discounts.

## **Volunteer**

One of the greatest benefits of NINC is the opportunity to volunteer your talents to benefit other members—which pays incredible and unexpected dividends in networking and knowledge. Learn more about volunteer opportunities here: <https://ninc.com/members-only/open-positions/>

Open positions include:

- Social Media Committee
- Tweet Team
- Recruiting New Members
- Anything!



*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

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

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- Secretary: Hallee Bridgeman
- Treasurer: Timothy Cerepaka
- Newsletter Editor: Harper St. George
- Advisory Council Representative: Lou Aronica

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## 2021 Committees

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

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  - Assistant Prog. Chair: Tawdra Kandle
  - Traditional Publishing Liaison: Victoria Thompson
  - Hotel Liaison: Karen Fox
- Authors Coalition Representative: Laura Phillips
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- Discounts Program: Emilie Richards

### **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.*

### **Nink Newsletter**

*March 2021 edition – Vol. 32, No. 3*

*Nink's* goal is to provide our readers with high-quality articles that offer critical business advice, marketing how-tos, advanced craft coaching, or strategy to continue building a career, all geared to established authors. All members should feel confident that *Nink* provides something for them. We welcome pitches and submissions from all members.

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

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