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President's Voice

By Tawdra Kandle



For me, growing up in a small town in South Jersey about twenty minutes from Philadelphia, the Fourth of July was the pivotal holiday of the summer. We had parades, picnics, and fireworks displays in just about every community in the county. Like so many Americans, I was raised on the glories of independence and self-sufficiency, the importance of making my own way.

It's not surprising, then, that much later in life I joined the indie publishing movement, a wave that eventually became a landscape-changing tsunami. Most of us who were part of that trend quickly learned the advantages—and the headaches—of doing it all ourselves, of being truly independent as an author. We might have relied on others for things like editing, formatting, and cover design, but we also realized how important it is to know how to do those things ourselves in a pinch. Independence rocks!

However, there is a flip side to this fiercely do-it-on-our-own coin. As I scroll the list of industry guests joining us for the conference this fall (are you registered yet?), along with the editors and agents we might see at any traditional publishing event, there are so many companies that fall into the author support category.

We're going to see the fine folks from [BookBub](#), who offer us one of the (if not the number one!) best ways to increase author and book discoverability through their Featured Deals, New Release Alerts, and self-service ads. Damon from [BookFunnel](#) will also be with us in September—I don't know about you, but I'm on that site at least once daily to manage my giveaways, promos, and website sales. [BookBrush](#) is a fabulous tool for designing graphics for social media and promotion. [Vellum](#) offers us a way to format our own books. [Kindlepreneur](#) helps us figure out keywords for metadata and for ads. [Plottr](#) is a newer and valuable tool for honing our craft. [Findaway Voices](#) has offered authors another platform for creating and selling audiobooks. [SPF](#) helps keep us current and in the know. [Draft2Digital](#) makes it so easy to publish to multiple platforms. And [Reedsy](#) has assembled a team of professionals to meet all of our author needs in one place.

Clearly, while independence rocks, interdependence has its place as well.

As members of NINC, we know that to be true. We reach out to each other when we have questions or when we've discovered a cool new tool or author support company. We offer advice and insight gained through experience. We hang out together in person at our conferences and come up with ways to work together to improve our craft and our marketing.

After a year in which many of us were forced into a form of isolated independence, won't it be wonderful to lean on each other again in person as we share, listen, and learn? I don't know about you, but I can't wait!

In case you didn't know, we still have a few spots open for conference registration. Remember, you only have until **August 15** to reserve your spot. I hope I see you in St. Pete Beach in late September!

Until then, regardless of how you publish, let's all celebrate both our independence—and our interdependence—this month. Happy July!

Tawdra Kandle is a USA Today bestselling romance author with over 100 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/>



Planning for the conference is in full swing. We've almost completed our speaker lineup and will start posting speakers and topics in the next few weeks. We are really excited about the wide range of topics and speaker experts. Our goal is to give NINC members actionable takeaways from the workshops.

We've also got several new sponsors on board—look for announcements on these vendors soon. There will be office hours and a trade show again, so there will be plenty of opportunities to connect with our sponsors and other industry guests. New this year: a sponsored coffee bar in the mornings and a charging station available for your phone or tablet.

We are switching up the evenings, focusing on NINC After Dark with cash bar, tables for connecting with authors and vendors, and Round Table options for exchanging ideas on a variety of topics.

The hotel is almost sold out of our room block. They are currently honoring the negotiated price on sold out nights, but we don't know how long that will last. If you haven't made your reservation yet, please do so soon as we can no longer guarantee the conference rate.

The conference will be **September 22-26** at the Tradewinds in St. Pete Beach, FL. If you haven't registered, time is of the essence. Registration closes on **August 15**:

<https://ninc.com/conferences/registration/2021-member-registration/>

Looking forward to seeing you at the beach!

Your conference committee,

- Lisa Hughey, 2021 Programming Chair
- Tawdra Kandle, 2021 Assistant Programming Chair
- Mel Jolly, Conference Coordinator
- Terese Daly Ramin, Central Coordinator

The Care and Feeding of Your Newsletter

By Tara Wyatt



Newsletters, while an incredibly useful author tool, can be frustrating. What do you send? How do you find subscribers? Most importantly, how can you get the most out of your newsletter?

How to get started

If you've never set up a mailing list before, the first thing you'll need to do is to pick a provider. There are dozens of mailing list services available, and the options can be overwhelming. Let's look at the three most popular platforms:

- [MailChimp](#) is one of the biggest and best-known email marketing platforms. If you have fewer than 2,000 subscribers, the platform is free to use, but pricing quickly jumps to \$31 per month for 2,500 subscribers and \$79 a month for 10,000 subscribers, making it one of the more expensive platforms.
 - Pros: MailChimp's reporting and the metrics available to users are thorough and extensive, and they have several beautifully designed templates, making it easy to send eye-catching emails to your subscribers.
 - Cons: Automations are difficult to set up (we'll talk more about automations shortly), and affiliate links are not allowed.
- [MailerLite](#) is a newer service, but is very similar to MailChimp in terms of its design and ease of use. The biggest difference is that they are significantly cheaper than MailChimp, as 2,500 subscribers will only cost you \$15 a month, or \$50 a month for 10,000 subscribers. However, only the first 1,000 subscribers are free, as opposed to the first 2,000 with MailChimp.

- Pros: Extremely user friendly with an easy-to-use interface and helpful customer service, and features such as integrated automation and a landing page editor.
- Cons: The reporting isn't as comprehensive as what you get with MailChimp.
- [Aweber](#) has been around for nearly 20 years and is a giant in the email marketing industry. The first 500 subscribers are free, which means they have the smallest free plan of the three services, but the pricing is reasonable: 2,500 subscribers, \$29 a month; 10,000 subscribers, \$69.
 - Pros: Aweber offers A/B split testing, analytics, and a highly functional mobile app for stats. They also offer user-friendly templates, and automation and list management tools. Their customer service is top notch.
 - Cons: If you're not into the reams of data available on Aweber, there are cheaper options. Users have also reported deliverability issues with Aweber.

If you build it, will they come?

Now that you've chosen your email list service and set up your account, the next step is to get readers onto your list. Sadly, it's not as simple as creating a newsletter sign-up form on your website and hoping readers will find it and subscribe. However, enticing readers to join doesn't have to be difficult. Here are a few strategies that will help you start growing your list.

(Note: Integrating the sign-up on your website with the back-end of your newsletter is sometimes seamless and sometimes complex, depending on what platforms you're using. You may need some technical assistance to get that set up).

Reader magnets

A reader magnet is something you've written that you offer to your readers for free in exchange for signing up for your mailing list. Your reader magnet can be anything, from a short story to a full-length book. If you're just starting out, you could write a prequel novella to your first novel. If you're uncomfortable giving away entire stories for free, you could create detailed character profiles for readers to download, or put together a sampler that contains the first chapter of each of your books. The idea is that the reader magnet will entice readers to give you their email address in exchange for this bonus goodie, so make it relevant and interesting to your target readers.

Another example of a reader magnet is a bonus epilogue. Include information about this at the back of the book, giving readers the link to sign up to download their copy. This is a highly effective strategy and attracts the readers you want—the ones who read and enjoyed your book—onto your list.

Once you have your reader magnet chosen (and you can have more than one, especially if you have reader magnets specific to certain books), advertise it not just on your website, but also in the back matter of all of your books. A reader who's just finished your book is more likely to be "warm" and willing to hear from you on a regular basis.

As long as what you're offering is enticing, reader magnets are a fantastic way to grow your list.

Onboarding automation

Once someone signs up for your list, what happens next? They need to hear from you right away, especially if they're expecting the delivery of their reader magnet. This is where onboarding automation comes in. When you set up your mailing list account, you'll also want to set up a welcome sequence containing anywhere from one to several emails that are sent automatically. (The process for setting this up will vary from platform to platform, but there is technical support available on all of the major platforms.)

The first email should welcome them to the list and thank them for signing up while providing them access to their free content. Follow up with a second email a few days later—here, you could highlight a permafrees book (or offer them links to other free books if you don't have any freebies of your own to offer), or give them more information they would find interesting and relevant. A third email could once again thank them for signing up while letting them know what to expect going forward (how often you send, what type of content you include, for example).

BookFunnel

Now that you've chosen your reader magnet, you might be wondering how to deliver it to your readers. While it's possible to simply host the bonus content on your website (or on a site like Google Drive or Dropbox), you could also use a service like [BookFunnel](#). The main drawback is that BookFunnel isn't a free service, but it offers numerous benefits you should consider.

If you're using BookFunnel, you simply upload any reader magnets to the site and use the generated link they provide in your onboarding sequence, directing readers to the BookFunnel site to download their content. Any technical glitches or requests for help will go through BookFunnel and not to you.

Another advantage to using BookFunnel is that they offer monthly promotions where you can team up with other authors in your genre to offer readers a free book in exchange for signing up for your list. If you're focused on building your list, this is an excellent way to find new readers.

However, if you're on a budget, BookFunnel isn't a necessity, and you can deliver your reader magnets by providing a link to a shared Google Drive folder, for example. You could also team up with other authors on your own to do newsletter building cross-promo. This is more time intensive, but a good option if you're on a budget.

The care and feeding

Now that you have a mailing list and are starting to attract readers through your reader magnets, joint promotions, website, and back matter, the next step is to start sending on a regular basis. Whether you're sending weekly, on the 1st and 15th, or monthly (and this will vary from one author to the next), be consistent. Sending regularly trains your readers to expect to hear from you and allows you to develop a relationship with them as opposed to simply

showing up in their inbox when you've got a new book or a sale. Finding out how often your readers want to hear from you will take some trial and error. One way to fast-track this process is to survey your readers about their email marketing preferences and incorporate what you learn.

The content you include will be up to you and dependent on your readers and your brand. However, it's a good idea to keep a list of content ideas so that you're not stumped for what to send. Make sure that your content is relevant and engaging for your readers. If every single email is nothing more than a sales pitch, readers will lose interest and your open rates will drop. Some non-sales content ideas include a behind-the-scenes look at your work in progress, character profiles, book recommendations, a personal story, memes, news stories relevant to your books, recipes, updates on what past characters are up to now, and things that have inspired you, such as songs or places.

Another key to success is to pay attention. Subscribe to newsletters from authors who would have the same target readers as you, and look at what they include in their emails. What resonates with you? What gets clicked or elicits a response in your newsletters? Make a note of what type of content works best.

In addition, include a link to the reader magnets at the bottom of every email, as some readers may have missed content and will appreciate the link. It's also a good idea to include a link to your most recent book and/or the first book in your series at the bottom of the email.

Hit send

A successful, fruitful mailing list is one of the most powerful marketing tools in your author arsenal. Focus on growing your list, sending regularly and giving readers interesting, click-worthy content, and you'll reap the rewards.

Tara Wyatt is a contemporary romance author who lives near Toronto, Ontario. Known for her heat and her humor, her books have won several awards. When she's not writing, she can be found playing with her daughter, reading, or binging Netflix with her husband.

What is an Editorial Coach?

And how does it differ from an editor

By Joanne Grant



Writing is a solitary pursuit but there is plenty of professional help available to support and educate you on your writing journey. But how does an editorial coach differ from an editor, and how can working with one benefit you? In this article I will outline the differences and how a coach can help you at specific points in your writing career. A caveat: this is from the perspective of how I work as an editorial coach. Approaches and services will vary across other coaches.

The first big and fundamental difference: focus

An editor's primary focus is a writer's manuscript. An acquisition editor represents a publisher and their job is to work with a writer to get the best publishable book from them, and to market.

A freelance editor is similarly focussed on the manuscript. They have been hired by the writer to execute a specific type of edit—whether it be a structural edit, line edit or copy edit.

In comparison, as an editorial coach, my focus is first and foremost on the writer. What are their goals, what is holding them back from achieving them, and how can I support them to make meaningful progress? This isn't to say your editor or freelance editor doesn't care about you as an individual, and it can depend on your relationship with your editor as to how involved they are with your writing process, but fundamentally a coach puts the writer at the centre of what they do, not the manuscript.

The focus is so much on the individual that I often work with writers and never read a single word of theirs! Intrigued about how that could work? Then read on! Let's start with how coaching in general works.

What is coaching and how does it work?

Coaching gets the best results over a course of sessions, held regularly over a number of weeks or months. However, in some circumstances great results can be gained from a one-off session. To provide advice on a particular issue, or to give a much-needed (but friendly!) kick up the you-know-what, for example.

Here are the three key ways that coaching gets results:

- **Finding your own answers:** Although sessions may involve elements of teaching, information sharing and/or advice, coaching encourages the writer to find their own answers to problems. Writers often know what they need to do, but understanding *how* to do it in a way that works for *them* is the issue. Coming to your own conclusions is far more effective than being simply told what to do.
- **Manageable and realistic goal setting:** The world of publishing and writing can be daunting—and lonely—whatever the stage of your career. A coach can help you gain clarity around your writing goals and then formulate a realistic plan on how to get there, breaking it down into manageable steps and then cheering you on as you take those steps!
- **Accountability:** This is the magic ingredient to coaching! It's one thing knowing what to do and how to do it, it's another to actually do it consistently and regularly. This is where your coach provides you with that external accountability. If you only have your own deadlines, it's easy to let them pass. Knowing you're meeting your coach for a progress check-in can be a great motivator.

However, a coach is not a miracle worker. The writer has to put in the work to get the results they want. But I find that once a writer makes the decision to invest in coaching, they have committed to their writing practise and this commitment to the process will fundamentally get the results which will set them up for future success.

Speaking of which...

There's more to writing success than craft

I strongly believe that to be a successful writer—and by success, I mean how the individual defines success for them—you require a combination of writing skill *and* the right mindset.

If your goal is to have your novel published but you're too fearful to submit it after a series of knockbacks, it doesn't matter how great your writing skills are. Or if your goal is to increase frequency of publication but productivity is an issue, then it isn't necessarily your craft that is the problem.

As a coach, I help tease out what the issues are working below the surface, holding the writer back, and work with them to overcome those barriers in a way that works for the individual. Common barriers are:

- Productivity, or lack of! – Whether it is help establishing a writing routine, time management or tackling procrastination, a coach can help with this.
- Confidence – Knocks to confidence can come in many shapes and sizes, such as after a rejection, a critical review or from comparing yourself unfavourably to other writers.
- Writers' block – This can happen at any stage in a writer's career and can be both frustrating and frightening.

Success from these coaching sessions are measured by what the writer sees as success for them, such as establishing a sustainable writing routine, increasing confidence and finally submitting their work or simply to start writing again after a bout of writer's block. All of these wins can help pave the way to that ultimate goal of a published book, but are fundamentally focussed in on the writer—not their work in progress. This is how I can get results without reading anything!

Tapping into editorial expertise

As an experienced editor, it would be odd if I didn't offer editorial services, and many writers come to me looking for a professional eye on their work in addition to coaching. So how does what I offer differ from an editor?

I offer structural edits and how that fits within the coaching depends on the type of editing support the writer is looking for. Here are some examples of ways I work with writers who want feedback on written work:

- Teasing out the story piece by piece. If a writer is struggling, committing to submit portions of a manuscript work prior to each session encourages productivity and builds confidence.
- Working towards submission, either of a partial or full manuscript. Regular deadlines and feedback as the story develops help keep the writer on track to an agreed deadline.
- A second opinion. If a work has been passed on without any specific or explicit feedback, it can be hard to know whether to revise it, rest it or keep submitting—which is where an objective eye can help.

But surely this is just the same as editing? Well, not quite.

How feedback sessions work

The aim of coaching is always to help individuals find their own solutions, which is the key reason why I always deliver feedback during a session and follow up with written notes—never the other way around.

The gateway into revisions and improvements

Whilst I will lead a writer to an area that requires attention, I will hold space for the writer to work out how to tackle it in a way that works for them and their vision of a story. This is through pertinent questioning, for example, about their characters and conflicts.

This isn't to say I don't make suggestions and aid brainstorming—I do!—but it is a much more organic way of presenting feedback than sending a revision report and discussing afterwards. It also prevents misunderstandings that can occur from a written report that rely on jargon or assumed knowledge.

It is true that some editors will work in this way, but remember that their primary focus is the manuscript, whereas a coach will be focussed on the writer and their goals.

Sessions can reveal more than what needs fixing in a manuscript!

This approach can show gaps in a writer's knowledge or skills that, once highlighted, can be worked on. Or reveal a deeper reason why the writer is holding back on their work, or is struggling on a particular character or story element.

But this approach can also bolster confidence in the writer, showing them that they can find their own solutions and, often, that their instincts about what needed fixing in their work was spot on. These are learnings that have a lasting impact on a writer and can be taken forward into future projects.

Working with an editorial coach at specific times in your writing career can give you additional support, mentorship and guidance in a way that is tailored to you. Whether you choose to work with or without feedback on written work, your coach will always put *you*, the writer, at the centre of the experience. And it is seeing the writer reach their goals and celebrate their successes that motivates and inspires me to be an editorial coach. Working on a great manuscript is just an added bonus.

Joanne Grant is an editorial coach with nearly two decades of publishing and editing experience. Joanne's publishing pedigree was forged at Harlequin and she has edited hundreds of romance novels over the years. She loves nothing more than coaching writers of all genres to overcome their barriers 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, sign up to her [newsletter](#), join her Facebook group [Motivation for Writers!](#) or connect on Twitter [@JoanneMGrant](#).

Tips for Using Episodic Television Techniques in Your Novel

By Ines Johnson



Since I was an adolescent watching Saturday morning cartoons and weekday *Afterschool Specials*, my storytelling brain has been primed for episodic structure, commercial breaks, and weekly cliffhangers. So, it's no wonder that when I shifted my focus from writing short films, documentaries, and children's media, I brought along many of those tools and techniques to keep my readers' butts snug in their favorite recliners and turning pages.

In television we have to address the reality of hundreds of channels at the flick of a remote button. We also have to contend with commercial breaks in the middle of our story. Despite the proliferation of streaming channels now that allow viewers to binge watch shows without commercials, the weekly format that was ubiquitous in the past is still around. Because appetites can go unquenched for seven whole days before the viewer can watch the next installment, screenwriters and producers have had to develop tricks and tools to keep the audience engaged for those long and short periods of time.

Many of the tricks and tools from scriptwriting work amazingly well in novel writing. My favorite trick is using TV buttons to end a scene or a chapter. What's a TV button? Read on...

I think Shonda Rhimes, and her writing roundtable, are some of the most skilled and prolific storytellers of our times. Yes, I said prolific, and I'm going to stand by such a big SAT word. Prolific actually means producing much fruit. I don't know about you, but I love fruit. I can't get enough of the juicy, sweet treats. From *Grey's Anatomy* to *Bridgerton*, I am a devout follower of Shondaland. But where I felt Rhimes shined as a craftsperson was in her political thriller *Scandal*.

[Here is a link to a free download of the pilot episode script so that you can follow along.](#)

Where most screenwriters are taught to button up their acts, Rhimes plays fast and loose with that rule and goes so far as to button up her scenes. Like a period, exclamation point, or question mark, a button is a punctuation mark at the end of an act (or chapter in a book), or in Rhimes's case, it's the end of a scene.

When we think about punctuation marks, we most commonly think of, and use, the period. A period signifies the end, finality. You won't find many period buttons in Rhimes's scripts. You'll most often find exclamation points, which indicate strong feelings and high volume. In fact, the exclamation point wasn't introduced until the 1970s, and then only in comic books to indicate a gun bang or punch!

Button up your act

The pilot episode of *Scandal* is divided into five acts. Acts typically end at commercial breaks. The commercial break is a dangerous time for television writers because the audience now has a choice of getting up to use the facilities, grabbing a snack, or, worse, turning the channel. If you study the end of each act in *Scandal* (or *Grey's Anatomy*), Rhimes buttons up each act-end by raising the stakes before the commercial breaks. The punctuation marks she places at each break serve to keep her audience pinned in their seats.

In "Sweet Baby," Act One ends with a murder suspect walking into the office with blood literally on his hands. Act Two sees that murder investigation and raises us a POTUS (President of the United States) embroiled in a sex scandal. In Act Three, Olivia's conservative-soldier client, the alleged murderer, gets arrested because he refuses to be "outed." By the end of Act Four, Olivia "handles" the POTUS's sex scandal by destroying the life of the president's accuser/mistress who then tries to kill herself. In the middle of Act Five is where we learn the biggest scandal of them all: that Olivia and the president were having an affair. By the end of the show, the stakes are raised sky high when Olivia, feeling betrayed by her married ex-lover, takes the president's mistress on as a client.

I strongly feel that these act ends are all exclamation points! They're also a lot to cover, so this breakdown will only focus on the first act. The first act of a television show is known as the Setup. A Setup has three goals: to be immediate, quick, and grab attention.

Act I, scene 1: Exclamation button

The setup starts immediately with the first scene. We are introduced to newcomer Quinn, who's trying to escape an undesired blind date. Rhimes grabs our attention with witty dialogue delivered by attractive individuals. Quinn believes Harrison is her date, whom she wants to ditch. Harrison is nonplussed by her attempts; instead he seems amused. We want to see how this ends, and then...surprise! It's not the man that every woman dreams of getting set up with. No, it's better. It's a dream job, and, of course, every 21st century woman is going to jump at the chance of her dream job. Though Quinn doesn't shout out loud at the prospect of working for Olivia Pope, strong feelings are written all over her face at Harrison's offer. "I wanna be a gladiator in a suit" is said with wide eyes and quiet awe. The scene is quick in that it is fast-paced, giving viewers not a single bit of dialogue or action that lags.

Act I, scenes 2-4: Dash button

In the second scene, we meet the famous Olivia Pope and her dashing rogue of a colleague, Stephen. We meet them in the midst of a deal about to go wrong. Olivia momentarily halts the conversation with Stephen about engagements to smooth over the dilemma of two Russian bad

guys pointing pistols at each other. Olivia comes off as badass, uber-confident and smart. With the deal settled, she and Stephen take their “package” and continue their banter about his impending nuptials as though no one was just in mortal peril.

The scene starts with Olivia and Stephen—then there’s a conflict, which is resolved—and the scene concludes with Olivia and Stephen continuing their banter. It’s a set of dashes. The dash is a handy device. It’s informal and essentially playful, telling the viewer/reader that the story is about to take off on a different track, but also that it’s still in some way connected with the present course. The playfulness comes across in the scene as Olivia and Stephen leave the danger giggling over how much they love this job.

Act I, scenes 5-7: Exclamation button/act end

Scene five starts with Quinn, our novice, coming into the extraordinary world of Olivia Pope and Associates. Through her, we begin to learn the rules of this new world. Olivia’s crew is introduced, along with their respective duties, and Quinn is quickly schooled that this is not a law firm but a firm of problem-solvers. We learn the package Olivia negotiated for was a kidnapped baby who is promptly picked up by its diplomat parents.

The Setup is complete by the end of scene five. Everything and everyone we need to know has been established. Now the story is about to get moving. A disabled, Iraq war hero appears in the office lobby with blood on his hands. “My girlfriend. She’s dead,” he says. “And the police think I killed her.” In a comic book, the exclamation point follows the BANG! In this scene, the gun has already gone off and we are seeing the effects of the aftermath. Harrison turns to Quinn and says, “Welcome to Pope and Associates!”

Early on in our grade school education, we are taught how to construct sentences in order to get our points across. Today most of our writing is peppered by the point of periods. Punctuation marks such as exclamation points, dashes, and even ellipses, we’re told to use sparingly. Rhimes and her team pay no heed to that grammar lesson. Their characters shout it out, are elliptically coy, and dash off with our hearts. And it has paid off for them episode and episode again!

Lover of fairytales, folklore, and mythology, Ines Johnson spends her days reimagining the stories of old in a modern world. She writes books where damsels cause the distress, princesses wield swords, and moms save the world. Ines writes books for strong women who suck at love. Aside from being a writer, professional reader, and teacher, Ines is a very bad Buddhist. She sits in sangha each week, and while others are meditating and getting their zen on, she’s contemplating how to use the teachings to strengthen her plots and character motivations. Ines lives outside Washington, D.C., with her two little sidekicks who are growing up way too fast.

Extra Cash in Your Pocket

How freelance writing can make you money

By Cheré Coen



Two months shy of graduating with a journalism degree, I sat down with my college newspaper advisor for career advice. “What I really want to do is write freelance, preferably travel,” I told him.

He was kind in his reply, gently explained that writers don’t waltz out of college and live the dream life. “Work for a newspaper, get experience, make contacts,” he told me.

I spent 20 years in newspapers but I did manage to freelance on the side, including those coveted travel articles. I acquired experience and I developed contacts. I nabbed a part-time job with freelancing on the side, then slowly over two years transitioned to a full-time, freelance life.

So, when people see me enjoying a free trip somewhere for a travel story, it’s my turn to gently explain the reality. However, writers can now access publications online—including back copies and staff lists—then pop off a pitch letter by email with links to writing samples, a real game changer since the days when writers stuffed envelopes with copies of articles and SASEs, then waited weeks for a reply, if any.

If you’re considering freelance writing to supplement your fiction career, here’s some advice to help you navigate those waters.

Building credentials

When pitching ideas to an editor, it’s important to prove that you’re:

- a. A writer who knows how to put words together. (You’ll be surprised at how many turn in copy with misspellings, grammatical mistakes or the wrong format, such as writing in the first person when a journalism style is required.)
- b. A writer who has some experience writing for publications.

In the first case, you're a writer who knows how to put words together. When you pitch a story to an editor, remind them of this fact, plus list professional writing organizations like NINC. A group designed to further one's career lends weight to your reputation.

The second requirement may be the toughest. How do you acquire story "clips" if you can't sell a story without story clips?

"It's like the proverbial chicken-and-egg but being resourceful and coming up with an assignment-winning pitch can overcome only having a few samples," said [Pamela A. Keene](#), a former public relations executive who now makes her living as a freelance writer. "Writing on spec may be required, but if the publication's reputation is good, it's worth the investment of time."

A "story on spec" or speculation means offering a story to the publication without an agreement to publish. If the editor loves your piece, then they pay and publish. If they pass, you receive nothing but you're free to publish it elsewhere.

Many writers offer stories for free to build up clips, but if you can receive some form of payment, however small in the beginning, it benefits all writers trying to make a living. I once contributed to a struggling travel magazine who paid me in gift cards the owner received from advertisers.

(Note: *Nink* looks for contributors and pays well for the service, so email ninkacquisitions@gmail.com with pitches.)

How to get started

I've heard it over and over again from editors at writing conferences: "Study the market. Read everything in that field." Although it's nearly impossible to read every back issue of the magazine you're pitching to, it's important to know their audience, their style, and what they're looking for, as per their writer's guidelines, usually found on the publication's website.

"Study my publications and their content and then, rather than pitching out of the gate, send an inquiry as to whether or not I'm accepting pitches and if not, am I adding writers to my roster," advised Melanie Warner Spencer, editor of several magazines in the [Renaissance Group](#) of New Orleans. "This will save both of us time, because we generally have our editorial schedule set a year in advance and we don't have space to add anything. Asking about adding to my roster, however, means that I will keep you in mind if we have something unassigned and you are a good fit."

This includes blogs, websites, and social media platforms.

"I look for well-written pitches that present unique, interesting, compelling, timely ideas that align with the mission of the e-mag and fit within its parameters," said Hope S. Philbrick, editor of [FoodieTravelUSA.com](#). "At the very least, read the e-mag description. As an example, there's no sense pitching a 'how to travel with young children' article to a site that targets adults traveling without children or an 'ATV trails' story to a food magazine."

Not all editors need the *New York Times* on a resumé, nor stellar copy.

"I'm looking for mostly a willingness to take direction," said Pam Blair, senior editor of [Pioneer Utility Resources](#), which publishes a series of magazines for electric co-ops around the

country. “I couldn’t care less if someone has been published. I can correct punctuation and grammar. I can’t do anything about inadequate content from the start. Hopefully the editor has a clear vision and communicates that to the writer. If you are asked to flesh out areas of the story after submitting your draft, please do that joyfully. The goal of a quality editor is to make everyone look good by the time the article is published.”

What do editors want?

“Originality, followed by accuracy,” said Mary Ann DeSantis, co-editor of [DeSoto](#) magazine of Mississippi. “Knowing how to interview a source and get pithy, interesting quotes is also essential for magazine writing.”

“Color and detail and a sense of place are what make a piece stand out above the crowd,” Warner suggested. “Additionally, while good writing is of course essential, I also like for a piece to have a news peg (if possible), along with depth, which is often achieved by sprinkling in a bit of pop culture, literary, musical, and artistic references (when appropriate) and, when it’s possible and relevant, data, so that we are looking at a well-rounded, informative and, again, when appropriate, entertaining article.”

With guidelines in hand, do what editors at writing conferences also advise: “Write what you love.” Let that love develop the story so that it captures and entertains the reader.

“Everyone has a story, but not all stories are entertaining,” said Blair. “There is a true gift in being able to capture the heart of the story. That is done through artfully crafting the piece in a way the reader ‘hears’ the voice of the story subject. As a reader, I want to be emotionally moved by the story, so ask enough ‘why’ questions during your interview with the story subject to achieve that.”

What editors *don’t* want?

“The assumption I would ever be interested in boiler-plate articles being pitched to every publication under the sun,” Blair said. “Be more targeted. It will take some of your time to learn about our audience, but it could net you a long-term relationship and ongoing work. I am willing to give anyone with a good idea suitable to our publications a chance, but I weed out the people who disappoint me. On the flip side, I happily return to writers who consistently deliver quality work on time.”

Editors always reiterate what should be common sense—make the story factual and clean of errors and turn it in on time. Don’t plagiarize, check spellings of everything but especially names and titles of those you interview, don’t insert an opinion when it’s not called for, and don’t veer from the assignment.

“Every fact in every article should be 100% true,” said Philbrick. “Every deadline should be met, 100% of the time. Do that, and you can succeed beyond your wildest dreams.”

In addition to her fiction career, [Cheré Dastugue Coen](#) writes freelance food, travel and Southern culture articles. She’s the co-editor of [DeSoto](#) magazine of Mississippi and pens the blog, [Weird, Wacky & Wild South](#).

Reading List

Pamela A. Keene, an Atlanta-based journalist who has written thousands of features in her 40-year career, suggests reading writing and grammar books. Here are a few, that also come in handy when writing fiction:

William Safir's Writing Rules

The Little, Brown Handbook

Theodore M. Bernstein's Dos, Don'ts & Maybes of English Usage

Wilson Follett's Modern American Usage

Webster's New World College Dictionary

A reputable thesaurus

For those working with publications adhering to the Associated Press style, an online subscription to the [AP Stylebook](#) might be in order.

The Mad Scribbler

Hunting the Snark

By Laura Resnick



Reversion: *n. the return to the grantor or his/her heirs of real property after all interests in the property given to others has terminated.*

—TheFreeDictionary.com

When I was a very young writer, I was discussing publishing contracts one day at a conference with a prolific, well-established, older writer (who has since passed away), and I was surprised to discover that she didn't know what "reversion" was. Moreover, when I explained it—the publisher's license expires and all the rights to your book return to you—she wasn't interested and didn't see the point. What would the writer do with an old book, after all?

Keep in mind that I was "a very young writer" in, literally, a different millennium.

Back then, although a "classic" or bestselling author's backlist was commercially viable and financially valuable, the novels of most other writers seldom got re-published. A midlist writer's title was available for a few years (or less); and then the book went out of print and usually never again earned income for the author.

Some publishers, particularly a few genre publishers like the family-owned science fiction/fantasy house DAW Books, were known for keeping midlist books in print for much longer. But they stood out precisely because maintaining a long shelf life for midlist fiction was not a standard practice.

Correspondingly, many writers felt no urgency about getting their rights back when their books became eligible for reversion, because there usually wasn't much they could do with them. Also, precisely as the older writer said to me in our discussion at that conference, if there was any possibility that an out-of-print book might be considered for publication again, the more realistic approach was to leave it with its original publisher in hopes of seeing it reprinted there. She thought that getting the rights back in hopes of selling a previously published book to

a different house seemed more like a gamble than a sound business decision, and she was far from being alone in that view.

Obviously, the ebook disruption of the industry and the indie revolution changed all that. And, as a direct corollary, it also changed the nature of reversion.

Old out-of-print midlist books went from being property that most publishers didn't particularly care about to being potential cash cows, editions that cost very little to produce or distribute and can continue generating income for years without the risk of paying for another print run, or more warehouse space, or returns.

Additionally, quite a few writers have made a lot of money by epubliishing the "worthless" backlist titles that publishers had recently reverted to them. And, as a friend of mine says, publishers tend to view any money that goes to a writer as money that is lost, wasted, and vanished into a void—money that should instead be filling the publisher's coffers.

Therefore, for the past decade, getting your rights reverted has been like hunting the snark—Lewis Carroll's imaginary creature that can never be found... or, if you're an optimist, an elusive creature that must be hunted with great courage and cunning.

Publishers have claimed, for example, that old print contracts which never even *mention* digital rights nonetheless grant them the right to publish ebook editions—ensuring that you won't get your rights back for decades.

One of the more famous examples of this occurred when HarperCollins sued Open Road Media in 2011 for publishing the digital edition of a bestselling, Newbery Award-winning children's book, *Julie of the Wolves* by Jean Craighead George. HarperCollins had acquired the book in 1971 for an advance of \$2,000. The title had been in print ever since, selling 3.8 million copies and generating a lot of profit for the company. When George decided she'd like to license an ebook edition, she negotiated with HarperCollins, but the publisher refused to budge on its royalty rate of 25%-of-net, which George considered (according to the court documents) "fundamentally unfair to authors, given the low costs and high efficiencies of ebook publishing." So she licensed the e-rights instead to Open Road, which offered her 50%-of-net.

HarperCollins sued Open Road, alleging this was a violation of its exclusive right to publish the ebook and claiming that the phrase "in book form" in its 1971 contract with George included digital publishing rights. The lawsuit dragged on until 2014, two years after the elderly author passed away, when a judge finally ruled in HarperCollins' favor—but not because she agreed that "in book form" covered digital rights. Rather, there was some unusual language added to the contract in 1971 by the author's agent, and in an excruciatingly detailed written opinion, the judge ruled that *this* was what validated HarperCollins' claim to the digital rights. She added that this was a very narrow ruling, based on things specific to this particular contract, and should not be viewed as a precedent.

(You can read about the case [here](#).)

What I took away from *HarperCollins v. Open Road* was that the publisher was unwilling to negotiate their e-royalty rate with an author who had generated substantial profits for the company for years, but they *were* willing to spend enormous sums fighting a three-year legal battle to get control of the e-rights to a book they acquired when Richard M. Nixon was president.

I think that lesson exemplifies the attitude of publishers toward e-rights: “Mine, *mine*, **MINE!**”

And publishers apply that attitude to most of us, too, not just to writers of bestselling classics. They cling to our licensed rights the way the stench of feral cat urine currently clings to my car. (I volunteer in cat rescue, and I’ve been doing transport lately for some trap-neuter-release efforts.)

So writers struggle to get their rights reverted on old titles, dealing with legal departments that don’t respond to their letters or return their calls, and publishers that refuse to revert books for a host of flimsy and questionable reasons. Some writers describe publishers making veiled threats, such as hinting they’ll cease to acquire new books from authors who pursue reversion of old titles. Multiple writers I know have recounted publishers maintaining (at least on paper) a minimum amount of stock in order to assert a book is not eligible for reversion, or printing just enough copies (at least in theory) after receiving the reversion request to maintain their license. Another writer reported that her publisher had denied her reversion request because a foreign language edition was still available in one country (or so they said).

Understandably, some writers get so frustrated that they think about proceeding with their new plans for their old works even if they keep hitting a brick wall when seeking reversion. What would happen, some writers wonder, if I self-published that book with a new title, and changed the names of characters and other details?

Well, perhaps nothing would happen. There are millions of ebooks out there, after all, by thousands of writers. The odds that a publisher would examine the contents of your indie output thoroughly enough to discover the ruse, or that someone else would alert them to it, seem low.

However, the odds aren’t zero. And there are programs available to compare texts, looking for similarities (ex. one was developed during the #CopyPasteCris scandal, which I wrote about here in the May 2019, to assist the victims of a particularly prolific plagiarist), so discovery and consequences are certainly possible.

Similarly, when dealing with recalcitrant publishers who are non-responsive, stall, and make flimsy excuses, writers think about just self-publishing the book, no pretense or disguise, and be damned!

I don’t think many publishers would sue the writer in either situation—mostly because publishers know that writers don’t usually have enough money to make suing them (which is expensive) worth the effort, time, and cost of launching legal action.

However, they would certainly contact Amazon, and probably every vendor where any ebook, POD, or audio edition of your indie title is available, and tell them you’ve published a title to which you don’t hold the rights.

I’ve been through this, and I do *not* recommend it.

In my case, I did not knowingly or intentionally violate a licensing agreement. I had, years earlier, published a trilogy with Tor Books. When the three titles were eligible for reversion, I sent my request to Tor via certified mail. Tor never responded, which didn’t surprise me; even when I had been under contract, it was a very rare event for anyone there to return my calls or emails. Six months later, I sent another certified letter to Tor informing them that, under the

terms of our agreements, based on their lack of response or action, the books had now reverted to me automatically. I copied the letter to the literary agent (long since fired) who had handled those deals. There was still no acknowledgement or response. A short while later, I self-published those three titles as ebooks.

Not long after that, I received a message from Amazon informing me that I had violated their terms by illegally publishing the third book, *The Destroyer Goddess*. They had removed the offending book from sale and informed me they might kick me off their site permanently.

What followed was incredibly time-consuming, frustrating, and headache-inducing, and it lasted for months. It took days of research and hiring a lawyer to figure out what had happened, and months to get it all sorted out.

The short version: I had conducted my reversion process based on the reversion clause in my first Tor contract. I had *not* read the reversion clause for *The Destroyer Goddess*. That contract had been issued several years after the first one, and its reversion clause was different—and so convoluted and complex that my lawyer was pretty bemused. I now learned the book had not been eligible for reversion when I requested it, precisely because the terms had changed quite a bit between books two and three, and so it had not reverted to me automatically as I had believed. And I was unaware of this because no one at Tor Books ever bothered to acknowledge or respond to the certified letters I sent them. So MacMillan, Tor's parent company, had filed a complaint against me when my digital edition of the book appeared on Amazon, which site the publisher monitored via an automated system.

This new reversion clause also had special requirements, by the way, such as: I had to refund to the publisher any overpayment of royalties I had received. With Tor also non-responsive about what I owed them, if anything, I pulled out years' worth of royalty statements and did the math myself. Then, when the book was finally eligible for reversion, I sent them a payment for about \$75, and showed my math. They never responded or deposited the check. Six months later, I again sent them an automatic reversion notice, with affirmation from my attorney that it was for real this time.

And then I *still* couldn't get my indie edition of the book back on Amazon, which insisted I had to have a retraction from MacMillan and a reversion document from Tor Books before I could publish. I showed Amazon all my paperwork, including a letter from my lawyer; but no one I dealt with at Amazon had any idea what I was talking about, and they just kept repeating that until the publisher withdrew its complaint against me and confirmed reversion, I couldn't publish the book.

I contacted MacMillan, who agreed to withdraw their complaint and to persuade Tor Books to send me a reversion document.

Overall... I advise everyone to avoid having a similar experience.

You have to be doggedly persistent to get publishers to revert your rights. Sometimes you have to be shameless, blunt, or creative; I once got a publisher to revert rights to a book I wanted back (one that was not contractually eligible for reversion) by explaining the real and severe damage they had done to my career and asking them not to continue harming me by maintaining the license. Sometimes you have to give up something; I got another publisher to surrender all rights by promising I would never try to get the money they owed me, if I could

just get my book back from them. Sometimes it's expensive; I had to hire a lawyer to get a book back when yet another publisher simply ignored all my attempts to contact them.

Additionally, Patricia McLinn, a past president of NINC, suggests, “[When] you’ve hit a roadblock, I’d get a group together, bypass the roadblock, and go up to the top and say, ‘Gee, you must not know that there’s been an issue with unreasonable refusal of reversion and we’re sure you’d want to know about it because the result is that established authors and the organizations they belong to are forced to tell everyone they come in contact with in the business to stay away from this publisher.’ And then be prepared to turn that threat into a promise by sharing your experience with that publisher so fellow authors know what they’re getting into.”

Stick with it. Keep trying. And—speaking from experience—try to avoid circumstances where a publisher can have your indie release removed from the market and get you labeled as a copyright infringer.

Laura Resnick writes fiction, nonfiction, and short fiction. She is currently getting her car cleaned.

NINC Member Discounts



Book Brush is a technology company with an energetic team to help you design book covers, ads and social media, right from your own computer. They constantly strive to update and refine their product and communicate regularly with their users to explain what's new. Among other options you can create text and stamps, 3-D book covers, and search over a million (!) free backgrounds for your project. Recently, your discount chair created a graphic for her newsletter in less time than it takes to brew a cup of tea—and with no training in how to use the program. It's that simple.

Mark Dawson calls Book Brush "... an elegant solution to produce convenient, high-quality images for books ads."

Dave Chesson, founder of Kindlepreneur and Publisher Rocket says, "There are three things I don't have enough of as an author—time, marketing images, and coffee. Book Brush has done a great job with the first two."

While you can sign up for a free version with fewer options, NINC members receive a 20% lifetime discount for any new paid plan. Details under **Member Benefits** once you sign into our [website](#).

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

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

2021 Board of Directors

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

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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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Address changes may be made on the website.

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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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