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President's Voice

By Tawdra Kandle



Happy New Year!

Have those words meant as much in recent years as they do now? I think that seeing the end of 2020 is allowing us all to breathe a collective sigh of relief.

It's the time of year for glancing backward with gratitude while looking forward with hope. That is an especially appropriate sentiment in NINC leadership, where we said a fond and appreciative farewell to several members of our team last month and extend a warm and hopeful welcome to new faces now.

Pam McCutcheon, who served as NINC treasurer for 2020, finished her term in December. We are grateful for her hard work during a tumultuous year, and we're sending her our best wishes for a well-deserved break. (If you didn't know, Pam also served as registrar for the conference for many years running prior to her treasurer gig.)

Michele Dunaway, who has been the editor of *Nink* and our newsletter editor board member for over three years, has reached the term limit of her service. Michele leaped into the gap to take over this role, organizing the process and streamlining how the newsletter is created and published each month. She is leaving a *Nink* that runs like a well-oiled machine, and we are so thankful for her hard work. We will all miss her!

We're happy to welcome to the board Timothy Cerepaka in the role of treasurer and Harper St. George as the new *Nink* editor. They both have big shoes to fill, and I have no doubt that they will shine in their new positions.

I want to remind you that everyone who has served on the board or will be serving is a volunteer. NINC runs on the enthusiasm of our members who give so selflessly of their time and energy. Please consider volunteering your time and talent to support our organization.

Take a moment to check out the updated list of our board and committee members in this edition of *Nink* — and don't forget to thank those folks!

Until next month, on behalf of the board, I wish you all a happy, healthy, and prosperous 2021.

~ Tawdra Kandle

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/>

Taking A Peek At Website Privacy Policies

By *Barbara Meyers*



Are you required to have a privacy policy on your website? If your website is based in the United States, the answer is yes—and you might be violating [Federal Trade Commission](#) (FTC) rules if you don't have one. If your website reaches audiences in the European Union, you also must comply with General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

Not following compliance guidelines can lead to liability. Likewise, if you have a published policy but don't follow it, someone could make claims against you for deceptive or unfair trade practices. Plus, those who view your website may be more comfortable knowing there's a policy that spells out exactly what information you collect during their visit and how it's used.

While most states have no laws regarding website policies, California and Vermont have been more aggressive in increasing privacy protections. The [California Consumer Privacy Act](#) (CCPA), took effect Jan. 1, 2020, and focuses on how businesses collect and use Californians' data. Even if you are not a California resident, your website is accessible to those who are. CCPA is meant to address website operators selling data directly by using lead generation companies and direct marketers, or by sharing personal data with ad networks through cookies without disclosure. Violations fall under [California Unfair Competition Law](#) and can incur a penalty of \$2,500 *per violation*.

Vermont recently signed into law legislation (Senate Bill 110) to address a number of issues related to data privacy and consumer protection, such as expanding the definition of personally identifiable information (PII) for purposes of data breach notification requirements for data collectors. Under the Vermont Security Breach Notice Act, data collectors are required, in certain instances, to report data breaches of PII.

The [General Data Protection Regulation](#) (GDPR) in Europe takes these rules a step further, requiring consent prior to data collection.

While everyone should have a privacy policy on their website, [Layne Lyons](#), JD, says you especially should if you:

- Collect personal information from residents of the state of California (you'll need to have a privacy policy which includes CCPA-specific requirements).
- Collect information for a newsletter, giveaway or any kind of an opt-in where you give a freebie in exchange for their email—you should definitely make visitors aware of how you plan to use their personal information.
- You sell via your website—in this case the need for a privacy policy is even greater.

What is a privacy policy and what is included?

Lyons explains that your privacy policy “tells your website visitors what information you collect, how you use that info, how you share it, how you store it, how you protect it and, very important, how they can opt-out if they want.”

A policy missing any of those key elements will fail to protect the business owner. Further, Lyons said, “The risk of not having a properly drafted policy is tremendous. Facebook has had billions of dollars of fines levied against it for failing to have one component of their policy adequately drafted and followed. It is essential that all of the elements be precisely addressed by someone who understands each facet and how to ensure compliance.”

Attorney Philip Nicolosi points out that often failure to write a proper policy stems from website operators not understanding the definition of personal data. For example:

- In California, under the CCPA, an IP address is specifically considered an item of personal data on a stand-alone basis. Cookies use unique identifiers to identify a device in connection to its IP address. Uninformed website operators may incorrectly define and then not disclose what is actually collected and shared.
- An open-source platform such as Wordpress allows for the integration of millions of free and paid plug-in applications to facilitate operating the website. Those plug-in operators/creators may be collecting data through each website that has installed and uses the plug-in. In fact, one of the most common privacy policy mistakes is not understanding what is collected by third parties while operating a website.
- The use of email marketing services such as Mailchimp gives these third parties access to personal data, such as an email address. In theory, using third parties to operate the website or for marketing purposes that have access to personal data in any capacity should be disclosed regardless of how such parties are using data.

The issue of data collection and disclosure is primarily all about controlling unauthorized selling and/or sharing of personal data without notification. The [FTC Act](#) controls data collection disclosure through restricting "deceptive practices." Not disclosing how an individual's personal identifying information is shared with third parties is deceptive.

How to create your policy

So where do you go to find legal documents for use on your web site? Both attorneys interviewed provide privacy policy and other legal documents for web-based entrepreneurs. Check out:

- <https://www.internetlegalarmor.com/>
- LayneLyons.com
- <https://digital.com/privacy-policy-generators/> (free privacy policy generator)

Keep in mind, however, the free sites may offer no support or any way to get your questions answered. A good policy includes several requirements regarding the setup for your website, for example [Secure Sockets Layer \(SSL\)](#), so it can be worth it to have someone to go to for assistance when you need it. SSL is a secure protocol developed for sending information securely over the internet. When you are asked to "log in" on a website, the resulting page is usually secured by SSL. If a web address starts with "https," the "s" after the "http" indicates the website is secure.

No matter if you do it yourself or get an expert to help with your policy, make sure your policy is written in easy-to-understand language. Lyons says she sees a lot of policies written in "impossible-to-understand legalese, filled with legal jargon and old English wording. Having clarity with all legal documents is empowering for an entrepreneur and will foster confidence and peace of mind."

In the interest of full disclosure, I was one of those website operators who didn't know I needed a privacy policy. I took advantage of Layne Lyons' free web site review and half hour consultation before she drafted my website policies.

(Editor's note: If you do not have a webmaster, your web hosting service can help you set up and install an SSL. Also, many free plug-ins are available to help you set up the "This site uses cookies" banner that should pop up on your website when a visitor lands on it. This banner alerts visitors you are collecting data, and if set up to do so, one click can allow a visitor to review your privacy policy.)

Barbara Meyers writes contemporary romance and women's fiction. Her latest release is the romantic Christmas novella, *A Family for St. Nick*.

Blogs & Newsletters

By Michele Dunaway



With so much information on writing and business techniques out there on the internet, authors can find and click on their favorite blogs and/or sign up for their favorite business newsletters in order to try and pare things down. First, we'll take a look at some of our NINC authors' favorite blogs/newsletters. Then we'll look at how we can emulate some of those in our own blogs/newsletters.

A killer blog

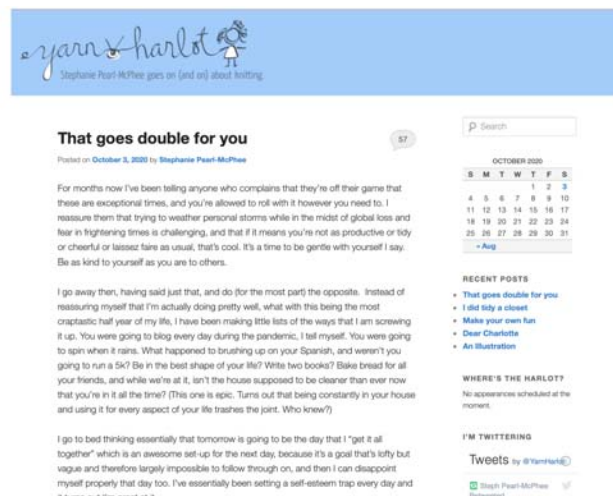
Eve Gaddy likes [TKZ, The Kill Zone](#), saying it's "a blog with a number of rotating veteran authors. It's definitely slanted towards crime/mystery/romantic suspense but many of the blogs are applicable to any genre. Their 'about' link will tell you more, including all the authors involved. James Scott Bell, among many others."



When I went to check it out, I found a comprehensive site. The home page has the daily blog. There is an archive of articles. You can also submit a first page for a critique (it's all anonymous and you don't know the author was who critiqued you), which could be fun for those of you thinking of playing around in a new genre (something Denise Agnew, our creativity coach, often suggests).

Spinning a yarn

Mindy Klasky likes Stephanie Pearl-McPhee's [Yarn Harlot](#) blog.



“On the surface, it’s a craft blog, focusing on knitting. But Stephanie is an author of books about knitting and of knitting patterns, and she’s a genius marketer who has built a huge community of followers because of the tone of her blog, her amazing photography of her knitted products, her willingness to share deeply personal stories, and her community activism (especially her fundraising for an AIDS charity each year,” Klasky said.

When I checked it out, Stephanie was talking about how these are exceptional times and how we’re allowed to roll with it however we need to, ending the first paragraph with: “It’s a time to be gentle with yourself I say. Be as kind to yourself as you are to others.”

Then she changes it up by saying, “I go away then, having said just that, and do (for the most part) the opposite. Instead of reassuring myself that I’m actually doing pretty well, what with this being the most craptastic half year of my life, I have been making little lists of the ways that I am screwing it up. You were going to blog every day during the pandemic, I tell myself. You were going to spin when it rains. What happened to brushing up on your Spanish, and weren’t you going to run a 5k? Be in the best shape of your life? Write two books?” Etc.

And I was hooked (pun intended). I can understand why people come back over and over. The tone is light and the blog is honest. You feel better about your own issues and feel like you’re not alone.

Well-known for fiction

Gwen Hernandez sent me [Writer Unboxed](#) with the full disclosure that she's a quarterly contributor with a column on Scrivener. According to Hernandez, the blog covers "all aspects of writing (mostly fiction), including craft, the joys and struggles of writing, marketing, book reviews, and critiques. They have both regular contributors and guest posters, including some pretty big names, like Donald Maass, David Corbett, Barbara O'Neal, and Bryn Greenwood."



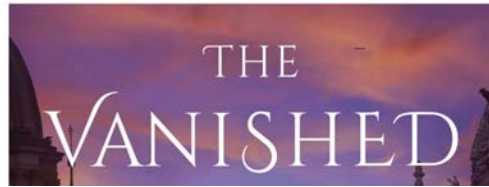
When I checked it out, Natalie Hart had written a post "Try a Little Tenderness." I scrolled down in her post and found this nugget: "As writers, we can get so obsessed with putting our characters in increasingly awful situations, stripping them of their support systems, having their friends betray them, that we forget that compassion and tenderness can play a role in putting tension on every page."

Even experienced writers will find something, and it might be a good place to browse when you hit a block.

Unfiltered advice

Jordan Summers told me she follows a few authors on Instagram and subscribes to Chuck Wendig, Ilona Andrews, Nalini Singh, Juliette Cross, Larissa Ione, Suzanne Wright, and D.B. Reynolds newsletters.

Wendig calls his site [TERRIBLEMINDS](#). Okay, so the blog is part of it, but you can subscribe and it will dump into your inbox. One thing I noticed immediately is how much of Wendig's personality comes through. You don't even need to read one of his books to know exactly who he is and why he is so appealing. Word of warning: if you are sensitive to adult language, this is not the site or blog for you. Chuck uses it liberally because it is part of how he expresses himself.



SUBSCRIBE TO TERRIBLEMINDS

Want to receive these blog posts via email whenever they post? Then all you gotta do is subscribe. Join 11,468 other subscribers

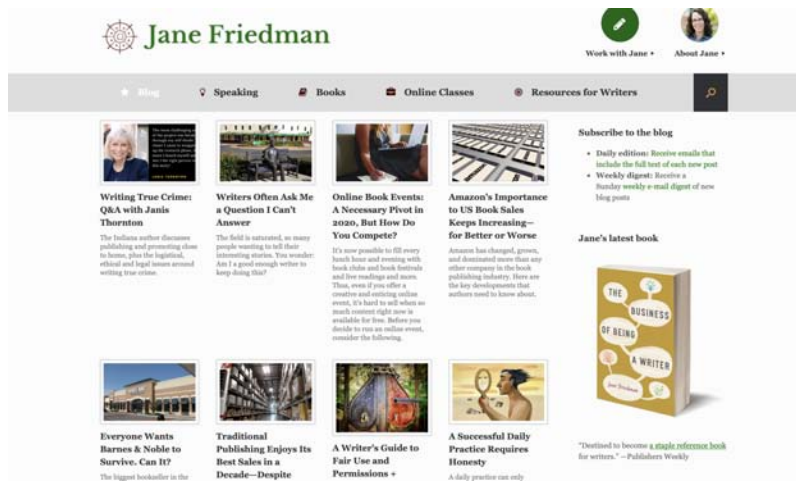
Put Your Email Address Here

SUBSCRIBE

Summers said she there's a reason she reads these newsletters. "I click open because of these authors write combo newsletters. They tend to include a slice of life bit, along with something I as a reader might find useful, and something about writing/their work/etc."

A publishing pro

As for me, I receive two newsletters rather than going to a website. One comes in from [Jane Friedman](#). Friedman has 20 years of experience in the publishing industry and has been blogging professionally since 2008. Her current blog enjoys more than 100,000 visits per month. In fact, while I was writing this article, she had her readers send in lists of blogs they liked and broke it up into part one and part two. Friedman even held a class for \$25 on how to blog successfully.



More than motivation

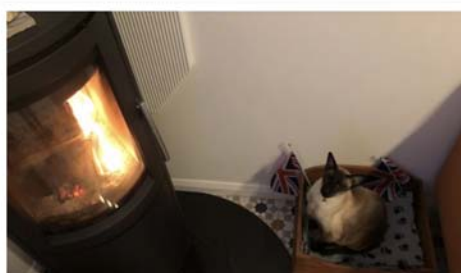
The other newsletter I receive comes in from [Joanne Grant](#), who does the craft articles for *Nink*. Joanne also does a Monday Motivation session on her [Facebook](#) page. I usually find it worth a watch. She's talked about everything from goal setting to characterization.



Dear Writer Friends,

How has your week been?

I'll be honest, I've had one of those weeks when everything seemed to take longer than planned. You know how it goes: you have your to-do list, then one thing happens to put you behind schedule and from there on in, you can never seem to make that time up! I can confirm that one thing went to plan though: Thai the Siamese got his wish of a fire to warm him last night :)



Other recommendations

Jenna Kernan also recommended the following blogs: [Kobo Writing Life](#) and [Reedsy](#). Both have free subscription options. She also suggested the following newsletters: [Sisters in Crime](#), the [Florida Chapter](#) of [Mystery Writers of America](#) and ITW [International Thriller Writers](#). Note, you must be a member of Sisters in Crime and Mystery Writers of America to get their publications. However, can fill out a [form](#) for ITW and it also puts issues up on [The Big Thrill](#) website and you can go there to read the publications and sign up for a monthly email.

Some common threads for blogs

So what does all this mean for you besides an information overload if you click on all the links? When I started researching this article, I simply wanted members to share blogs and newsletters that they loved in a place where it might create an “Ah ha!” moment for other members. But then it became a learning experience about blogs in general.

The blogging world is still like podcasting—it’s a way to get ourselves out there and develop a following. It can also be a time suck, and it’s not like it used to be when it first started. That doesn’t mean that blogging isn’t relevant. Friedman taught an Oct. 7 online class called “Blogging Strategies That Work in 2020.”

The [Blog Tyrant](#) has all sorts of strategies, including how to write blogs that convert. In fact, he says, “Most people post, tweet and promote blindly—throwing a bunch of things at the wall to see what sticks. But, by making a few targeted changes you can grow your blog in big ways, much quicker than you thought.”

Looking at his strategy, Friedman’s course outline, and reviewing the blogs Klasky and Gaddy love, I found some common threads:

1. Have a goal for what you are writing. Why are people coming to your site, what are you wanting them to tell them and what are they going to take away?
2. Keep your site easy to navigate. While Stephanie Pearl-McPhee's Yarn Harlot is the simplest of the group, it does contain an archive by date and her blogs have pictures. Make sure you have a solid landing page, and if possible, make your archive searchable.
3. Make it personal. Decide how much of "You" you plan to reveal. Yarn Harlot and Chuck Wendig have a complete vibe going that is unique to them.
4. Headlines do matter, so learn to write snazzy ones.
5. Do your research. Who are you trying to target? Know your audience.

Happy reading.

Michele Dunaway writes contemporary romance. A crazy cat lady, she's cutting back on all obligations and truly going to focus on writing, writing, writing for 2021.

Dialogue Tags

By Joanne Grant



“What’s the fuss all about?” she asked, quizzically.

There are lots of “rules” in writing and with them a hive of opinions and debates. In this article I am going to bravely wade in with some thoughts on the dialogue tag “rule,” which is this: only use the verb “said” unless absolutely necessary. Now the chances are, you will have strong feelings about this use of said, and are firmly in the “for” or “against” camp. However, if you’ve never given it much thought until now, then I want to say “I’m sorry!” Because it seems that when it comes to the humble verb “said” there is actually a *lot* to be “said” about it!

So what *is* the fuss all about? I am here to put your mind at rest, offer up some tips and suggestions, and I promise, there won’t be a “rule” in sight. Let’s start by looking into the basic arguments between using “said” versus more descriptive verbs in dialogue tags.

Put simply, a dialogue tag serves to show the reader who is speaking. It is a tool to orientate the reader and smooth their passage through the story.

Against

Purists who argue for the use of “she/he/they said” only, do so because they believe anything else detracts away from the dialogue, action and intrudes on the story. Dialogue tags are functional and therefore should be “invisible” to the reader. There is also an additional argument that the use of alternative verbs, or heaven forbid, an adverb (see article tagline!) is at the best amateurish, or at the worse, just plain wrong.

For

On the flip side, those in the for camp could argue that relying on plain old “she/he/they said” is well, boring! It is creatively limiting when there is a wealth of verbs just longing to be whispered, muttered or shouted—why wouldn’t you want to pepper your prose with a little more flavour?

But which side am I on?

This argument made me think back to my school days where we were encouraged to find creative alternatives to “said” to expand our vocabulary and pep up our creative writing. I am sure the results were indeed “amateurish” and I can’t help but wonder whether the cringeworthy results of this language exercise have left a scar on some writers!

But as an editor, what do I think about dialogue tags? To be honest, I have never felt that strongly about them. That is because when they’re handled well, I hardly notice them—if they don’t bother me, I don’t bother them! I completely agree that their role is functional and can be near on invisible to the reader, but when I do notice them it’s usually because:

- There is a lack of them and I have lost track of who is speaking—very annoying!
- or
- They jump out at me by being ill placed, irrelevant, or just plain bizarre!—and ruin the flow of the story.

Now, my research shows that not all editors will feel as neutral as I do about dialogue tags. This suggests that it is rather a question of personal taste, which is why rules simply cannot exist—it is subjective. As a writer, therefore, how do you navigate this potentially divisive terrain?

Research

I always advise that you research the conventions of the genre you are targeting to give you a flavour of not only content, but also details such as verb usage in dialogue tags. Notice how they are executed, how frequently and whether it is a quirk of the writer, or if there is a convention across the genre. And if you find yourself reading for research but forgetting to notice dialogue tags, it’s likely because they have been handled beautifully. Go back and read with more detail to spot them!

Purpose and techniques

Once you’ve identified the preferred usage of dialogue tags it’s time to apply your learnings. Whether you’re in the “for” or “against” camp, it is still important to communicate clearly what your character is saying. The following examples can help you execute your chosen dialogue tag in an effective way.

Redundant tags

If you’re thinking of using a more descriptive verb or adverb, question whether they add information or meaning that isn’t obvious through dialogue and action. If nothing is added, it is likely redundant and you are in the dangerous territory of telling what you have already shown. Here is an example:

She slammed the door and glared at him. “How dare you talk to me like that?” she asked angrily.

The addition of the dialogue tag in this instance is redundant: “asked” due to the punctuation and “angrily” because it is clear from her actions that she is angry. As a result, the dialogue tag just adds words and potentially slows the pace of whatever the response will be. Using this type of action, followed by the dialogue can help eliminate the need for a dialogue tag entirely.

Aural tags

Whereas, if you want the reader to hear the dialogue and appreciate the volume of what is being said, for example, an aural tag such as “whispered,” “muttered,” or “shouted” can help. Not only can this bring dialogue to life in a way that isn’t obviously communicated through dialogue or action, it alters the meaning too.

There is a big difference between:

“I hate you!” she shouted.

“I hate you!” she whispered.

Obviously, the action around the dialogue will help to fill in the blanks, but If you were a purist, and simply went with “she said” then the action would have to do most of the talking. After all, the meaning of the words can be changed entirely depending on how they are delivered.

As you can see, there isn’t a right or wrong way! And plumping for “she/he/they said” only is actually more difficult than it may appear! Whatever side you end up on, and let’s be honest, there is a hybrid option available, it is all about finding what’s right to your author voice as well as the genre of fiction you are writing, and then finding a match with an editor who feels the same.

I appreciate it takes skill from the writer to execute tags in such a way that they fulfill their function and play an unobtrusive role and seamlessly bring the dialogue alive, but I can honestly say that I have never passed on a submission because dialogue tags—and you can quote me on that!

Joanne Grant is an editorial coach with over 16 years of editorial expertise working for the global best-selling publisher Harlequin. Grant 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—she 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](#).

An Interview with Betsy Mitchell

By Jennifer Stevenson



NINC members know how it pays to have an editor for your work. If your publishing house doesn't provide much editing, you can hire your own. And of course, indie authors make use of freelance editors. I interviewed Betsy Mitchell, who was my editor at Random House for a trilogy of sexy romantic fantasy novels. Mitchell, formerly editor-in-chief at Del Rey Books, is now a freelance editor and also a consulting editor for Open Road Media.

Speaking as an editor, can you talk about where have you been versus where you are now, and what makes this easier or harder?

I toiled in the vineyards of New York publishing from 1983 through the end of 2011, when I took early retirement after 10 years of heading the Del Rey science fiction/fantasy line at Random House. As soon as I left, Jane Friedman, former head of HarperCollins Worldwide, invite me to join her (then) new ebook publishing venture, Open Road Integrated Media. I accepted a consultancy position to start a science fiction/fantasy line there—and proceeded to have the fun of acquiring digital rights to a stellar list of authors, including such big names as Octavia Butler, Joe Haldeman, Robert Silverberg, Robin McKinley, Jane Yolen and many more.

Ebooks were beginning to account for a solid percentage of publishing income at the traditional houses by the time I left Random House. In fact, ebooks had begun to shift the financial underpinnings publishing had relied on for decades. The more readers chose to buy books in digital form, the fewer hard copies had to be printed—which meant that production prices per copy were rising, tightening the already close margins publishers operated under. Publishing has not been a big-profit business for a long time—if it ever was—but by the end of my sojourn, mid-level authors were truly under pressure, and new authors had to prove themselves **fast** if they were to get a second contract.

Digital editions—either self-published or how we acquire them at Open Road—are a great choice for a couple of types of authors:

- Those whose print backlist is spread out at different houses—therefore not commanding much (or any!) promotion at any one house.
- Series authors whose publishers can't keep all of the titles in print. Fewer brick-and-mortar bookstores equals lower bookstore orders, which equals many titles that can't achieve the minimum reprint figure that will cause a publisher to go back to press. (That number used to be 2,500 copies for mass market reprints; I don't know whether that's changed.)
- Series authors whose early titles may still be in print but whose publishers haven't renewed their contracts. The fans are still there, and they want new stories in whatever form!

What would you like to say about the changes in what an author should expect from an editor over the past (oh say) 12 years or more?

In addition to consulting at Open Road, I have a private editing business, [Betsy Mitchell Editorial Services](#). Many of the authors I take on have experience with traditional publishing and want to try the self-publishing route (with a new series, for example, or with a stand-alone book they were unable to place for whatever reason). Both authors and agents tell me sad tales of manuscripts insufficiently edited, even at large publishing houses. One client distrusted her “official” editor so much she had me work on her titles *before* she delivered them to the publisher.

It is true that as publishers trim their costs, editors are being asked to do more than they had to in the past. Some houses ask the editor to write cover copy, marketing materials or publicity pitches, for example—tasks that were handled by separate departments in the past. It is true that editors can have so much on their plate during official publishing hours that they must take work home at night. But an editor's work is *first and foremost* working with an author to produce the best manuscript possible. There is no excuse for not doing that. I don't know if it's a matter of poor training, or what. (It could also be a personality thing. I've noted that many British editors are so respectful of their authors that they work with a very light hand. So if you want your editor to go hard on your manuscript once it's delivered, tell them.)

Talk about the differences between a content editor, a line editor, and a publishing house editor?

At larger houses, at least, a manuscript receives two levels of editing: big picture and small picture. In such cases, your acquiring editor is also your developmental editor. He/she will work back and forth with you to improve issues with plotting, characterization, pacing, etc. The finished manuscript then goes to a copy editor (also known as a line editor), usually a trusted freelancer who specializes in sentence structure and is especially alert to the smaller details. (An experienced copy editor is a very valuable individual! Say thank you after you finish responding to all their catches!)

At smaller houses the same editor might do both levels of work, with a proofreader providing a second set of eyes.

What do you want to say about what's different about traditional publishing from where you sit now, as opposed to (say) 2012?

The biggest change I've seen in the last 10 years is the rise of self-publishing. It has never been easy to become rich as a writer, but we traditionalists are amazed at the number of writers who have established big followings. I'm no expert on self-publishing.

Kudos to those authors who work so hard to find and grow an audience without the help of a traditional publishing house. I *do* urge any self-published author to not skip the step of having an editor because an author has never lived who couldn't benefit from judicious input on plotting, characterization, or pacing. Or if you think your high-level work is already acceptable, what about a line editor to help individualize your character's voices, or work on those pesky matters of grammar?

If you're shopping for a freelance editor, do your due diligence. High-level, developmental editing, especially, is an apprenticeship skill that's typically learned at the elbow of an experienced professional editor. Thanks to budget cuts at the New York houses, there are enough former editors that you should be able to find one who's gone freelance in your genre. Check with at least three possibilities and compare what they propose to do and how much they'll charge. Some work by the page, some by the hour, some by the job. Do they have a website? Have they worked on books whose titles you recognize or can at least find on Amazon so that you can read the reader comments? Will they give you a sample edit for free, or at least provide a sample edited chapter from a previous job so that you'll see what level of work you can expect?

Any experienced editor will also have testimonials from previous clients. He/she should also be perfectly happy to have a phone call about the details of your particular project before any work begins. Having a clear picture of the procedure is hugely important so as to avoid potentially pricey misunderstandings. You'll also be able to work out a schedule satisfactory to both parties. Start looking for an editor a good couple of months before you expect to finish writing. If others are like me, they're booked up about that much ahead.

Copy editors, line editors, and proofreaders can learn their skills in many settings, so it's not as important whether they worked in a traditional publishing house. But do take the time to find one who is knowledgeable in your genre. If you're writing military science fiction, for example, you might want somebody who knows a little something about guns and ammo, or at least recognizes the need to look stuff up.

Do you want to talk about editing at Open Road?

Last of all, a shout out to Open Road, which has allowed me to stay in touch with agents and authors all over the map and to republish works which I either loved when I first read them, or never had the opportunity to get to before. Open Road has become a new publishing home for hundreds of excellent genre writers and classic authors in all categories. As we all

know, it's not enough just to have your book available. You need to reach the people who will want to read it. Open Road's approach focuses on marketing, the bugaboo of so many authors who would rather write than try to land a BookBub deal, say. It warms the cockles of my editorial heart to see so many older books receiving updated covers, copy, and marketing focus.

Jennifer Stevenson has published 20 novels, four of them with traditional publishing houses. She writes paranormal women's fiction, fantasy, PNR, and contemporary romantic comedy.

The Mad Scribbler

Keep Going

By Laura Resnick



“If you’re going through hell, keep going.”

—Winston Churchill

The end of the beginning

On Dec. 8, the United Kingdom started administering doses of the first approved COVID-19 vaccine, developed by the pharmaceutical company Pfizer, to priority patients. Three days later, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration issued Emergency Use Authorization for the same vaccine, and workers began the complex process of moving huge shipments of the life-saving drug across this nation. Frontline healthcare workers in the U.S. started getting vaccinated on the same day that our official COVID death toll passed 300,000.

(Disclosure: I am a volunteer in the Pfizer vaccine trial. I’ve recently been told I will be “unblinded” in March—informed whether I received the placebo. At that time, I’ll be offered the vaccine if I did not receive it when researchers injected me in September.)

The logistics of inoculating enormous numbers of people is, of course, extremely complex. Credible estimates vary, but they all confirm it will be months before we’ll be able to return to normal life in the U.S.

So, as Prime Minister Winston Churchill famously told the British after their first major victory in WWII, when they defeated Rommel at the Battle of El Alamein in 1942 and drove German troops out of Egypt, “This is not the end. It is not even the beginning of the end. But it is, perhaps, the end of the beginning.”

We still face enormous challenges before we will emerge from the hell we’re going through with this virus. But with vaccines being distributed now, there is at least light at the end of the tunnel.

(Given what we've been through so far, it's worth noting that Churchill later wrote in his memoirs, "Before Alamein we never had a victory. After Alamein we never had a defeat." May our own struggle follow a similar trajectory.)

So how is the publishing world doing, as we stand at this crossroads between the wreckage of 2020 and the hope for a better 2021?

Publishers and print books

In an interview published in *Nink* last month, Lucia Macro, executive editor at William Morrow/Avon, said, "Book sales remain strong, thank goodness! With many outlets essential (think of Target, Walmart, your drug stores), people still had places to purchase books—and books have provided comfort and entertainment. Unsurprisingly, ebooks saw some growth and the audio format got a little softer with so many people not commuting."

In August, the *New York Times* [reported](#), "There has been a surprising spike in sales for print books, a development that would normally be cause for celebration, but is now forcing publishers to scramble to meet surging demand. Unit sales of print books are up more than five percent over last year, and sales have accelerated over the summer... The surge has been driven by several new blockbuster titles... Publishers have also seen an unexpected demand for older titles, particularly books about race and racism, children's educational workbooks and fiction."

Similarly, Betsy Wollheim, publisher of DAW Books, a genre house that focuses on science fiction and fantasy, said in a December [podcast interview](#) that sales have been good this year, despite everything.

To date, all of the editors I've communicated with, including Macro and Wollheim, are still working from home. Although most of them are tired of it, the work of acquiring, editing, and publishing books adapts easily to the exigencies of social distancing.

However, producing, storing, and distributing physical books has been more challenging in the pandemic.

In her podcast interview, Wollheim talked about the anxiety that publishers have lived with for nearly a year that their warehouses might close because of the virus. Without the warehouses, the publishers have no place to store physical books for shipments, and the supply chain would collapse.

Printing has also been an issue. The NYT article quoted above reported that one of the two biggest book printing companies in the U.S. declared bankruptcy in April, and the other, currently up for sale, "had to temporarily shut down its printers at three plants due to the pandemic."

Meanwhile, publishers were canceling spring and summer books because of bookstore shut-downs, then overscheduling fall production, then moving books out of fall, and so on. The result has been chaos, a systemic breakdown wherein additional printings of very popular books are now taking at least twice as long as expected, while many authors' on-publication payments are repeatedly delayed as books get pushed further and further back in the schedule.

“The reshuffling is impacting prominent, award-winning authors and first-time novelists alike,” the NYT reported.

“We’re concerned about the unknown author, the first-time novelist who may be down the pecking order in terms of print priorities,” said James Daunt, the chief executive of Barnes & Noble (B&N). “Booksellers want to get their hands on them, and the copies aren’t there.”

Booksellers

James Daunt was once a successful indie bookseller in Britain who was eventually hired to manage the failing Waterstones chain of bookstores, which he completely turned around and made profitable. In 2019, the hedge fund group that had recently purchased the failing B&N chain hired Daunt to turn it into a success too. Daunt’s strategy is to make chain stores function much more like independent booksellers.

A recent [article](#) in the *Wall Street Journal* describes the extensive changes Daunt has so far implemented across B&N. However, it’s still early days, and the pandemic began only months after he took over. The WSJ reports, “Barnes & Noble has suffered seven years of declining revenue in the face of Amazon.com Inc.’s dominance in online retail. The pandemic crushed sales in big cities, with revenue down 50% at major metropolitan stores, as well as the in-store café business.”

Daunt told the WSJ in December that annual sales would be down from the previous year. So it remains to be seen whether B&N will continue as the last big book chain standing in the era of Amazon’s rapid expansion.

Meanwhile, independent bookstores, which tend to survive on thin financial margins even in normal times, have innovated and adapted during the pandemic, but it’s often a struggle to stay afloat. *Vox* published an article, [“How Booksellers Are Weathering the Pandemic,”](#) toward the end of the year that described how independent booksellers “are doing everything they can to stay in business.”

Many bookstores, for example, moved all their in-store events to online platforms. However, online viewers of these free events don’t purchase nearly as many books as in-store attendees do. Therefore, as the owner of Politics and Prose in Washington, D.C., told *Vox*: “Sales are down even though audience levels are, in some cases, up.”

Switching to online ordering, mail delivery, and curbside pick-up helped many indies keep going, though this sort of business model isn’t at all why people become booksellers. “It started to feel like a fulfillment warehouse for widgets,” the manager of Skylight Books in Los Angeles told *Vox*. “It really took a toll on us psychologically.” He added that personal notes from his customers helped him keep going. The owner of Bank Square Books in Mystic, CT, went even further and started personally delivering book orders. She would leave bags of books hanging on a customer’s front door knob, ring the bell, and go back to her car. Some customers, in anticipation of her arrival, would leave bagged snacks outside for her.

Booksellers that have re-opened their doors to shoppers are balancing the conflicting issues of generating income by welcoming foot traffic yet keeping in-store numbers low enough to avoid creating a public health hazard.

“Oddly enough,” said B&N’s Daunt, “one of the pleasures of being in a bookstore is that they aren’t crowded places.”)

Many of the indie store owners said they were only able to survive because of the Paycheck Protection Program loan from the federal Small Business Administration. But the money has dried up, and it’s unclear what help will be available hereafter. According to the American Booksellers Association, indie stores have been closing at a rate of one per week during the pandemic, and 20 per cent of those that remain are in danger of closing.

“Given the current level of economic activity, it’s not realistic to think that bookstores or other retail businesses can, on their own, make a go of it,” said the owner of Politics and Prose. “More federal assistance is needed so long as the pandemic persists.”

Ebooks and Amazon

Fortunately for indie authors, digital books have done well during the pandemic, since it’s a format ideally suited to the strictures of this public health crisis. GoodeReader [reported](#) that U.S., for example, ebook sales in October 2020 were 20.4 percent higher than in October 2019. And the *Guardian* [reported](#) in November that the pandemic was driving ebooks sales to an all-time high in the U.K.

The surge in digital book sales has increased the market share of the industry’s behemoth online retailer, Amazon. Various industry pundits have [suggested](#), in turn, that Penguin Random House’s proposed acquisition of Simon & Schuster, which was announced late in the year, is all about Amazon—an attempt to counter Amazon’s power and enhance their own bargaining position by becoming too big for Amazon to dominate. And now there is speculation in business media about whether the PRH/S&S merger and Amazon might each face anti-trust challenges.

Writers and readers

I am far from the first person to note that when everything went to hell, people turned to creators to help them get through this past year. They turned to movies and TV, music and comedy, books and stories.

Reading rates and book sales didn’t rise during the pandemic because people ran out of TV shows to watch, family members to fight with, or video games to play. It happened because people need stories, and they’ve needed them more than ever during this terrible past year. Not only to transport them away from reality, but also to help them make sense of it. Story is a crucial tool for helping us redefine our world, rediscover our values, and renew our strength.

So don’t ever forget that the books and stories you send out into the world matter. Keep going—because what you do *matters*.

Laura Resnick writes novels, short fiction, and nonfiction.

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: http://ninc.com/system/assets/uploads/2017/01/2017_New_Member_Welcome_Packet-public.pdf

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.

- 2021 Conference Committee
 - Conference Coordinator: Mel Jolly
 - Programming Chair: Lisa Hughey
- Authors Coalition Rep: Laura Phillips
- Diversity & Inclusion Committee
 - Chair: Hildie McQueen
- Social Media Committee:
 - Chair: Jenna Kernan
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Central Coordinator

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Address changes may be made on the website.

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