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Contents

- ◆ President's Voice ~ Lisa Hughey
- ◆ Conference Update ~ Tawdra Kandle
- ◆ Behind the Scenes, Part Two: How to Plan A Fabulous NINC Conference ~ Tawdra Kandle

Feature Articles

- ◆ When to Form a Limited Liability Corporation (LLC) ~ Cheré Coen
- ◆ Naming Your Baby: Should Your Publishing Company Be Named After You? ~ Michael L. Banner
- ◆ Using Core Values to Strengthen Characterisation ~ Joanne Grant
- ◆ How to Write Superhero Fiction: Making Heroic Heroes and Villainous Villains ~ Timothy L. Cerepaka

Columns

- ◆ Smart Marketing For Savvy Authors ~ Tawdra Kandle
- ◆ Member Discounts Highlight: Publisher Alley ~ Emilie Richards

- ◆ NINC Membership Benefits
- ◆ About NINC

President's Voice

By Lisa Hughey



The NINC board and committees are hard at work. We're in the process of interviewing applicants for the bookkeeper job. Thank you to everyone who spread the word. We had a pool of ten fabulous applicants.

Conference registration is now closed. If you are registered and haven't booked the hotel, the TradeWinds is close to sold out. They may or may not honor our room rate as we are far over our contracted block. Huge thank you to Karen Fox for negotiating with the Hilton Garden Inn down the street to reserve rooms for us.

It's hard to believe this year is halfway over. As things get back to normal, I made plans and set goals—and things still went awry. Life interfered, as always happens, but somehow it was more of a surprise this year. COVID is under control so what could possibly go wrong? ::cue hysterical laughter:: How quickly I forgot that things can always go sideways. Instead of wallowing in frustration, I worked on reframing to take a perceived negative and create an opportunity.

[This Mel Robbins video](#) on visualization was posted in a group I'm in on Facebook. It's a quick ten minutes but totally worth the time. Visualization can be more than closing your eyes and imagining. It can be a vision board, a yearly collage, writing out your dream day. I do a yearly collage of images and phrases that encompass my goals and post it on the wall in my office. I never achieve everything on my board but at the end of the year, I can see where I succeeded. I assess the things I didn't get done and decide if the goal is still worthy of my time, then I have a blueprint in place for the next year. Until things go sideways again. ☺

Happy writing!

~ Lisa Hughey

USA Today best-selling author [Lisa Hughey](#) writes about strong heroines who are perfectly capable of rescuing themselves and the heroes who love both their strength and their vulnerability. She pens romances of all types — suspense, paranormal, and contemporary — but at their heart, her books celebrate the power of love. She lives in Cape Ann, Massachusetts, with her fabulously supportive husband, two out of three awesome mostly grown kids, and one somewhat grumpy cat.

About NINC

NINC is committed to welcoming a diverse and inclusive membership to our organization and serving all members. No author will ever be discriminated against on the basis 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](#), [traditionally published 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/>



The NINC2022: Work Smarter conference team is happy to announce that this year's event is officially a sell-out. Registration is closed.

If you are registered and have not yet reserved a hotel room, you can call the TradeWinds at 1-800-808-9833 and request the NINC conference rate, but we have exceeded our room block —as well the increased room block—and can no longer guarantee that the hotel will honor our rate.

We have arranged for an overflow hotel: [The Hilton Garden Inn](#), 6100 Gulf Blvd., St. Pete Beach, FL 33706.

If you call the TradeWinds and cannot secure the conference room rate at the Rumfish, we suggest that you call The Hilton Garden Inn at 1-877-782-9444 and reference the NINC conference. The rate there will be \$169 per night, available from the night of Wednesday, September 21, through Saturday, September 24 (checking out Sunday, September 25). **This rate is for registered conference attendees only.** We will be double-checking reservations, and if anyone is not already registered, their hotel reservation will be canceled.

We're pleased to share the following workshop topic announcements:

- **Melanie Harlow**
 - Don't Serve Spaghetti When They Ordered Cake
 - How to Hook and Hold Readers Using Brain Science
- **Elana Johnson**
 - KU vs. Wide: Can't It Be Both?
 - Stop Looking for Unicorns. Start Planning Strategies
- **Monica Leonelle**
 - Direct Sales with Kickstarter and Patreon
 - Fiction Apps: Reaching the Next Generation of Readers
- **Janet Margot**
 - Amazon Ads: Targeting Simplified
 - Mindset and Methods: Leveling Up your Amazon Ads

- **Nora Phoenix**
 - Expand Your Empire: Conquering New Markets with Translations
 - Small but Mighty: Marketing Techniques for Selling Niche Books
- **Renee Rose**
 - Write to Riches
- **Julia Spencer-Fleming**
 - What Happens Next? – Suspense for All Genres
 - When the Where is the Why: Taking Your Scene-setting to the Next Level
- **Nick Thacker**
 - Advanced Book Marketing
 - Advanced Email Marketing
- **Vanessa Vale**
 - How Wide is Wide Enough?
- **Carol Van Den Hende**
 - Brand Land: What is Author Brand and How to Craft Yours
 - Generational Insights: Writing Millennial Characters
- **Susan May Warren**
 - Igniting Your Story from the First Line, the First Paragraph, and the First Scene
 - Growing Your Readership Through Series (Connected Series or Universe)
- **Jasinda and Jack Wilder**
 - Healthy Living for the Busy Writer, or How to Avoid Sedentary Spread
 - Variety is the Spice of Life—for Authors too!
 - Lane? What Lane? Writing in Multiple Genres, and Ignoring the Rules

The conference team is also thrilled to announce that Saturday Night Karaoke is now an official NINC event, sponsored by our wonderful friends at Draft2Digital and BookFunnel. So tune up those pipes and choose your go-to song.

For 2022, we've added quite a few new sponsored events, including breakfast on Friday and Saturday, a snack break on Saturday, and a Coffee Cart on Thursday. Stay tuned for more coming soon!

We'll also be announcing more workshop titles and all of the blurbs over the next few weeks, so be sure that you're on the IO group and/or our conference Facebook group, open only to registered conference attendees.

Tawdra Kandle is the USA Today bestselling author of over 100 romances that span genres from contemporary through paranormal. Her engaging and realistic characters bring readers back again and again to devour the steamy love stories she spins. She lives in central Florida with a husband, a mischievous pup, and too many cats.

Behind the Scenes, Part Two

How to plan a fabulous NINC conference

By Tawdra Kandle



Last month, I shared a little about what happens in the early days of conference planning, including choosing a list of speakers to invite, reaching out to companies to offer sponsorship opportunities, and laying out a tentative event framework.

But it's right around this time of year when everything kicks into high gear. By now, we have a full slate of speakers, including Featured Guest Speakers, sponsors, and other industry guests. When we invite speakers, we always have an idea of what we'd like to hear from them, but once we have our guests contracted, registered, and set up for a hotel room, we get down to the business of specific topics, titles, and the dreaded blurbs.

One of the biggest goals—and one of our biggest challenges when it comes to new-to-NINC-speakers—is ensuring that the presentation meets the high-level expectations of our membership. No matter how much we stress this point, if someone hasn't been to our conference, they don't know. They can't understand.

Last year, one of our regular industry guests introduced me to another industry professional who was interested in attending the conference and wanted to pitch a workshop. He did, and we accepted, asking him to make sure that he understood he'd be speaking to a group of professional authors who knew more than the average bear. He assured me that he got it and would tailor his talk accordingly.

When I saw this industry guest on the first full day of the conference, he was wide-eyed and slightly shell-shocked. "I didn't know," he said. "I didn't really believe you. I stayed up late

last night totally redoing my workshop after talking with the authors I met last night. I didn't know, but now I do."

As we iron out the details of topics, we do our best to strike a fine balance of workshops that appeal to authors who write a multiple range of genres as well as those who are traditionally and/or indie published. While we know that no one speaker or topic will please all of our attendees, we try hard to make as many of you happy as is possible.

Even as we work on speakers and workshop topics, we're also in conversation with our wonderful sponsors to detail what sort of presentations they'll be doing for us. Not all sponsors speak, but everyone is invited to pitch a workshop. The programming committee selects the topics that we feel will meet the needs of our attendees based on poll results and discussions within NINC-member groups.

By early summer, we've created the basic skeleton of our conference schedule. While it might seem that our lineup of events doesn't change much from year to year, we've actually tweaked quite a few aspects of the schedule over the past five years, and this year, we expect to make even more changes. All good things!

In pre-COVID days, we were always assembling and proofreading the print program up to the last minute. Now, though, with the conference app, we have some welcome wiggle-room to make switches and last-minute fixes, including shifting rooms in real time during the conference itself. The app is also a wonderful way for attendees and industry guests to interact before, during, and after the conference—and it's also a fabulous tool for attendees to arrange meet-ups, dinners, bar hang-outs ... just post what you want to do and invite others to join you!

In mid-summer, sponsorship focuses on everything that is part of the various sponsorship packages; they order the napkins printed with corporate logos and banners for our new sponsors. They also work with the hotel committee on details like menu items with specialized names.

By August, the conference team is handling final items such as printing signs for tables and making sure our speakers have all of their last-minute questions answered. The registration team is prepping badges and other material to give our attendees during check-in. Meetings and communication between the teams and team members is nearly constant at this point!

When the conference team descends on St. Pete Beach, every one of us is aware of our mission. Programming and the hotel team meet with our liaisons from the TradeWinds one last time, finalizing the details that mean so much in a conference like ours. Sponsorship makes sure that all of our industry guests are welcomed. We retrieve the conference items from our local storage unit, set up our on-site office, and we prepare for check-in on Wednesday afternoon.

And when the first attendee steps up to the table to check in and receive their badge, the conference team isn't finished. All of the committees work hard until the end of the Annual General Meeting on Sunday morning ...

... before they get ready to do it all again the next year.

If you'd like to volunteer to be part of our conference team, please reach out to any member of the current committee or to a board member for more information.

[Tawdra Kandle](#) is the author of over 100 romances that span genres from contemporary through paranormal. Her engaging and realistic characters bring readers back again and again to devour the steamy love stories she spins. She lives in central Florida with a husband, a mischievous pup, and too many cats.

When to Form a Limited Liability Corporation (LLC)

By Chéré Coen



Writing a novel and determining how to publish it—whether through an agent, a publishing house or independently—is daunting enough, but should an author also create a Limited Liability Corporation (LLC)?

[Michael Banner](#), founder of an LLC filing service and multi-published author of apocalyptic thrillers, answered with a resounding “Yes!”

“Anybody who’s a professional should set up an entity immediately and not wait,” Banner said. “It’s a good thing for all small businesses to form an entity.”

In the business world, a business entity may be a sole proprietorship, a corporation, or an LLC.

Optimistic [Wayne Stinnett](#), author of the Jesse McDermitt Caribbean Adventure Series, created an LLC when he decided to publish, preparing for the inevitability that he would be successful. And he was right. The author recently retired and makes his living solely from writing novels. His Down Island Press, LLC, holds the rights to his books and a corporate partnership, Down Island Publishing, LLC, publishes other authors.

He claims those entities offer peace of mind.

“An LLC gives you some protection and it limits your tax liability,” Stinnett said. “It enables you to stay rich and protect yourself. These two things combined give you ease. It makes you sleep better.”

What is an LLC?

A Limited Liability Corporation (LLC) consists of “members” or a sole proprietor, the latter known as a “single-member” LLC. According to the IRS, members may be “individuals,

corporations, other LLCs, and foreign entities” and there is no limit to how many members may be involved.

LLCs are regulated through individual states and some differ from others. In most cases, it’s an easy procedure that can be done online and for a small fee. Authors will need an LLC name and a physical address.

Some states, however, require more than others.

“In California, the cost was a minimum of \$800 or a percentage of your total income per year. So, it was very expensive,” said [Lisa Hughey](#). “In Massachusetts, where I created one, it’s \$500 per year flat rate.”

Some businesses, such as banks and insurance companies, can’t be LLCs, according to the IRS.

“It’s pretty straightforward,” Banner said. “When you’re creating an entity in the United States, it’s like forming a new person. You’ve created this legal person that’s separate from you.”

The pros of an LLC

“The big takeaway is the tax advantages,” Stinnett said.

The IRS taxes the LLC like a corporation, so all company expenses—from a new computer and Microsoft Word subscription to vacations taken at locations as settings for future novels—may be deducted as a company expense. The company may pay its members’ salaries of their choosing, as well as hire employees and distribute profits to its members.

An LLC also places a wall between a business and personal assets. For instance, if someone sues an author for copyright infringement, plagiarism or libel, they sue the company and not the author.

“It basically isolates your assets and protects you,” said [Troy Lambert](#), who owns two LLCs: his own, Unbound Northwest, and a publisher he co-owns, Mooney & Lambert. “In other words, they can’t come after your house because your company doesn’t own your house.”

For traditionally published authors, the publisher may offer some form of liability protection, Lambert said, and an LLC may not be necessary. For independent and self-published authors, even those earning a small income, if it’s feasible in the state in which they live—some states require a higher income—he recommends an LLC.

Plus, there’s that success thing again.

“If the book goes viral and authors start making big bucks, having the LLC already saves them from having to do it during what may be a stressful time,” Lambert said. “It’s important to be prepared for success.”

Authors may include the company name on their copyright page to add a level of credibility or to remain anonymous. Banner used a different LLC from the one he usually publishes under to create a political parody under a pen name. This kept his novel readers from making the connection.

Just choose a company name carefully, he advises.

“You might not want to use your name or pen name as the company name in case you want to write under a different name,” Banner said. “Choosing an LLC name takes some forward thinking.” (**Note:** See Banner’s article in this issue of *Nink* for more on this topic.)

Transferring an LLC makes selling publishing assets easier, as well as transferring ownership of intellectual property after an author’s death, another benefit.

How to form an LLC

Banner insists that anyone can file an LLC on their own with little time and a small investment, then maintain that LLC with a relatively small fee every year.

“In most states, it’s fairly inexpensive to start an entity and to maintain one,” he said.

For those with questions and who are not confident about the process, they may hire any number of companies that will take care of the process for a nominal fee. Banner suggested [SmallBiz.com](https://www.smallbiz.com), a filing services company he founded, as an example.

“The process was simple,” author [Annabel Chase](#) said. “I hired a local lawyer who specializes in small business formation. A couple of documents and a filing fee, plus the cost of the lawyer.”

The first step to creating an LLC requires a name. Once an author decides upon the company name, a Google and trademark search is called for to make sure it’s not already taken.

Then the author must file for an LLC with their state, using a physical address. Again, different states offer unique requirements.

“I think it depends on where they live and how much they earn,” Chase said on who should file an LLC. “It wouldn’t have been worth it to me in Pennsylvania beneath a certain income threshold because of the additional costs involved, but once I cleared that number, it’s been well worth it.”

It’s not necessary to create an operating agreement outlining the details of the company, but it’s recommended. Authors may list what the company represents, its intellectual property such as books and pen names, and its members and their percentage in the company. Those previously published may list their books, copyrights, and ISBN numbers under their names, transferring those rights to the LLC. (In the future, it’s advisable to obtain those in the LLC name.) Blank operating agreement documents may be found online to download for free.

Once the LLC is in place, authors should open a separate bank account and a credit card in the company’s name, then use both for all company expenses, Lambert said. “It makes the process simpler, especially at tax time.”

The LLC must also have an EIN (Federal Employee Identification) number, otherwise known as a tax ID number, for tax purposes and for opening financial accounts. If an author already has an EIN, they must file for another under the LLC name.

For authors first starting out, use the company to register ISBNs and have all royalties sent to the company bank account.

For authors who are already doing business, use the operating agreement to list all intellectual property, such as ISBNs, pen names, and books created. This shows how the author is transferring those rights to the company.

“And, in return, you’re getting ownership in the LLC,” Banner said.

As with all financial and legal undertakings, it’s good practice to check with your accountant or attorney.

In the end, an LLC gives authors a level of authenticity, Lambert said, “It adds a certain amount of legitimacy. Publishers take you seriously. It definitely sets you apart.”

Note: Michael Banner gave a presentation at the 2019 NINC conference on the topic of 13 Reasons Why Authors Need an INC (or LLC) Now!, and an article outlining that speech is available in the December 2019 issue of *Nink*.

Chéré Coen is the author of several romances and the Viola Valentine paranormal mystery series. She filed an LLC after writing this article.

Naming Your Baby

Should your publishing company be named after you?

By Michael L. Banner



If you have considered setting up your own publishing company to own and manage your writing business, your books, and all your other intellectual property (IP), what should you call it?

In this article, we will explore:

- What criteria goes into a good business name
- Applying these criteria to choosing your author business name

Failing to consider these criteria can create problems when naming your business. For example, a company attempting to jump on the green energy boom chose Gain Green, LLC as their name. Say the two words quickly and you will see why this was not the best name for their company. Here is what they should have considered.

What makes a good business name?

In my book, *Entity Set Up: Why and How Authors Need to Create a Business Entity Now*, I spend a fair amount of time describing the criteria for choosing the best name for *any* business entity, not just specifically an author entity.

A good business name should be:

- **Memorable** so that your business comes to mind
- **Descriptive** in what the business does
- **Unique** and not overly general
- **Scalable** in case you wish to grow
- **Brandable** and therefore not already in use

*Additionally, it should **not** be:*

- **Confusing** through odd spelling or punctuation
- **Stupid** by unintentionally describing something inappropriate or otherwise distracting

Applying these criteria to authors

When choosing a name for your author business entity, you will typically decide between these three choices:

1. Your author/pen name
2. Your legal name
3. Another name or concept

Let us examine each of them.

Your author/pen name

If your most powerful brand is your primary author name, it may make sense to simply name your publishing company after this same name.

A front-cover view of this naming method is logical. When considering what makes a good business name, it would certainly be *memorable*, it is definitely *unique*, and maybe even *brandable*. But what if you have more than one pen name? What if you wanted to take on a co-author? What if you wanted to publish someone else's work? In other words, is your pen name *scalable* for your author business?

In any of these potential scenarios, having your publishing company named after your author name might be confusing. Worse, it might be harmful to your author name brand.

For instance, what if you wanted to write under a different pen name, in a different genre, and you didn't want to be directly associated with your primary pen name? If your company is named after your primary pen name, think of the potential ramifications if the new pen name or the book it was connected to failed or drew controversy. If your company name were the same as your primary pen name, it might cause damage to your primary brand.

While at our 2019 NINC conference, I presented an illustration of this, using the real-life example of Big Foot Erotica. Prior to my research, I had no idea there was such a genre, much less that someone truly wanted to write stories set in it. Even more interesting was that a congressional candidate had written such a book. And, of course, he was caught by the opposing candidate (on the other side of the aisle), who used this titillating fact in her campaign against him. As I pointed out in my class, if this author had used a different pen name and named his publishing entity after something unrelated to what he was known by, it would have been hard to connect him to his book. His political aspirations certainly would not have been derailed by his secret "passion" for writing.

Your legal name

So, if naming your publishing company after your primary pen name might cause complications, why not just name it after your own legal name? It is certainly easy. Applying our “Good Business Name” criteria, it would be *memorable* and could be *brandable* (although there are some additional complexities associated with trademarking your own name).

The fact is, your legal name is generally not a good company name choice, as you would have many of the same issues identified with using a pen name. Additionally, here are four big questions this practice might pose:

1. Does your name fit the brand you are trying to sell?
2. Can you ever publish something anonymously? For instance, you could never publish your next political hit job without it being connected to you and your brands.
3. Is that the most professional (i.e., Jones & Co. vs. Mary Jones Co.)?
4. What if you or your heirs wanted to sell your publishing company (with all your titles and IP) to a larger publisher (this happens all the time, so they say). Just imagine the complications if they owned everything, including some rights to your legal name?

Another name or concept

In most cases, you are better off choosing a name for your author entity that is based on a concept which is different from your own legal name or pen name. Objectively, you need to look at this as your business. The main products you are selling are your books, under the brands of one or more of your author names... What word/words best describe what your business does?

Let us go back to each of the major points of a good name, but with one addition. Your author business name should be:

1. **Memorable**
2. **Descriptive** in what the business does
3. **Unique**
4. **Scalable** (i.e. grow beyond your one author brand)
5. **Brandable**, so that you could file a trademark to protect it
6. **Straightforward**, so as to not be confusing
7. **Astute** (not stupid)
8. **Match your goals!**

I named my publishing company Toes in The Water Publishing LLC because I wanted something fun and memorable that represented my lifestyle. Was it the best name for a writer who mostly pens end-of-the-world sagas? Probably not, and had I thought about it more, I may have come up with a more thrilling and apocalyptic name. However, this company name fits my own goals. Add to this, I do not expect to publish any other authors’ books.

Final thoughts

We have explored the standard criteria for choosing a good business name and applying these to choosing your author business name.

Let me offer one last, real-life example so you can practice being *astute* in selecting your publishing company's name.

I was telling a trusted friend my company name ideas before making a final selection. When I told him my main choice was **Toes In The Sand**, he started laughing. Not getting it, he spelled out the abbreviation for me... Yep, it certainly was *not* astute.

Michael L. Banner is a USA Today and international bestselling author, penning 15 novels as ML Banner and two nonfiction books under his Self-Publishing Empire® series. Before becoming a full-time writer, Michael was a serial entrepreneur, having formed dozens of businesses over 40-plus years, including [SmallBiz.com](#). Before selling, he helped more than 100,000 start their own corporations or LLCs, consulted thousands by assisting them on how to set up and manage their own enterprises, and served on boards of other start-ups. Now, when not writing, Michael and his wife relax at their favorite Mexican beach with their toes in the water or cruising to yet another foreign port (tax deductible of course).

Using Core Values to Strengthen Characterisation

By Joanne Grant



As a writer you will know that the key to memorable, engaging fiction is believable characters that readers can relate to. But how can you dig deep into your characters to make sure that they are as real to your reader as they are to you? In this article I will take you through why developing an understanding of core values can help strengthen your characterisation and improve motivation and conflict.

What are core values and why are they important to fiction?

Core values are the foundation of who we are, the decisions we make, how we behave and interact with other people and the world. Our value system is shaped by our early experiences in life, and influenced by those key people around us, such as parents, teachers, and mentors. Our values remain the steady compass by which we navigate through the world.

When we live our lives in balance with our values, we experience fulfilment and live in integrity, but when there is an imbalance that is when stress and conflict creep in.

The chances are, if you're writing character-driven fiction with a positive arc, your character will be facing stress and conflict but working towards a life of fulfilment. Understanding what is driving them at a core value level can help deepen their characterisation and motivations.

How can I identify my characters' core values?

There isn't one definite list of core values, but there are many lists readily available for use. The number of values on these lists vary from a handful to hundreds! This is because of the use of synonyms, and, as we know, language matters, so find what works for you. I really like the Life Values Inventory (LVI: Grace & Brown, 1996), which uses 14 relatively independent values, should you wish to refer to this.

Exercise 1

A simple exercise is to identify one of these lists and think about your characters. Highlight the values that chime most closely with that character. Do they value financial security? Are they concerned about others? Perhaps they are fiercely independent.

Highlight all that apply to start with, then narrow them down to a smaller number (maybe between three and five) of those values that really characterise their behaviour or are most relevant for the story you are writing. Characters, like real people, will have many facets to their personality, but they will be most strongly driven by only a handful.

Exercise 2

If you are in the early stages of getting to know your characters, you can start at the origin of their core values—in their backstories. Identify key life experiences and think about how they could lead to developing a specific core value. For example, if your character was raised in poverty, they may strongly value financial security. Or if they had a stable, loving home, belonging may be a key value for them.

Do keep in mind that humans are complex individuals and there is no simple correlation between an event and the value that is shaped. In fact, relying on obvious correlations can result in clichéd characterisations. Someone raised in poverty may actually feel ambivalent about material wealth and financial security, and instead has developed a value of freedom outside of material constructs.

I've identified my characters' core values. Now what?

Identifying core values and where they have stemmed from gives you a strong foundation to build a believable, well-motivated character. Values become an anchor to refer back to. Think about how a core value may manifest itself in the character's current situation and how they may react if that core value is challenged, or when they are faced with someone who has opposing values. This is where conflict can come from.

For example, how would a character who values independence react if their independence is undermined? Or if a character strongly values belonging (to be accepted and validated by others), imagine how it could affect them if they are rejected by others?

Put pressure on your characters!

It sounds mean, but if you want to create believable conflict look to your character's core value and put pressure on it! If you have successfully built their core values from backstory, that character will be highly motivated to overcome this conflict, to readdress balance in their lives—whether it is to regain their independence, sense of belonging, or financial prosperity. And if you continue to tap into how a person with that core value may react and behave, your character's behaviours will remain true to them and be a more rounded, believable character as a result.

Doing deep character work is an essential part of creating strong fiction, and relating your characters closely to the psychology of people, such as their core values, can help shape truly believable and memorable characters. And in the process, you may even learn something about yourself!

Joanne Grant is an editorial coach and publisher of Severn House, with nearly two decades of publishing expertise. Joanne has edited hundreds of novels over the years and understands how to coach authors to deliver their best work. If you're interested in finding out how she can help you achieve your writing goals, get in touch! You can find her on Twitter [@JoanneMGrant](#) and on Facebook [@JoanneGrantEditorialCoach](#), where she delivers a weekly dose of Monday Motivation for free!

How to Write Superhero Fiction

Making heroic heroes and villainous villains

By Timothy L. Cerepaka



The rise of the Marvel Cinematic Universe and many other superhero stories and shared settings has led to a superhero boom that is still going strong today. I've been writing superhero fiction myself under my pen name, [Lucas Flint](#), since 2016, and have been able to make a modest living while doing so.

Anytime I tell other writers I write superheroes, nearly everyone tells me they have always wanted to write superheroes. Some even have their idea fleshed out, but most only have a basic idea or desire to write their own.

Regardless, I always get asked for advice on how to write superhero fiction, so here's my advice for authors who want to write in this niche genre.

Have fun

I list this as number one because it really is important. While superheroes can be used to delve into darker and even mature themes (and I have not shied away from dealing with some pretty heavy themes in my own stories), the key to remember about superheroes is that they are fun.

Exploring deeper themes and having darker moments is fine sometimes. But superhero readers read for escapism and fun. If your superhero story is drearier than the reader's own life, then they probably won't enjoy it that much (unless you are going for a *Watchmen*-style deconstruction, but I wouldn't recommend that for first-time superhero authors).

Let your imagination run wild. Superheroes are flexible enough to include all sorts of genres, ranging from romance to horror to fantasy and everything in between and then some. Make it cool and fun.

Give your characters cool superpowers that make sense for the character—and be creative about it!

Most superheroes (barring Batman and Iron Man types) have their own unique or cool superpower that defines them and what they can do.

Coming up with a cool power is an important part of writing good superhero fiction, but you can't (or shouldn't) just slap a random power on your character and call it a day. Consider how the power connects to the character's personality and growth over the course of the story, including the character's character arc, and how it may impact the plot and the world around the character.

For example, Nyle "Winter" Maxwell, the protagonist of my Capes Online superhero/LitRPG mashup series, is somewhat uptight, not very open or social, and generally dependable. Therefore, it's no surprise that he gets ice-related powers when he becomes a superhero, ones which grow with him as he becomes more comfortable with his new life as a superhero in a video game.

Make the hero good and the villain bad

There's nothing wrong with having moral ambiguity sometimes or giving your heroes flaws and your villains redeeming qualities. Indeed, superhero fiction in general has never shied from dealing with moral ambiguity and tough questions.

But ultimately, readers want their heroes to be generally heroic and their villains to be generally evil. Don't make your heroes jerks for no good reason because you're trying to be edgy or think you are cleverly deconstructing superheroes in a way that no one ever has before when you probably haven't or it has already been done by writers better than you.

Give your heroes admirable qualities and make them do admirable, heroic things. Give your villains despicable qualities and make them do despicable, villainous things.

And do it without turning either of them into boring, one-note caricatures at the same time.

Know your subgenre and stick to it

One of the strengths (and weaknesses) of superheroes is that it is one of the broadest genres.

Superheroes have and can be crossed over with anything. I myself have mixed YA, action adventure, sci-fi, fantasy, and even LitRPG into my superhero books with a lot of success. Superhero romance is a thriving subgenre and has heavy crossover with urban fantasy. UF writers especially should have an easy time writing superheroes, as the two genres are similar in many ways.

It can be tempting to throw everything and the kitchen sink into your superhero book right away, but I advise taking it slow at first. I would pick one main subgenre and combine it with superheroes first, then perhaps expanding into other genres as needed for the story.

Crossovers can be your friend (and your enemy)

Superhero fans *love* crossovers, with the prime example being Marvel movies. Indeed, in my experience, crossovers can be a great way to promote two (or more) different series at once.

Crossovers are also fraught with danger, however. You can only add so many characters before the audience gets lost or confused. Crossovers are usually not for finding new readers but for rewarding old ones or helping to promote an underperforming series to your fans who might not have checked it out before.

Personally, I only do a crossover trilogy every two years due to how big and sprawling they can get. Juggling all of those characters and plotlines at once can be tricky but incredibly rewarding if done correctly.

Put limits on your hero's powers

This is basic advice for any story involving potentially story-breaking elements like magic or super science, but it's especially important for superheroes. While almighty superheroes like Superman can work, most readers find stories with god-like superheroes who can do anything boring.

So give your character's powers some limits. Force your character to come up with creative ways to use their powers. And if you do expand their power set later on (which is something I've done often in my books), do it gradually and do not make the character an instant expert in their new powers or have them pull powers out of nowhere to magically solve whatever problem they are dealing with. Make them work for it.

Make your hero relatable

Peter Parker (aka Spider-Man) is one of the most beloved and popular superheroes for many reasons, but I believe chief among them is how relatable he is in his civilian life.

On top of his duties as Spider-Man, Peter has to deal with relationship issues, taking care of his elderly aunt, paying rent, going to school, and so on. These are all very relatable things that make Spider-Man a more interesting character to read about, especially when his personal and superhero lives collide with each other.

Giving your character even just a few relatable features can make them a more interesting character to your readers.

Decide if your hero is inspirational or relatable—or both!

I personally divide superheroes into two categories: inspirational (like Superman) and relatable (like Spider-Man).

Inspirational heroes are meant to be symbols to live up to. Superman, for example, stands for "truth, justice, and the American way" and is generally written as the ultimate standard of goodness in most Superman stories. Inspirational superheroes can be boring, though, due to generally lacking relatable flaws.

Relatable superheroes are meant to be easier to relate to. Despite Spider-Man's fantastic powers, he is still an ordinary guy like you and me at the end of the day who has to pay rent, work a day job, and other mundane things in addition to his superhero duties. Make them *too* relatable, however, and your readers might find themselves reading a soap opera instead of a superhero story.

Of course, your hero can (and probably should) be a mixture of both. But it's one way to think about your character and may help you with their development. Think of it more like a spectrum than an absolute black and white binary.

Decide if your character needs a secret identity or not

It used to be that every superhero needed (or at least had) some kind of secret identity, but in recent years (thanks largely to the MCU movies and changing audience tastes), it's no longer a necessary trope in modern superhero fiction.

Having said that, a secret identity can certainly add more drama and conflict to your story. Spider-Man is probably the best example, as he is constantly struggling to juggle both his superhero life and his personal life all the time while keeping friends and enemies alike from knowing who he really is.

But secret identities can also be cumbersome, especially when you feel the need to keep it a secret all the time. If you set your superhero story in our modern world where everyone has a camera in their pocket and access to the internet at all times, it can be difficult to convince your audience that this person has kept their identity a secret from everyone for a significant amount of time.

Ultimately, it's up to you how and if you wish to give your character an iron-clad secret identity or not. It doesn't really matter either way.

So there you go. There is more that can be said about writing in this genre, but hopefully this article serves as a basic overview. Go write your story and have fun while you do it!

Timothy L. Cerepaka lives in Oklahoma City with his wife and their pet guinea pig and rabbit. He writes superhero and LitRPG fiction under the pen name Lucas Flint. He also does ghostwriting on the side. Check out his rates and links to his books on his [website](#).

Smart Marketing For Savvy Authors

By Tawdra Kandle



This quarter of Smart Marketing is all about author collaboration. We'll discuss writing together, working together, and winning together.

Not long after I published my first book, a friend who had helped me tremendously with the decision to go indie introduced me to a group of authors who were also newly published. We were all going through the same things, pioneers of sorts in a brave new world. Whether it was figuring out how to format paperbacks or submitting our books to Pixels of Ink (the precursor to today's BookBub), we shared information, experiences, and ideas.

In the ten years since then, I've had the good fortune to share a wide variety of hive-mind communities with many, many authors. From a series of masterminds to advertising co-ops and newsletter swap teams to author support groups, I've learned more than I could ever begin to remember from my fellow authors.

Finding the right author tribe isn't always a simple task, but it's one worth pursuing. Often, a mastermind grows out of a group of authors who have previously joined together for a project like an anthology or a shared world and discovered that they share similar goals or frustrations.

My first mastermind group included myself and two local friends, one of whom wrote romance as I do and the other who wrote epic fantasy, paranormal romance, and some romantic suspense. The mastermind was born after we'd all heard a speaker tout the benefits of such an arrangement. We met on occasion to discuss what we'd learned in various online classes, at conferences, and through experience. We reported on the success or lack thereof of specific ventures. And we listened to advice of our fellow masterminds on issues or challenges that had us stymied. We didn't stick to any particular structure in our meetings; they were very casual and informal.

My second mastermind group grew out of a working relationship with two other people—one an author in my own genre and the other who was focused on her first nonfiction book and accompanying course. This mastermind was more structured in format. We made a commitment to talk via Zoom once a week, using Google docs to take notes and rotating the roles of moderator, note taker, and facilitator. We used timers to keep our check-ins moving and purposed to share a “hot seat” at every meeting—an item that we needed to discuss or on which we needed input and advice. We also agreed that we would each set a goal at the close of every meeting.

This mastermind is ongoing and has offered me invaluable insight—and even better, accountability for meeting my personal goals. Sometimes, just considering how I’d present something to my fellow masterminds helps me to hone and clarify what is causing me angst at the moment.

Sometimes, support in these groups goes beyond advice, moving into helpful action. Word-of-mouth (WOM) or visibility co-ops have long been popular with experienced and new authors. Within a group such as this, each member commits to supporting the work of the rest—think things like sharing new releases and sales—and may go beyond that, depending on the size and goals of the co-op. If you ever notice that one of your favorite authors tends to share the releases of a certain other author, there’s a good chance that they’ve formed a WOM co-op, even if that’s not what they call it.

Other benefits of a WOM co-op is that the participants can do things like following each other on BookBub, Amazon, and Goodreads, and liking/sharing/commenting on social media posts. While it is true that other authors aren’t our target audience, there is impact to the algorithm when a connection exists between two authors; we’ll pop up in each others’ also-boughts, and on sites like BookBub and Goodreads, your finished and to-be-read books appear in posts on readers’ feeds (so it’s important that when making these kinds of like/follow exchanges, you choose authors whose branding and style is consistent with your own. If you write light rom-com, you probably don’t want to work with authors whose books are dark romance or all-out fantasy.)

But author-to-author support groups don’t have to be about organized promotion or even brainstorming. They can grow out of a shared experience such as attendance at an author conference (Say, for example, a certain conference that happens every September on the beach in St. Pete Beach, Florida?) or participation in a class. More than once, when I’ve bought an author-education course, I’ve reached out to friends or acquaintances who I knew had also purchased it. It’s easier and more fun to learn things like Facebook ads, newsletter best-practices, or release strategies when I have others around me trying to do the same thing. What’s more, if I don’t understand something, it’s great to be able to ask someone else in the group for help.

USA Today bestselling author of contemporary and romantic suspense (and NINC president!) Lisa Hughey is a member of three fairly small author groups. She notes, “The two best benefits are sharing industry info and connecting with other writers in person.”

Hughey goes on, “I’m also a member of many groups on Facebook (they tend to be larger... and you have to analyze the information shared with an understanding of the lens of the sharer). I think the smaller groups are more beneficial because you know the people better and can more easily gauge the usefulness of the information.”

Pre-pandemic, some author masterminds or other groups often met in person if the participants were geographically close. There is an undeniable benefit of being able to speak to other authors in person, to vent about the frustrations that are part of this business, and to share both victories and disappointments. But when distance and/or disease prevent that sort of interaction, apps like Zoom or FaceTime can be valuable.

That’s another huge benefit of masterminds and support groups: a like community. One of the big highs for me when I’m at the NINC conference is the relief I feel at not having to explain every detail about frustrating or elating situations. The people around me all get it; if they haven’t personally experienced what I’ve gone through, they know someone who has, or at least they understand the context of what I’m saying. I love that I can use words and phrases like BookBub, release day, uploading nightmares, KU, or KDP without having to define what they mean. We are a community who speak the same language and share a similar history.

We can find the same sort of community sense within author support groups all year round, and that is an enormous sanity saver.

How do we find the right group for our particular needs? I noted above that some masterminds, co-ops or support teams happen organically after a shared project, a conference, a course, or a common goal. Others might form through geographical proximity. But there’s no reason that we can’t intentionally foster the formation of small communities for whatever purpose we want.

There are several factors to consider before posting an open call for a mastermind or support group. The first is that there should be a clearly stated goal for all participants. If some authors join expecting promo exchanges and others only want to share advice, friction and frustration will ensue. Group goals may evolve and change, but starting out, at least, everyone should be on the same page.

Secondly, you should probably consider the level of success of group members. (The word success here refers to financial/sales figures and does not imply that there are not measures of achievement outside that definition.) There’s nothing wrong with a mastermind made up of just-published (or soon-to-be-published) authors, as long as all are committed to growing and learning. In a group that is more about support for each other, that makes sense. However, there is something to be said for masterminds that include authors who have achieved some measure of success and are willing to share certain inside details with other participants. This can

provide incentive for those of us still trying to reach those goals as well as a tangible proof that our dreams are possible!

If you're trying to put together a more formal, organized group, it's a good idea to discuss ahead of time the format of meetings, including frequency, length, and set or flexible timing. You also may want to determine roles during meetings. In my current mastermind, I mentioned earlier that we have a weekly moderator, facilitator, and note-taker. These jobs rotate. The moderator sets up the Google doc that we use, providing an inspirational quotation that sets the tone for each meeting and transferring our goals from the previous week to the new doc. The facilitator watches the time, particularly during our updates and hot-seats; we try to stick to ten minutes for each of us. (Confession: we're not always successful!) The note-taker transcribes our conversation into the same Google document which is great for looking back at our earlier discussions.

"Choose the members (of a mastermind) carefully," Hughey advises. "Don't make it too big. Pretty much the same with an author support group. Define the parameters. Everyone has different career objectives, so it's important to make sure that the group members are aligned."

Few, if any, of us can attend an amazing conference every week of the year, but sometimes simply having a trustworthy, accepting, and understanding community of like-minded writers around us, even if the presence is virtual, can make a tremendous difference in how we survive —and thrive—on this roller-coaster author journey.

Tawdra Kandle is the author of over 100 romances that span genres from contemporary through paranormal. Her engaging and realistic characters bring readers back again and again to devour the steamy love stories she spins. She lives in central Florida with a husband, a mischievous pup, and too many cats.

NINC Member Discounts

By Emilie Richards

[publisheralley](#)

If you're interested in tracking your sales at Baker & Taylor and YBP Library Services, there's a service that will do it for you, and NINC members get a discounted price of \$50.

Among other possibilities, [Publisher Alley](#) can analyze performance by title, subject, market, and overall imprint or company on books published beginning in January 1977. Identifying sales trends, by selecting from a wide variety of categories, can help you uncover unrepresented market niches and help you along the road to your next book idea.

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[Emilie Richards](#) is the author of over 80 novels, which have been published in more than 21 countries and 16 languages. She is both traditionally and indie published.

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 (these groups are for NINC members only):

- Email list for all Novelists, Inc. Members: <https://groups.io/g/NINCLINK>
- NINC Facebook group: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/NovelistsInc/>
- Follow NINC on Twitter: https://twitter.com/Novelists_Inc
- NINC on [Clubhouse](#): Novelists Inc Virtual Tiki Bar
- Critique/brainstorming group: <https://groups.io/g/NINKcritique>
- Traditionally published authors: <https://groups.io/g/NINCTradPubbedAuthors>
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- Authors of thriller/crime/suspense: <https://groups.io/g/NINC suspense-thriller-crime/>
- Discuss creating book covers: <https://groups.io/g/NINCcovercreators/>

Conference:

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

Newsletter

- Propose an article: <https://ninc.com/newsletter/propose-an-article/>
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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: <https://ninc.com/>—> Members Only —> Welcome Packet

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.

NINC is committed to welcoming a diverse and inclusive membership to our organization and serving all members. No author will ever be discriminated against on the basis 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.

Founders

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

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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.

***Nink* Newsletter**

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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.

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