



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



VOLUME 29 : NUMBER 1
JANUARY 2018

Nink January 2018

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President's Voice

By Julie Ortolon



Being asked to serve Novelists, Inc. (NINC) as president is a true honor, albeit an intimidating one. Since joining NINC in the early 2000s, I have watched the organization grow and change as it works to meet the needs of its members. The last seven years have been especially tumultuous—being both exciting and overwhelming at the same time. On the personal front, if not for the resources and friendships I've found through NINC, I would not have weathered those last years nearly as well, if at all.

So, I was already grateful to NINC, and serving on the board this past year as president-elect helped me gain a whole new appreciation for what makes our organization such a powerful asset. And that's our members.

For over 25 years, NINC has offered members a worldwide community of authors that shares knowledge and expertise, creating a global network that has helped authors, including me, manage their careers.

I am awed by all of you who serve NINC as either board members or committee chairs and volunteers. What I've learned from you, and from my personal experience, is that the more we give to NINC and to each other, the more we gain. I want to thank all the volunteers who serve on our various committees. By sharing the load, you help make NINC an even more valuable asset for all of us.

Here's to making 2018 another great year for Novelists, Inc.!

Julie

P.S. It's membership renewal time. Please go to <https://ninc.com/members-only/membership-renewal/> and log in to renew your membership.

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](#). You can also [propose an article](#), submit a [letter to the editor](#), or volunteer to [be an assistant editor](#) and become part of the team. You can also [buy a paperback copy](#) of the 2016 Best of Nink!

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/>

Julie Ortolon is a USA Today bestselling author of contemporary romance. First published by Dell Publishing in 2000, she has also written for St. Martin's Press, and Signet Eclipse. Since going indie in 2009, she has hit the Amazon Top 100 several times. One of her greatest joys is helping other authors find success. When not writing, she enjoys traveling the world with family and friends.

Happy New Year!

Make one of your resolutions renewing your NINC membership today.



Follow this link and log in to renew:

<https://ninc.com/members-only/membership-renewal/>

(PS—thanks to all of you who already renewed!)

Writing the Dreaded Back Cover Blurb

By Barbara Meyers



“They do not need to know what happens in the book, they just need to know what makes it interesting.”

—Ben Cameron

Your book is finished and it’s wonderful. You’ve got an awesome cover. You’ve decided on the price and the release date. But writing that all-important back cover blurb is giving you fits. How can an author make a 100K-word book tantalizing to readers in three or four paragraphs? That is the question.

Even when I had a traditional publisher, I had to submit a blurb. Their in-house experts would then manipulate what I’d written or sometimes change it completely until we were all satisfied that the blurb conveyed what the book was about and entice readers to buy—or at least look further.

But how to get the words right?

Start with a hook, also known as a tagline. Those few words that sum up your entire book and intrigue your reader enough to make them stop and read the back cover blurb. Hooks are a subject for another article, so here we’re going to stick to blurbs.

Length:

Most seem to be 100-150 words long as the blurb text itself. Keep in mind this word count includes the book description only. It does not include information about the author, review quotes or blurbs from other authors.

The maximum is 250 words. More than that and you might be in trouble. In reviewing several recent releases by bestselling authors, it’s worth noting that not one of their blurbs ran longer than 250 words, even though the descriptions included more plot points.

Beware of trying to squeeze too much information into your blurb. Not only can too many words deter buyers from reading the blurb, they may find it confusing. A confused reader will likely put your book down or click to the next offering on Amazon.

How to Begin:

1) It's a good idea to begin thinking about and perhaps even writing a rough draft of your blurb before your book is finished. If you've written a synopsis, think how best to condense the tone of the book, the main characters and their problems into just a few paragraphs.

2) Read blurbs of your favorite books and those of other authors in your genre. I found this extremely helpful when I wrote my first new adult novel. I read every one of bestselling author Colleen Hoover's book blurbs. Most of them say little of what the book is about. The *Hopeless* blurb is a perfect example:

Here's the tagline/hook:

Sometimes discovering the truth can leave you more hopeless than believing the lies...

And the blurb:

That's what seventeen-year-old Sky realizes after she meets Dean Holder. A guy with a reputation that rivals her own and an uncanny ability to invoke feelings in her she's never had before. He terrifies her and captivates her all in the span of one encounter, and something about the way he makes her feel sparks buried memories from a past she wishes could just stay buried.

Sky struggles to keep him at a distance knowing he's nothing but trouble, but Holder insists on learning everything about her. After finally caving to his unwavering pursuit, Sky soon finds that Holder isn't at all who he's been claiming to be. When the secrets he's been keeping are finally revealed, every single facet of Sky's life will change forever.

The blurb for *Hopeless* is 126 words condensed into two paragraphs. Notice the language used: struggles, terrifies, captivates, buried memories, secrets, change forever.

Readers may have very little idea what this book is about, but chances are they will be intrigued enough by the blurb to look inside the book and possibly buy. That's the magic to shoot for as you create your blurb.

Remember this: *"Your reader has to be pulled in just far enough to care about your subject, but not too far, or they'll have no reason to buy."* —Ian Chandler

Guidelines:

1) Think in terms of presenting a faint outline of your first few chapters. This will convey who your main characters are and perhaps the inciting incident or situation in which they find themselves.

2) What will make change inevitable for these characters?

3) Do they have hope of overcoming their crisis?

4) Use language to convey the mood of your story and make an emotional connection with your reader. The use of hyperbole is not only acceptable but encouraged.

5) Don't be afraid to begin with a much longer blurb. Once you have the basic elements on the page, you can begin to trim. Pick out the essence of your characters, plot and

“feel” of your book.

Sometimes you may have all of the elements and the correct word count but your blurb just doesn't seem quite right. Consider rearranging the sentences or paragraphs or changing a few of the words to add more emotional impact. That may be all it takes. For example, in my latest book, I used the line, *Meanwhile, Jason guards his heart and vows that when Kerrie leaves with their baby, he won't beg her to stay.* It was, in fact, a fellow writer who suggested the word “vows” instead of “decides” or “is determined to.” A shotgun wedding is the premise of this story so the word “vows” fits into the theme of the book and has more emotional impact.

6) Which leads us to the next guideline. Ask others for their opinions and suggestions, especially fellow writers. Your critique buddies, perhaps? Beta readers? I have posted various versions of my blurbs in progress on my Facebook author page and requested feedback. It's a good way to interact with readers and also to tease them about your work in progress. I let the commenters know their names will go in the hat for a drawing to win a copy of the book once it's released. The other members of the NINC online brainstorming group were also extremely helpful when I had to revise blurbs for my previously published books.

7) Print it out! If you aren't already using this trick, it may become your best friend. The draft of your blurb will appear much differently to your eyes when you see it in print as opposed to staring at it on your computer screen. There's something very satisfying about doing revisions with a pen and paper. I printed out several of the blurbs from a few Colleen Hoover books as well as the draft of my blurb in progress and brought it to one of my writer's group meetings. The members were instrumental in helping me trim and rearrange and reword my blurb.

Have you ever seen a movie preview that left you feeling like there was no reason to buy a ticket? What you leave out of the blurb is as important as what you put in. A well-written back cover blurb's purpose is not to inform the reader, but to entice them. Afraid to go write yours alone? There are numerous blog posts about how to write blurbs. You can also check out the resources below as recommended by NINC members. I only have experience working with Carol Eastman at Blurb Bitch on two projects. If blurb writing is simply not your thing, it may be worth it to pay for professional expertise.

Resources:

[Blurb Your Novel: How to Write Book Descriptions](#) by Kat Sheridan

[The Killion Group](#) (blurb writing)

[Blurb Bitch](#) (blurb writing)

Barista by day, romance novelist by night: When not writing, Barbara Meyers disguises herself behind a green apron and works part-time for a world-wide coffee company. Her novels mix comedy, suspense and spice and often feature a displaced child. Her latest, White Roses in Winter, released 11/1/17.

Is it a Fork, or is it a Weapon?

Adding creativity to combat scenes

By Jerry Spradlin



Can you kill someone with a fork? For writers, questions like this can become plot devices.

Authors who want to add color to combat scenes should research Pencak-Silat and/or Kali on the internet. Legend has it that Kali is a feminine art founded by a blind Filipino princess whose hands became so sensitive and skilled that she could virtually see with them, so researching Kali images will reveal a multi-armed princess image paying homage to lightning-fast hand movement.

For more contemporary dynamic visualization, these arts, blended with others, can be seen in the action sequences of multiple films, such as in the Jason Bourne film series. One thing to note, though, is that these sequences are often filmed at very wide angles with exaggerated movements and slower speeds to ensure ready visibility for entertainment value.

Real-life training also starts in this slow motion, as a wide-angle exaggerated movement style affords the person studying the techniques an opportunity to learn correctly. As the student improves, speed increases and movement tightens toward the target area of the opponent. For example, excessively long knife strokes passing beyond the range of the body of the opponent not only waste time, but also open "lanes" of vulnerable entry for your opponent to enter your space. Therefore, the trained knife fighter should be incorporating defensive strategy into his/her offensive strategy. The trained fighter must be skilled enough to instantly stop once an opponent's cutting opportunity has passed, and immediately initiate reverse direction in another offensive motion. All this must occur within a fraction of a second, before the opponent has time to contemplate a counter move.

Actual combat occurs much closer and faster, with shorter and crisper economical movements. These become considerably less apparent as reality becomes somewhat of a blur with indiscernible movements, akin to the difficulty of refereeing a full-speed cartoon catfight. Hollywood usually slows down fight scenes for the viewers; but reality is anything but slow.

My favorite cinematic fight sequence occurred early in the 1992 film, *The Last of the Mohicans*, when Hawkeye (Daniel Day-Lewis) was leading a British convoy through the forest

on foot when Native American mercenaries lying in wait ambushed them.

This combat was classic, well-executed Kali with textbook "meets & passes," which means meeting an incoming threat by parrying or deflecting the threat to miss your body, and, hopefully setting an opportunity for counterattack through your opponent's resultant opening lane of vulnerability. If you watch this scene, pay particular attention to the edged weapons combat—the blades and tomahawks.

One thing authors need to know when working with these type of characters and scenes is that in close-quarters combat, everything is a weapon in waiting, including fixed objects like walls—or even bystanders!

Your character shouldn't become dependent upon a single tactic or weapon. A professional combatant possesses a library of useful tactics. The flow from one weapon and/or tactic to another should be fluid. My favorite Jason Bourne tactic was when the character opened the gas jets on a kitchen stove and then created a fuse by inserting a rolled up newspaper in a nearby toaster to ignite explosion when the newspaper caught fire, thereby ensuring he had time to escape before the house exploded.

One of fightmaster Bruce Lee's principles was that when met with resistance, you should simply abandon that tactic, whether fighting barehanded or with a weapon, and flow spontaneously and seamlessly to the next option. There's a saying in Marine Corps combat training: "One mind, any weapon." In life-and-death situations, everything is in play, with the only rule being that the winner is the person who gets to walk away. Fair fighters are losers; winning requires spontaneously capitalizing on every perceivable advantage—especially when your character is caught without a plan.

The professional operator, whether good guy or bad guy (whichever your character may be), should train himself to find advantage in these situations, the same way these characters train their minds in "muscle memory" with katas (training rituals involving specified series of moves). Muscle memory may also be referred to as mind-mapping in martial arts training.

Novices often discount the value of repetitious practicing of routines. They demean the value of drills because real fights never occur in a set pattern. While that is true, mind-mapping provides a catalog of understanding, with each element of a practiced sequence becoming independently executable on demand.

Dan Inosanto, a renowned Filipino-American martial arts instructor who is perhaps best known as a training partner of the late Bruce Lee, once told me that muscle memory requires 5,000 repetitions.

According to Wikipedia, "Muscle memory has been used synonymously with motor learning, which is a form of procedural memory that involves consolidating a specific motor task into memory through repetition. When a movement is repeated over time, long-term muscle memory is created for that task, eventually allowing it to be performed without conscious effort. This process decreases the need for attention and creates maximum efficiency within the motor and memory systems. Examples of muscle memory are found in many everyday activities that become automatic and improve with practice, such as riding a bicycle, typing on a keyboard, typing in a PIN, playing a musical instrument, martial arts or even dancing."

So muscle memory is the key component in being able to accept/adapt/act instantly. It is a trained reflex that replaces the slow process of thought. Contemplating muscle memory reminds me of one of my favorite Bruce Lee quotes: "I fear not the man who has practiced 10,000 kicks once, but I fear the man that has practiced one kick 10,000 times." (This is why I have great concern when people become inappropriately confident after only three self-defense group classes.)

Keep in mind that when you're choreographing a fight scene, everything is a weapon.

For example, I once met with an author who verbally painted a scene from her in-progress book where two men sat down alone for a casual meal in a cabin. Both men discovered during the course of the meal that their missions were to kill each other. Both were unarmed. Seated in the same positions as those characters, and in a similar setting, the author and I spontaneously acted out the scene in character and choreographed the confrontation.

My fork, positioned to the left of my plate and pointed towards my adversary, became my impromptu weapon. I reached across my body with my right hand, palm down, grabbing the fork handle, and then (figuratively) plunged the fork through my enemy's right temple with a back-fist motion, as my opponent gagged on the unswallowed bite of steak lodged in his throat.

(The bite of steak is immaterial, offered only for sensationalism.)

My lunch companion had a glint of realization, ceased being my fictional adversary, resumed being a writer, and feverishly wrote notes. Here's what she learned: The temple of the human skull is one of the thinnest of bones in the human body and a gateway to the temporal lobe of the brain. Penetration is relatively easy, so you can at least neutralize the opponent, if not necessarily cause death.

My instinctively selected first strategy was akin to a cobra strike and offered superior benefit of rapid execution and escape. An alternative target could have been the eyeball and/or eye socket entry port. However, the head would be more mobile and possibly evasive, with a greater range of motion, unless braced on the back side with my left hand palm down in a scissor-like motion. To execute this strategy successfully would have required me to rise to my feet.

Battles should always be replayed in your mind as metaphorical "training films," just as athletes review films of their games and matches, in sports such as football or boxing, for the purpose of learning from their mistakes, thus empowering possible future improvement. This is a technique of advanced continuing education.

My patterned engagement in this fork encounter has its foundation in a set of training drills known as "Hubud-Lubud." This is a flowing pattern of hand-arm movements purposed to deflect attack and create opportunity for entry. The tactical beauty of Hubud-Lubud is the ability to reflexively flow bi-directionally from defense to offense, or offense to defense with equal ease of execution. This drill is of primary importance and is practiced repetitively to achieve blinding speed.

Fully understanding Hubud-Lubud will require visualization as afforded in online videos. Simply search for "Hubud-Lubud Training Drills" on YouTube to find a plethora of videos featuring empty-handed techniques, as well as drills with sticks and knives. Sticks are not common weapons in Western society, but they allow for wider-angle training at a safer distance

that can be shortened to the same pattern of empty-handed combat.

Authors wanting to begin researching can start by Googling the terms in this article, or look up Dan Inosanto, and then follow the resulting path to multiple centuries of this monomaniacally focused discipline. Visiting, or revisiting, *The Art of War*, from 5th Century BC, may also aid in realization of the inherent combativeness of humans, and the extent of study devoted to it for centuries.

By day, [Jerry Spradlin](#) is a consultant and writer for the imported auto parts distribution trade. By night, he is a lifelong student of combative arts, both hand to hand and with weapons.

Creativity Killer

Comparing yourself to others/outside validation

By Denise A. Agnew



“Comparison is the thief of joy.”

—Teddy Roosevelt

As creative individuals, we live in a world where success is often measured by money earned, rank achieved, awards won, and number of five-star reviews received. Writers are not the only people who face the comparison game. The human animal seems to be born this way, always striving for a special designation in a career field or a climb up the proverbial ladder. Is it bad to crave good reviews, to win contests, to hit bestseller lists and make gobs of money? No. And yes.

An excellent argument can be made, though, that competition is good. If there is nothing to strive for, what is the point? An equally valid argument can be made that striving for contest wins, awards, bestseller lists and money can be a creativity killer for many writers. So is it the competition that kills creativity, or is it our response to said competition? Better yet, is creativity killed by our belief system that believes that status and competition are the only true badges of success?

As a creativity coach, I work with writers who are experiencing some sort of existential crisis, and lately I’ve noticed a common pattern. If a writer strives for status validated by external rewards, said writer is more likely to burn out in her creative journey when compared to individuals with a more personal definition of success. When a writer hasn’t achieved all of her oft-coveted external goals, she may compare herself to other writers and deep-six her creativity.

For example, I had a client with several well-reviewed romance novels that hadn’t made bestseller lists. After a few years she hit a tremendous wall. She couldn’t create another word, had no idea why, and assumed all she needed was rest. A year later she still wasn’t writing. After some digging, we discovered the real reason behind her block. She’d been unconsciously comparing herself to an author in her genre who wrote 12 books a year, made tremendous sales,

and hit all the bestseller lists. Attempting to write 12 books a year exhausted my client, yet she'd been punishing herself relentlessly because she wasn't achieving the same goals accomplished by the writer she admired. Her mind and body rebelled, becoming the reason she couldn't create. My client believed that all she had to do was work hard and she could accomplish everything the other author did.

I reminded my client that she didn't know the challenges, illnesses and possible disappointments in that author's life. My client learned that her idol wrote 14 hours a day, seven days a week, and suffered numerous illnesses and personal problems. The client's hero worship of the famous author dissolved overnight because reality washed away the fantasy. When my client saw that the author she idolized had significant problems to face, my client realized that achieving 12 books hadn't been an easy road for the author. My client reassessed her own goals. She decided to try for a smaller goal of finishing one book. Once she worked on relaxing more and realizing that she needed to make her own, reasonable and reachable goals based on her own life circumstances, she was able to finish the book she'd been unable to complete for a year. After that, the client discovered she was happier and healthier when she worked for a goal of three books a year.

Are there ways to stop comparing yourself? Absolutely.

When you first started writing you probably didn't spend much time analyzing the situations, people, or places that helped you feel creative, but by exploring your motives for creating, and reflecting on your strengths, you're less likely to compare yourself. Take an extra notebook and write down answers to the following questions:

1. Why are you writing?

Most people don't think about the real reason. Is it self-gratification and fun? Good. That's an inner core value that will help your creativity stay intact.

2. Are you writing to exorcise some inner demons?

Not a bad idea at all. Writing for yourself gives your work authenticity, and you'll be less likely to jump ship when your creativity is motivated first by a desire to make yourself happy.

3. Are you trying to make a living solely on writing?

Why do you think this is the case? Writing to make money can be a creativity killer in some situations. This doesn't mean that you shouldn't try to make gobs of money with your writing career. However, there is a good chance your creativity will diminish if the pressure to make a living wage becomes the top motivation for creating.

4. Are you a perfectionist?

Perfectionism is often rooted in comparisons. Sometimes people confuse thoroughness with perfectionism. Perfectionism, however, can destroy creativity if it keeps you from finishing that book. As a creativity coach, I'm a fan of giving yourself permission to resist revision until you've finished the first draft. Give yourself permission to push forward and write without

looking back until the end of the manuscript. My clients who've tried this experienced an amazing sense of freedom. Once they felt free, their perfection-at-all-costs tendencies decreased significantly. Another thing that works is to do a check-in with a trusted critique partner. If you discover you're filled with self-doubt about the merit of a project and taking an extremely long time to finish it, consider showing the pages to the critique partner and get feedback. You may find that the things you thought weren't "good enough" may be far better than you believe.

5. What stirs your creative juices?

If you understand what helps you be creative, you're halfway to victory. Perhaps all you need is recognition of those things that can free your individual creativity. That means looking outside the box of assumptions you've made about your own abilities. Decide to make some leaps you've never made before. Try writing in a different place in your house. This could mean taking paper and pen and writing rather than using a computer. Or it could mean using a laptop instead of sticking with a desktop. Have you resisted listening to music while writing? Why not give it a try and see if it helps? Try your hand at something you think you're not good at. Do you think you can't draw? Give it a try. Doodling can free your mind to new possibilities.

6. Are you willing to take chances with your writing?

Are you stuck in a rut and the way you create has become a habit? In other words, are you willing to do something you haven't done before? Try reading and writing outside of your genre, and not just to compare yourself with writers within that narrow genre focus. Try reading something you think you won't like. Try writing in first person if you write in third and vice versa.

7. Are you willing to flush jealousy out of your life?

Comparisons can bring jealousy, especially if we stew in that juice too long. You're a unique individual. Bring you to the table and dwell less on the accomplishments and failures of others.

8. Are you willing to live-and-let-live?

Everyone's writing career/path is totally unique, even if it may not look like it from the outside looking in. If you see someone taking a writing path you wouldn't, spend less time obsessing about it, especially if your gut reaction is to say, "They're doing it wrong." Give others the same leeway you'd want them to give you.

What next?

After you've written your answers to the questions above, you may have a clearer picture of how to stop comparing yourself to other writers. Look back at the notebook in a month and see if your creativity is reviving. Are you looking at things differently? I hope you have some new inspiration and excitement for the creative journey.

Denise A. Agnew is the award-winning author of over 67 novels. Denise's novels Love From the Ashes and Blackout were optioned for film/TV by Where's Lucy? Productions. Denise is a writer/producer (Happy Catastrophe Productions/Bright Frontier Films/Where's Lucy? Productions), a paranormal investigator, Reiki Master, Certified Creativity Coach, and RT Academy Mentor. As a creativity coach, Denise assists anyone in the arts to maintain lifelong creativity. You can find her at www.deniseagnew.com and www.creativepencoaching.com.

NINC Advice Column

This is a monthly feature that crowdsources writer-to-writer advice. Questions are posted on NINCLink by the end of each month. Answers of 100 words or less are due to the editor by the 15th of the following month.



QUESTION: If you make them, how do you keep your New Year's resolutions from falling by the wayside?

I try to make goals/resolutions that are both a stretch and manageable. By that I mean that they aren't so easy that they aren't a challenge, but they're not so difficult that if the least little thing didn't go perfectly I'd fail. Also, I've gotten to where I prefer weekly and monthly goals versus year-long ones. There may be things I want to accomplish by the end of the year, but I use my weekly goals planner to break those goals down into more manageable chunks that I can check off in the short term. It gives me a more immediate sense of accomplishment and doesn't seem so overwhelming and anxiety-inducing. All those weekly check marks hopefully lead to the big check mark at the end of the year.

—[Trish Milburn](#)

I make a writing to-do list for the year and I keep it out where I can see it. I like checking things off a list. It keeps me motivated.

—[Barbara Meyers](#)

By choosing goals that I want to achieve rather than ones that I think I "should" achieve.

—[Matt Buchman](#)

For goals in general, not just New Year's resolutions, I create a recurring event in iCal with an alert, so I get a reminder either once a week, or once a month.

—[Julie Ortolon](#)

Taking a tip from the NINC conference workshop "From Midlist to Mad Money," with Roxanne St. Claire and Kristin Painter, I bought the enormous "At-A-Glance" one-year calendar, and tacked it to the wall directly behind my desk chair so I see my goals every day. I highly recommend reading the coverage of the workshop by Jenny Gardiner in the November *Nink* newsletter for more details. I also bought a one-month erasable wall calendar that is mounted on the wall above the yearly one, so I can set more goals—personal and professional—on a daily basis.

—Gillian Doyle

I always try to set realistic goals and allow some flexibility because life happens. This means I schedule backwards from due dates and set weekly page goals, allowing time off for holidays and vacations and adding in some leeway in case of unforeseen circumstances. I think we're often too demanding of ourselves in ways we would never be of others. My favorite writing quote is "Treating myself like a precious object will make me strong," from *The Artist's Way*. I have found it to be amazingly true.

—Victoria Thompson

I use a writing and publishing schedule, created with a simple spreadsheet. It usually covers a full year or three books. On the schedule, I have realistic weekly goals, taking into account time off for holidays, kids' birthdays, anniversaries, spring break, summer, and so on. If I know I won't be writing due to life circumstances, I don't schedule a goal for that week, or set a smaller goal. Knowing when I'll realistically finish a book, I can schedule beta readers, editors, proofreaders, cover designers, and formatters well in advance. Currently, I have these vendors scheduled for a book to be published next week, again on May 21st and October 24th. The spreadsheet has goals and accountability columns. See screenshot on the next page.

—Wayne Stinnett

	B	C	D	E	G	H	I	J	L	M	N	O
1	2018 Release Schedule											
2	Rising Fury Schedule, to publish on 12/27/2018				Enduring Charity Schedule, to publish on 6/2/2018				Rising Force Schedule, to publish on 12/15/18			
3		Ending	Goal	Actual		Week	Goal	Actual		Ending	Goal	Actual
4		Friday	1st Scene	1818		Ending	Opening			Friday	Opening	
5		9/22	4000	3355		1/5	3000			5/18	3000	
6		9/29	8000	7269		1/12	6000			5/25	6000	
7	10/1	10/6	NINC	9 days off		1/19	10000			6/1	10000	
8		10/13	15000	12465		1/26	15000			6/8	15000	
9		10/20	20000	19034		2/2	20000			6/15	Off	
10		10/27	25000	25669		2/9	25000			6/22	Off	
11		11/3	30000	34405		2/16	30000			6/29	20000	
12		11/10	42000	44404		2/23	35000			7/6	25000	
13		11/17	51000	49571		3/2	40000			7/13	30000	
14	T-day off	11/24	57000	56487		3/9	45000			7/20	35000	
15		12/1	64000	64581		3/16	50000			7/27	40000	
16		12/8	70000	72647		3/23	55000			8/3	45000	
17						3/30	60000			8/10	50000	
18			After beta reading	75315		4/6	65000			8/17	55000	
19			After editing		4/9	4/13	Spring break	9 days off		8/24	60000	
20			After proofreading			4/20	70000			8/31	65000	
21										9/7	70000	
22												
23		Start	Finish			Start	Finish			Start	Finish	
24		Monday	Friday			Monday	Friday			Monday	Friday	
25	Beta	12/11	12/13	5 weekdays	Beta	4/23	4/27	5 weekdays	Beta	9/10	9/14	5 weekdays
26	Editor	12/14	12/21	5 weekdays	Editor	4/30	5/4	5 weekdays	Editor	10/3	9/21	5 weekdays
27	Proof	12/23	12/24	Sa-Su	Proof	5/7	5/11	5 weekdays	Proof	10/10	10/14	5 weekdays
28	Formatting	12/26	12/27	T-W	Formatting	5/14	5/18	5 weekdays	Formatting	10/17	10/21	5 weekdays
29	Publish	12/27	paperback	W	Publish	5/19	paperback	Saturday	Publish	10/22	paperback	Saturday
30	ACX/BB	12/27	12/27	Th	ACX/BB	5/19	5/20	Sat & Sun	ACX/BB	10/22	10/23	Sat & Sun
31	Publish	12/27	ebook	Friday PM	Publish	5/21	ebook	Monday	Publish	10/24	ebook	Monday
32	Facebook	12/27	12/30	F-Su	Facebook	5/21	5/25	M-F	Facebook	10/24	10/28	M-F
33	Raise price	12/30	evening	Su	Raise price	5/23	evening	Wednesday	Raise price	10/26	evening	Wednesday
34	BB Alert	12/31		M	BB alert	5/24		Thursday	BB alert	10/27		Thursday
35	Zon Alert	1/3		Th	Zon Alert	5/27		Sunday	Zon Alert	10/30		Sunday

Want to contribute to the column? Send your answers of not more than 100 words to newsletter@ninc.com by Jan. 15 to this question: **What's the most romantic thing you or your characters could do to express love for someone?**

Hot to Write a Great Sex Scene

(Hint: Sell the sizzle, not the sausage)

By Cate Hogan



Steel yourself for a lot of bad puns and double entendres, because today we're looking at how to avoid the ultimate fiction faux pas: a horrible sex scene. The suggestions below are most relevant to genres where love and sex form the heart of the plot, but writers of all narrative creeds are welcome here. So get ready, it's time to penetrate the action and rip the covers off a whole heap of time-tested strategies. (Hey, you were warned!)

Creating anticipation, before we reach the bedroom

The fun is in the foreplay, so they say. Before we get to the good bits, we need to lay a rich foundation of tension and anticipation. The reader's expectation blossoms from the moment attraction is acknowledged by the lovers, up to the point it reaches its fulfillment, or in this instance, sex. Will they succumb to desire or won't they? Frustrated desire helps sustain the pace of your novel and ensures that when we finally hit the bedroom, the plot climaxes right along with the characters. Expend this tension too early in the story (i.e., before the 25 percent to 50 percent mark), and you risk using up all that magic sizzle before it's had a chance to ripen to its full effect.

It's all about sexual tension

Writers develop anticipation by acknowledging their attraction within a greater context of opposition; e.g., they want to tear each other's clothes off, but he's a Russian spy and she works for the Americans. This delicious push-pull dynamic continues as we explore the characters' increasing physical awareness, fantasies, and deep, unspoken desires. What unbidden dreams come to them at night? What do they long for most: to taste, conquer, mark, possess? Perhaps they wish to comfort, or communicate feelings where words fail them. We only enjoy the release of sexual gratification *if we've first established a need that requires gratifying*. It's also fun to play with the reader's expectations. After weeks of tortured looks and touches, the lovers finally find themselves alone. Then, right when their lips are about to touch... her boss knocks on the office door. Raise the tension, then raise it again.

Sex, in itself, is not a plot development

If the main point of your sex scene is to show the lovers succumbing to their attraction, it's simple enough to have them lock lips at the bedroom door and leave the rest to the reader's imagination. We include graphic sex scenes because the details of the act itself tell us something important. For example, our enemy spies finally fall into bed together. The sex is great, but midway through they lock eyes, and to their surprise, a quick fling turns into lovemaking. This new development shifts the course of the entire story: When it comes time to assassinate the Russian minister, will love win out, or duty? Just as every scene in your story should advance the plot, your sex scene needs to offer a vital turning point in your character development. Ask yourself this: how are my lovers *changed* by sleeping together? If the answer is: *Well, they had a great time...* That's a sure sign your scene isn't working hard enough.

Variety is the spice of life

We all know the basics of a sex scene in a female-oriented genre: it starts with kissing and touching, and generally escalates when the man moves south. He pleases the woman, is then overcome with the need to find his own satisfaction, and fireworks explode as they achieve a complete union. Most romance writers have written a scene just like this at some point, and some writers will include variations of the above multiple times in a single book. But like all patterns, it's predictable. Instead, your characters might make love *before* they kiss. The woman might have a pleasure point behind her knee, or the man might have a fetish he's desperate to explore. Also consider original settings. Have we had multiple scenes on their bed? What about sneaking into the corner of a library, the back of a car, or a beach? Are we constantly stuck in the missionary position, and who is the dominant character in each act? How might we flip those roles? Surprises keep every scene distinct, and exciting.

Theme and tone are equally important when it comes to variation. From deep, emotional love-making, to acts of dominance and submission, mindless lust, light-hearted fun, or barely repressed aggression, sexual acts cover a wide and varied spectrum. Each emotional note is a different tool in your belt waiting to unveil a new, intimate aspect of your character.

Turning points keep the scene authentic and surprising

The romantic candlelit dinner. A walk under the stars. Some light, affectionate banter. Cue the passionate kissing and ... *yawn!* Instead of writing a scene that will obviously end in sex, twist the reader's expectations. The perfect date ends in disaster. The worst-ever date turns sweet at the final hour. Maybe the guy is too nervous and fumbles at the vital moment, or the woman has a change of heart. Stereotypes and clichés are also waiting to be broken: the playboy who's suddenly in love for the first time and loses all his smooth moves right when he needs them. The prostitute who's done just about everything, but never kissed a man. Ask yourself: what does the reader expect the characters to do in this moment? Avoid the obvious, and provide an alternative that's true to who the lovers are, but less predictable.

Choreography is key

If you're looking for a hilarious way to spend a Sunday afternoon, ask a friend to help act out the characters' movements. You'll be surprised how many written actions don't make sense in real life, especially if your novel features a six-foot hero and petite heroine. And once you have the moves down, check the continuity. If his hands were on her waist a moment ago, how did they suddenly become entangled in her hair?

We're in the business of writing novels, not stage directions

When I first began writing sex scenes my technique was *highly* strategic: sit back, visualize a steamy fantasy, and then scribble it down. It was a great way to spend an hour, until my editor pointed out my sex scenes were just long lists of physical actions. *He grabbed her ample bosom.... Moaning, she ran her fingers through his hair....* Ultimately, I was writing for my own gratification, instead of getting deep inside the fears, hopes and needs of my characters. All fiction writing involves **action** (*he ran his fingers up the nape of her neck, burying them in her hair*), but it's important not to forget **description** (*it felt like coarse silk*), **exposition** (*for years she'd kept it tightly pinned, high atop her head*), **dialogue** ("So beautiful," he whispered.) and **interior monologue** (*Her hair alone had undone him; what hope did he have as her fingers moved to the buttons of her chemise?*) As fiction writers, we have all these wonderful external and internal tools at our disposal, so avoid falling into the trap of just being a fly on the wall.

Side note: be sure to add variety to your description as well. Taste, sound and smell all deepen the POV, beyond just sight and touch.

Don't be afraid to explore big ideas

Good sex is satisfying. Great sex is transformational. When we finally give our protagonist their moment of bliss, or the 'promise of the premise' in plot-speak, consider lifting it from basic physical pleasure, to something transcendental. The French describe an orgasm as 'the tiny death;' how might your lovers brush against the very core of existence as they meld physically, emotionally and spiritually? Perhaps they enjoy a brief, beautiful glimpse into the truth of human experience, the tragedy of a fleeting moment, or whatever the theme of your scene might be. They've been trudging along the earth as they overcome one obstacle after another. This scene could be your chance to let them touch the heavens.

Forget the purple prose

They might touch the stars, but three paragraphs about twinkling planets, blazing comets and glittering nebulas could be a touch too much. Of all the different types of scenes, those of great emotional significance (like sex or violence) are where we most need to keep the reader suspended in the moment. As soon as we create distractions like purple prose or poor word choice, we jar them out of the fantasy, and they become aware of the fictional construction. Writers of erotica use euphemisms like, "Desire pooled in her core" because it slips seamlessly through our minds, while, "Her sacred flower unfurled its petals in breathless anticipation," is so stylistic it becomes a distraction. The subject is already loaded with drama and sentimentality, so there's less of a need to embellish with colorful style choices. Keep it simple,

and focus your energy on where it's most needed: what's happening, why it's important to the story, and how it changes your characters forever.

Grab your embarrassment by the balls, and throw it to the winds

You're writing this scene for readers who have come to your novel wanting to be turned on and emotionally engaged by the action. Yes, your conservative neighbor might grab a copy and end up deciding you're a pervert, but that's their problem. If it's a big concern, adopt a pen name or leave out the erotic scenes altogether. Either way, embrace your choice fully, and have fun with it. Embarrassment only leads to self-conscious prose, and a great sex scene is loud, proud and unapologetically steamy.

Finally...

If you want more on how to write a great sex scene, Diana Gabaldon, author of the popular *Outlander* series, wrote a wonderful guide to crafting sex scenes titled *I Give You My Body*, which has gone on to become a *New York Times* bestseller in its own right. If you've had a chance to fall in love with Jamie and Claire, you'll know that Gabaldon's love scenes are truly masterful.

After many long years working her way into a fancy harbourside office, Cate Hogan left Sydney's cutthroat film industry on the verge of a breakdown. She found her passion (and sanity) on the beautiful island of Bali, where she now helps writers become bestselling authors. When she isn't busy developing tomorrow's stories, she's writing articles, dodging tourists, and shaking her head at the rising cost of coconuts. Learn more at www.catehogan.com, or reach out via cate@catehogan.com.

Finding Superfans Among the Strangers

A case study using Facebook marketing

Presented by David Gaughran

Reported by Cidney Swanson

Editor's Note: This article, which is a follow-up on the November 2017 conference article called "From Strangers to Superfans: Targeting the Right Readers," focuses specifically on Facebook marketing.

In David Gaughran's conference talk "From Strangers to Superfans," he presented a five-step process he called "The Reader's Journey" and invited authors to consider this journey from the perspective of the consumer instead of the advertiser. After identifying the buyer persona of an ideal reader, an author marketing a book attempts to successively appeal to this ideal reader through the steps of discovery, visibility, consideration, purchase, and advocacy. It is a process of engaging with a customer who might love what you write but hasn't heard of you or your book—yet—and helping them find, buy, fall in love with, and ultimately recommend your book.

In addition to describing each of the steps and pointing out ways to identify and address failure, Gaughran also briefly outlined an application of this process using Facebook, which Gaughran believes is a growth area for this approach to marketing.

Providing visibility using Facebook ads has become increasingly difficult with cost per click rates doubling, tripling, and quadrupling over the past 24 months. Two years ago, it was still possible to successfully market an unknown book by an unknown author to random strangers on Facebook, something Gaughran calls hard advertising to cold customers. Now, however, Facebook is saturated with these kinds of ads, and they aren't performing as well. When you combine poor conversion with higher click costs, it becomes hard for many authors to justify continuing to use this advertising platform.

Defining "hard advertising" as any ad with a call to action (and an invitation to purchase would be at the top of the pyramid of hard ads), Gaughran contends ads with a "buy my book" button don't convert well with customers who have never heard of that author or their books. This type of ad doesn't function well as a means of enabling the reader to take the five steps of discovery, visibility, consideration, purchase, and advocacy.

Gaughran's solution is to treat Facebook as an audience segmentation tool, using it to discover those customers who are more likely to be interested in an author's book. In effect, he's recommending sieving "warmed up" customers from a group of cold customers.

As with all Facebook marketing, you must first identify a pool within Facebook's billions of customers who are likely to have some interest in your type of book. An author writing sci-fi

could, for instance, target men aged 35-65 who have indicated an interest in sci-fi.

At this stage, Gaughran serves what he calls “soft ads” to the selected audience. Soft ads can include things such as content (i.e., articles with links), videos, or even static images of your books. Whether he uses content, videos, or images, Gaughran *never* includes a call to action in these initial “soft” ads. He admits this might feel counter-intuitive but urges marketers to stick to it and avoid using a call to action at this stage. The purpose of these ads is not to get sales.

So what are these soft ads for? Gaughran uses them to find those viewers who will click the article, watch the video, and like, share, or comment on it. These interactions indicate the viewer is interested in the subject matter, which of course should be tied to the genre or even the books the author writes.

While it would be impractical to describe the entire process here, Facebook allows marketers to create a new audience from those who have responded in some way to content or a video. This culled audience is now *warm*—they have self-selected as people likely to be interested in the books an author wishes to market. This warm audience is perfect for retargeting and can be shown ads with a “buy now” or “learn more” button.

Gaughran notes that some interests on Facebook will return too small of an audience to be effective. If, for instance, you have targeted women readers ages 25-45 who have expressed an interest in romantic suspense and only get a pool of 50,000, you should probably widen your targeting to *all* romance instead.

For those interested in hearing more, you can watch [this interview](#) he did with Kobo Writing Life from St. Pete's Beach, or [visit his blog](#) where he regularly discusses these topics.



Cidney Swanson is an award-winning author of young adult sci-fi and fantasy, including the Ripple series, the Saving Mars series, the Thief in Time series, and more. Cidney lives in Oregon's Willamette Valley with her family and entirely too much rain.

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The Mad Scribbler

Storytellers

By Laura Resnick



“When the storytelling goes bad in a society, the result is decadence.”

—Aristotle

I recently read an article in *The Atlantic* about a study wherein anthropologists from University College London asked 300 Agta people, a society of hunter-gatherers in the Philippines, to name the five people they would most like to live with. The Agta named good hunters, fishers, and foragers, as well as people whom they considered strong and wise.

What surprised the anthropologists, though, was that the Agta polled in the survey most often named good storytellers. In a subsistence culture where survival depends heavily on possessing certain practical skills, the researchers had not expected a skill they regarded as relatively unimportant—storytelling—to rank so high. But it did.

“In fact, the Agta seemed to value storytelling *above all else*,” according to this [article](#). “Good storytellers were twice as likely to be named as ideal living companions... and storytelling acumen mattered far more than all the other skills.”

This unexpected result led the team to become more interested in the role that storytelling plays among not only the Agta, but in other hunter-gatherer societies, and among people in general.

“Storytelling is a universal human trait,” writes *Atlantic* science reporter Ed Yong. “It emerges spontaneously in childhood, and exists in all cultures thus far studied. It’s also ancient: Some specific stories have roots that stretch back for around 6,000 years.”

In fact, numerous familiar stories in our own culture go back millennia. Most of us learned the biblical story of Noah and the Great Flood when we were children, for example, and many scholars view that story as a derivation of an even older tale, the Mesopotamian *Epic of Gilgamesh*, which originates more than 4,000 years ago.

An oldie but a goodie, indeed.

Story is often viewed as an important human adaptive trait. It’s how we make sense of our

experiences, share culture and heritage, and transmit knowledge through generations. Storytelling also defines, inculcates, and reinforces societal norms, values, and ethics.

“As attested by the universality of the trickster figure,” says Dr. Michelle Scalise Sugiyama, an evolutionary psychologist from the University of Oregon, “telling stories about rule breakers who get caught and punished is an effective means of persuading individuals to conform to group norms.”

That’s a familiar concept to commercial fiction writers, and particularly to genre writers. Popular fiction habitually evinces, relays, and reiterates some of our most profound cultural convictions and societal ideals.

The traditional spine of the mystery genre, for example, is the pursuit and triumph of justice: the protagonist’s goal is to exact accountability for crimes committed and thereby reinforce the societal norms that have been violated. In other words, “It’s wrong to murder people and right to punish murderers.”

The core of the fantasy genre is traditionally the triumph of good over evil, and it usually involves deep cost or sacrifice. Fantasy fiction reinforces the cultural ideal that we should always confront and oppose evil, whatever form it takes, even though it can be very daunting. As I write this, the long-suffering and ever-dwindling Stark family have so far endured multiple seasons of battling evil in one of the most popular sagas of our lifetime, HBO’s *Game of Thrones*, based on George R.R. Martin’s bestselling fantasy novels.

Romance novels are driven by the portrayal of love as a lifelong pair-bonding commitment that enriches and stabilizes the lives of individuals, families, and communities. A romance heroine may have previously married a man who dumped her for another woman in the past, but that’s certainly not who she’ll marry at the end of a romance novel.

The values and assumptions of every culture are reflected in its stories, as are the conventions of any given era. For example, in “Turnabout Intruder,” the final episode of the original *Star Trek* TV series, the story’s conflict arises from the premise that standard regulations in the 23rd century prohibit a woman from serving as captain of a starship. This seemed like a perfectly normal premise in our society when the episode was produced and televised back in 1969. Yet by 1995, the *Star Trek* spin-off series *Voyager* portrayed a starship crew led by a female captain, and this scenario was presented as ordinary and unremarkable. Her chief engineer was also a woman. And here in 2018, novels, movies, and TV shows frequently portray women in leadership roles that would have seemed outlandish to readers and audiences in 1969.

However, storytellers don’t just reinforce a society’s existing values, they also help shape new ones.

Referring again to the original *Star Trek* in the 1960s, African American actress Nichelle Nichols, who played Lt. Uhura, decided after the first season to quit the show and return to live musical theatre, which was her real love. However, only days after making that decision, she met Martin Luther King, Jr. In what has become a famous encounter, Dr. King told Nichols she mustn’t quit, because *Star Trek*’s portrayal of an African American as part of an elite starship command team exemplified everything he was fighting for. Whereas King faced violent and widespread opposition to his pursuit of equal rights, the fictional Lt. Uhura held high rank and was treated with respect by captain and crew.

As the actress recounted in an interview with NPR decades later, King said to her, “Don't you understand what this [TV role] has achieved? For the first time, we are being seen the world over as we should be seen. Do you understand that this is the only show that my wife Coretta and I will allow our little children to stay up and watch?”

Witness the power of storytellers.

Indeed, the importance of storytellers and the weight of their influence on society is among the reasons that *New York Times* investigative journalist Jodi Cantor cited when explaining why she had focused months of work on the Harvey Weinstein story. Cantor, along with her colleague Megan Twohey, researched and co-wrote the explosive NYT article in early October 2017 that exposed film producer Harvey Weinstein's alleged sexual predation. As a result, we are now living in what the media like to call the “Weinstein moment,” when (some of) the powerful are suddenly being held accountable for sexual harassment and assault. The “Weinstein effect” has started spreading to politics, but it began and continues growing in the media and entertainment world.

Speaking of “rule breakers who get caught and punished,” as we were a few paragraphs ago, Weinstein has now been accused of “sexual misconduct,” which includes everything from harassment to rape, by *more than 80 women*. Multiple women are suing him for his actions toward them, he has been jettisoned from his company and his profession, and he is the target of criminal investigations in multiple cities on two continents. So justice may finally be done, and good might triumph over evil in this instance, thanks to journalists digging for the truth and victims stepping forward.

Cantor and Twohey participated in a public discussion panel, “Uncovering Sexual Harassment,” in December. (You can find the video online at [TimesTalks.com](https://www.nytimes.com/talks).) In that program, Cantor said, “Part of what is important about these high-profile media and Hollywood stories is that so many of the men who have a history, as it turns out, of these allegations ... These were our culture's storytellers ... They were the people who told us the story of who we are. Right? They were the narrators.”

In a long and thought-provoking essay on [The Cut](#), writer Rebecca Traister explores the Weinstein scandal in light of how our culture portrays and consequently views women, including “the way that their worth has been understood as fundamentally erotic, ornamental; that they have not been taken seriously as equals; that they have been treated as some ancillary reward that comes with the kinds of power men are taught to reach for and are valued for achieving.”

Consider the breadth and depth of Weinstein's reach as a storyteller: He produced or executive produced more than 140 motion pictures, many of them nominees and/or winners of major awards, many of them commercial hits. He also produced Broadway shows and television programs. And he is one of a growing number of very high-profile, powerful men in storytelling professions—entertainment, media, and writing—against whom a substantial number of appalling allegations are emerging daily.

Which leads me to wonder—how much do the stories these men have told us for years reflect our society? And, more to the point, how much does our society reflect the stories these sexual predators have told us for years?

After all, in the *Atlantic* article about storytellers, University of California anthropologist Sarah Blaffer Hrdy (no, I didn't spell that wrong) reminds us that storytellers don't necessarily use their skills and their platform to promote fairness, justice, and courage. She notes, for example, "The Maya-speaking people I used to study in southern Mexico told tales about a winged, super-sexed demon with a six-meter-long, death-dealing penis, who reinforced proper sex roles for men and women, including proscriptions for postures during sex, menstrual taboos, freedom of movement. Rather than promoting sexual equality, these served to constrain women."

I somehow find that story depressingly familiar.

Fantasy novelist and Nink columnist [Laura Resnick](#) enters the New Year with her usual sunny optimism.

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***Nink* Newsletter**

January 2018 edition – Vol. 29, No. 1

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

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

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