



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

**in** novelists,  
inc.

VOLUME 31 : NUMBER 10  
OCTOBER 2020

# *Nink* October 2020

## Contents

- ◆ President's Voice ~ Tawdra Kandle
- ◆ From Fiction to Nonfiction Author, Part 2: Exploring How To Make the Shift ~ Trish Milburn
- ◆ Crafting A Letter or Email That Gets Results ~ Trish Milburn
- ◆ Be Your Own PR Person, Part 4: What To Do When the World Blows Up ~ Michele Dunaway & Nicole Evelina
- ◆ Getting Started In Audiobook Production ~ Steven Womack
- ◆ More Ways To Stay Creative ~ Denise Agnew
- ◆ The Mad Scribbler: Five Years On ~ Laura Resnick
- ◆ NINC Membership Benefits
- ◆ About NINC

# President's Voice

By Tawdra Kandle



At the board meeting in September, with two members in person at the Tradewinds Island Resort in St. Pete Beach and the others joining us via Zoom, Lou Aronica suggested that the story of the 2020 conference should be memorialized in some way so that future members understand what we did and why during this very challenging time.

So here goes.

By late February of this year, our programming committee had already booked a full slate of speakers to present workshops at the 2020 conference. Registration was steady, promising a full house of attendees; we were on target for a sell-out crowd. We had already increased our room block twice by the beginning of March. Along with Mel Jolly, our conference coordinator, and Lisa Hughey, our president-elect and assistant programming chair, I'd helped to set up a preliminary schedule—quite possibly the earliest in the year that particular goal had been completed.

And then came mid-March and the pandemic. At first, we weren't worried. After all, late September is a long way from March. We had our first inquiries from members—*what are we going to do about the conference?*—by the middle of April, and we checked in with our hosting resort, who assured us that it was far too early to think about the autumn yet.

However, as the infection rates and numbers continued to rise, we began to make contingency plans. We started to investigate what a virtual conference might look like. We watched the daily reports of attendee cancellations swell and the room reservations fall.

By June, we knew that we had some difficult decisions to make. I met with the hotel and discussed options. We learned that canceling the in-person conference would result in a huge penalty, and realizing this, the board opted to continue planning our event while at the same time making it as easy as possible for our attendees to cancel their registration without financial hardship.

We hoped that most of our speakers would still join us, but as Florida saw a frightening surge of infection, all speakers except for two elected either to move to a virtual platform or to withdraw altogether. Dave Chesson of Kindlepreneur/Publisher Rocket and Corey Alderin of

BookBrush committed to coming. In mid-August, Alessandra Torre agreed to present live as well.

The cutoff date for full refunds as well as for conference registration was August 31. As of September 1, we had under fifty registered attendees, including attending board members, volunteers and speakers. We were almost catastrophically under the contracted room block, which was worrying until the resort informed us that in appreciation of NINC not canceling, they were waiving the penalties for room attrition.

The conference kicked off on Wednesday evening with the VIP reception held on the South Lawn of the Tradewinds Island Resort. We moved to the All Attendee Orientation—about forty of us there—and then to the welcome reception. After we'd enjoyed cocktails and hors d'oeuvre, everyone separated into six tables to enjoy genre discussions.

Thursday was the first official full day of the 2020 conference. One change this year was a later start; our workshops began at 10 AM, which everyone (especially our West Coast attendees!) seemed to appreciate. Between each workshop, the rooms were thoroughly sanitized, including atmosphere cleaning courtesy of a lovely woman whom we called our ghostbuster (her machine looked just like a ghostbuster pack).

Over the course of the three days (Thursday through Sunday), we were treated to virtual presentations from Dr. Jennifer Barnes (*The Psychology of Fandom*), Alex Newton (*Market, Data and Trends: Does the Book Market Need a Vaccine?*), Skye Warren (*How to Launch a Bestseller*), and Becca Syme (*Stuck, Blocked and Burned Out: A Writer's Guide to 2020 and Success Metrics and the Elusive Why*). We also enjoyed live workshops with Alessandra Torre (*Decoding the Secrets of a Bestseller and Advanced Email Marketing*), Corey Alderin (*BookBrush Tutorial*), and Dave Chesson (*The Popularity Effect and Mastering Amazon's A9 Algorithm and Your Book's Rankings in the Market*).

Some of our fabulous sponsors offered virtual workshops as well: Amazon, BookBub, Draft2Digital, LaLa Projects, Kobo and Vellum kindly shared updates and information with attendees.

Lunches on Thursday and Friday were delicious but different. Those of us used to the noise and lines of a crowded Banyan Breezeway were definitely taken aback by seeing that space occupied by a tenth of the normal crowd and about ten tables. The food at the buffet was dished out to us by masked and gloved servers to keep us safe.

In the evenings, what used to be Night Owls and Night Clubs morphed into what we now call NINC After Dark. We met in the courtyard and joined discussions at topical round tables while Lindsay manned the nearby bar.

Our shorter schedule this year meant that we had time to hold the Annual General Meeting on Saturday instead of Sunday. Our non-attending board members came in via Zoom.

Unfortunately for those members, though, we couldn't bring them in virtually for the annual Beachside Buffet. The rest of us had a wonderful time: the food was plentiful and delicious, and the night was perfect, with a lovely gentle breeze wafting over us at sunset.

(Actually, the weather was perfect all week. I think it might have been the best weather for a NINC conference in recent memory!)

What did we miss in 2020? Oh, so many things. We missed having a full house at the Industry Guest/VIP reception. We missed hearing the greetings of old friends meeting again at



this conference. We missed having full tables of chatty authors at the tiki bar each evening. We missed the lines at registration. We missed cramming ourselves into the Shark Tooth Bar for Draft2Digital's NINC-adjacent karaoke on Saturday night.

Mostly, though, we missed each and every one of you who couldn't be with us. We all understood why our numbers were small, but nevertheless, if you weren't in St. Pete Beach, your absence was keenly felt.

We wore our masks, and we social distanced (it wasn't hard to do when we were under 30 in a room meant for over 150). There were no hugs or handshakes. We frequented the many hand sanitizer stations around the hotel. We were grateful for the bug bracelets that Lisa Hughey had suggested that NINC provide—they were a lifesaver since we were outside so much!

All of us who were part of the NINC2020 conference will remember some things forever: the unique aroma that lingered after the rooms had been sanitized (it wasn't exactly roses, folks), the sight of our cheery ghostbuster, the beautiful color-coded app on our phones, the smiles on the faces of all resort employees and their eager welcome (they were so happy that we were there!), the take-away boxes provided at the end of each meal so that no food went to waste, seeing our speakers on a huge screen at the front of the rooms, the very simple disposable lanyards we used, the elevators in the main building being out of service (we got our steps in!) . . . and probably for some of you, me wandering the lobby to nag anyone who forgot to replace a mask.

More often than anyone can imagine, we all said that we can't wait until things are normal again in 2021 (and yes, we rapped on wood when we said that). Even so, there was some peace and appeal to our small group. By Sunday, we all knew each other. I'm fairly certain that our two first-time attendees had met everyone by the time they left. We didn't wait for bathrooms or meals. We all had seats at every workshop. Conversations were long and deep instead of being short and rushed.

Yes, we're excited to have our full contingent back soon. But we've certainly learned some lessons this year, and we'll be implementing a few of those in planning future conferences.

We hope that future generations of NINC conference attendees will look back on 2020 and realize that we all did the best we could—and that thanks to the patience and go-with-the-flow attitude of the few and the mighty, we managed to pull off a pretty damn good event in the face of some daunting odds.

That smell in the rooms, though. That's one thing that we can definitely lose in 2021!

Thank you all for your support, whether you were with us or cheering us from afar. We're grateful and eager to see you next year. Be well.

—Tawdra Kandle

---

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



**A huge and special thanks to ALL of our 2020 sponsors!**

- Kindle Direct Publishing
- BookBub
- Draft2Digital
- Kobo Writing Life
- LaLa Projects
- Mark Dawson's Self-Publishing Formula
- Vellum
- Author, Author!

**The board would like to express its appreciation for the hard work of the programming committee and associated volunteers:**

- Lisa Hughey, Assistant Chair
- Rochelle Paige, Sponsorship Chair
- Violet Howe, Social Media Liaison
- Karen Fox, Hotel Liaison
- Mindy Neff, Registrar
- Karen King, Moderator Coordinator
- Michele Dunaway, Newsletter Editor/Reporter Coordination
- Laura Hayden, App Coordinator
- Vicki Thompson, Trad Liaison
- Pam McCutcheon, Treasurer
- Mel Jolly, Conference Coordinator
- Terese Ramin, Central Coordinator

## **About NINC**

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

## **About *Nink***

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

## **NINC Member Benefits**

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

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

## **Accessing the NINC Website**

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

# From Fiction to Nonfiction Author, Part 2

Exploring how to make the shift

*By Trish Milburn*



In last month's Part I of venturing into nonfiction writing, we looked at the sort of nonfiction NINC members have published, the similarities between writing fiction and nonfiction, and the benefits of having a fiction background when turning one's efforts to nonfiction writing—and vice versa. Now let's explore more of the logistics and business considerations of undertaking a nonfiction book project.

## Switching back and forth

First, the decision must be made whether to work on both fiction and nonfiction at the same time or to switch from one to the other.

"I can write both at the same time pretty easily because my academic training was as a journalist so I am used to cranking out copy, and when writing for the news you go from subject to subject to subject and change directions often," [Jenny Gardiner](#) said.

"I find it easier juggling fiction and nonfiction projects than two fiction projects," [Rachel Aukes](#) said. "I think this is because there's such a contrast between the two. In a way, it's somewhat like switching gears from creative writing to planning promotional activities. They are two very different mindsets, but because they are so different, they are easy to switch from one to the other."

I agree it's much easier to switch between fiction and nonfiction than between fiction and fiction. While I've not written a nonfiction book, I freelance for the magazine I used to work at as a managing editor. I even go so far as to switch computers and where I sit when writing fiction versus my journalism work. It's totally mental trickery, but sitting at my desktop computer working on interviews and writing articles mimics what I did at the day job. When I switch to writing on my novels, I get more comfortable in bed with my laptop.



## A good business decision?

While some authors admit that their nonfiction works do not contribute significantly to their income, for [Gwen Hernandez](#) it was a good business decision.

“For a couple years, it was my only source of writing income, and I used my advance to hire an editor for my Golden Heart finalist book and eventually to self-publish that book,” she said. “That said, writing *Scrivener For Dummies* took me three straight months of very long days, and I could not have worked on anything else. So, if I’d had other projects, they would’ve come to a halt, or I would’ve made myself sick trying.”

Even after branching into fiction, [Carol J. Perry](#) said she still loves nonfiction.

“I used to do a great deal of travel writing, which involves quite a lot of free trips and resulted in national magazine credits and not inconsiderable money. I do earn more with the mystery books though,” Perry said.

Sometimes a career shift isn’t totally made for business reasons.

“After Hurricane Katrina, I needed a break from writing romance,” Chere Coen, who also writes as [Cherie Claire](#), said. “My heart was too heavy at the time. I sold a nonfiction proposal for a book about gris-gris bags (*Magic’s in the Bag*, written along with co-author Jude Bradley) and it was a great experience, although a tremendous amount of work. Other books followed until I got back into fiction writing. The nonfiction books give credence to my freelance journalism work, and my freelance articles help sell the books.”

## Shifting gears to nonfiction

For authors who are still going the traditional publishing route, the requirement of a proposal submission before selling a novel or series is nothing new. That requirement also exists to sell nonfiction, but a nonfiction proposal is strikingly different. Much more detail is required but less of the finished work. According to Perry, you’ll need to include things like a premise statement, a full and detailed section about your target market and how to reach them to maximize sales, a synopsis about what will be covered in the book, and a chapter outline and some sample chapters that best represent the overall flavor of the book.

If you find yourself already wanting to get your hands on a how-to book on this topic, Nikoo and Jim McGoldrick, who write together as [May McGoldrick](#), suggest *How to Write a Book Proposal* by Michael Larsen.

“When it comes to fiction, agents and editors generally want to see the complete manuscript, or at least a description and storyboard of the overall story, along with a few chapters, depending on their relationship and contract with the author,” Aukes said. “Nonfiction is a completely different beast. Most agents and editors do *not* want to see the completed project. They prefer to see a detailed outline of the project along with details on your author platform and your target demographic.”

Gardiner said her nonfiction proposal was quite detailed and had to go chapter by chapter.

“For a seat-of-the-pants writer it was quite a different experience to outline and put in so much work before ever writing the book,” Gardiner said.

Jenny Ruhl, who has published several nonfiction titles about computer careers and health topics such as blood sugar under her own name and fiction as [Jenny Brown](#), points out that nonfiction covers a huge range of books.

“The market for each type is different, so it is important to figure out what sub-sub-genre your book would fall into, and then seek out authors in that niche to learn the ropes,” Brown said. “I would never suggest that anyone set out to write nonfiction to earn money because I have seen too many people attempt that and fail. Often this happens because they assume their personal experiences will interest others, but the buyer of nonfiction is always asking, ‘What’s in it for me?’ So while you can make good use of autobiographical material in writing expert voice nonfiction, you have to go way beyond your own experience to write a book a reader will pay for.”

### **Advice for branching out**

So you’ve read this far and are still interested in venturing into the nonfiction realm. Those who’ve gone before you have some advice to help illuminate the path.

[Nicole Evelina](#) said if you have an interest, by all means write about it.

“Don’t be afraid or think you aren’t good enough,” she said. “You are. You have your expertise for a reason, no matter how you got it, and there are people out there who want to learn what you know.”

Even though there is merit to believing in your ability to do something, Evelina said it’s also reasonable to know one’s limits as well as strengths.

“I personally find nonfiction easier to write because to me it’s like a giant school paper, and I was basically Hermione Granger in school,” she said. “So consider your strengths; if you dreaded school papers, nonfiction might not be for you. But if you like showing off what you know and/or writing persuasively to change people’s minds, it might be a good fit. And it also depends on the type of nonfiction you’re writing. History, biography and other more academic subjects are a totally different experience and require different skills than how-to, self-help, humor or memoir do.”

According to [Matt Buchman](#), it’s crucial to think about the reader-narrator relationship.

“In nonfiction, the narrator is you, but it is no less of a voice and POV than a character’s,” he said. “Think very hard about how you want to tell the story. Think about whether or not you wouldn’t be better off writing the next fiction book. Think about nonfiction’s purpose hard before adding it to your business plan.”

Hernandez said nonfiction work can be time-consuming and sap the energy you need to write novels, so consider your temperament and personality carefully before diving in.

“Figure out what time of day you’re at your best writing fiction, and preserve that window for creative writing at all costs,” she said. “I find that fiction takes a lot more out of me mentally, so if I want to get it done, I have to do it first. I can write nonfiction when creatively exhausted, but not the other way around.”

Instead of diving into a full nonfiction book first thing, Perry suggests perhaps starting with nonfiction articles on a topic that interests you.

"I've written lots of Florida articles—easy research because I live here and everyone wants to come here," she said. "I like antiques and collectibles and have written hundreds of articles about them. I've also written about manatees and lighthouses and whale watching and red cockaded woodpeckers and mangrove trees and anything at all that interests me. I figure it might interest someone else too. The nonfiction clips give a book editor confidence you can actually write and sell nonfiction."

As it is with most things, writing that first nonfiction work is likely to be the hardest.

"The entire journey is a learning process, all over again and you have to accept that it may be a loss leader," said [Jeannie Lin](#). "Also if it's not a side of your business you are ready to invest the time and money into developing, then you should understand that it may just be a passion project or a lark. Oh yeah, and don't get disheartened when the world doesn't come rushing to your door when your new project releases. You've forgotten how hard it was, how hard it is to start out fresh."

[Maddie James](#) gives the type of advice that, while you'll likely heard it before, bears repeating.

"Choose a topic or topics you either already know a lot about, or have a great interest in learning more about," James said. "Consider your expertise and experience, and write about those things. You know, the old 'write about what you know' thing. I also believe that when your passion meets your expertise, you are more successful."

[Sara Fitzgerald](#) believes the most important thing is to ask yourself why you want to tell a particular narrative or explore a particular topic. Then pick the best approach that serves you, your subject matter, and your reader.

"Once you have an idea for a nonfiction book, be sure to identify your ideal reader," Aukes said. "Know this person inside and out, and write the project with this person in mind. Having an ideal reader is even more important to nonfiction than it is to fiction. No book can be everything to everyone, but it can be something very special to someone."

Gardiner said that while it's a good idea to write what can help you earn a living as a writer, it's also important to write what you want to write, what you believe in, and what is going to feed your soul a bit.

"So by all means if that is what is calling to you, do it, but don't throw all your eggs in one basket," she said.

---

*[Trish Milburn](#) is the author of more than 50 novels and novellas, including her current *Idol in Love* series set in the world of K-pop.*

# Crafting a Letter or Email That Gets Results

*By Trish Milburn*



As authors we often have to reach out to others for information, whether it has to do with research for a book, the pros and cons about a publisher or agent, a request for a cover quote from a fellow author, or feedback in preparation to write an article such as this one. All of us have probably been on the receiving end of one of these types of requests, and chances are some of those requests have not been effective or left you scratching your head with more questions than the sender posed.

A successful email or letter requesting something needs to be crafted in such a way that it's as easy as possible for the recipient to respond with the information you need. Think of the writing of such communications as you would one of your books. There is the brainstorming phase, then the first draft, followed by editing, and finally sending it out into the world.

## **Dos and don'ts**

First off, address the recipient by name. If you are sending the same request to multiple people, make absolutely certain that you don't forget to change out the name each time. Receiving a request addressed to someone else is a big turnoff. Next, fully identify yourself. This means more than your name. Are you a fellow author? Who are you in relation to the request you're making? Include your website and any relevant credentials—without going overboard—in case the recipient wants to know more about you before responding.

Clearly state your objective in making the request, what you need and why, as well as a deadline for feedback. Unless you've been assigned an article that requires a quick turnaround, be sure to give the recipients a generous amount of time to respond but not so long that they forget about your request.

"My best advice is to be brief," [Katie MacAlister](#) said. "A quick introduction as to why you are writing/requesting help, followed by (again, brief) details. If you need to list street cred, make it short. Politeness is always appreciated, but the most important element in my opinion is to be professional."

[Julie Leto](#) suggested putting the “ask” in the very beginning and any explanation after and to separate the ask as its own paragraph.

“If the email has a long explanation following the ask, repeat the ask at the end with the time frame expectation,” Leto said. “‘So if I could get that report on my royalties by Tuesday, that would be great!’ Or something similar.”

She also agreed with MacAlister about brevity.

“If you have several issues, don’t clump them into one email,” Leto said. “Do separate emails with separate subject lines.”

Depending on the time and effort necessary to respond to the request, consider if you can offer something in return. This can be a mention as a source in a book, an exchange of services, or some mutually beneficial group effort.

“Be sure to thank the person even if they are unable or unwilling to help,” MacAlister said. “A little kindness goes a long way, especially in a business where you never want to burn a bridge.”

When you receive responses, be prompt in thanking the respondents for their time and effort. Especially if they are responding to one of those quick turnaround requests, thank them for their speedy reply. If you have not heard from someone by your stated deadline, kindly check in to see if they want to respond. You may receive an “Oh my God, I’m so sorry. I totally forgot. I’ll get the answers to you today” type of response. If you still don’t hear back, take that as your answer and let it go. The person may have something going on in their life, or they are on a tight deadline and they aren’t checking their messages, or that your request is, honestly, low on their priority list. Assume there is a valid reason for no reply and work with the responses you have received.

When making a request such as for a blurb or cover quote from another author, remember to be professional and respectful of the author’s time. Avoid gimmicky requests. MacAlister said she once received a request for a blurb from an author who wrote to her in her dog’s voice. Agents and editors have told similar stories while on panels at conferences.

Be careful of comparing yourself to another author. While some people will appreciate this in helping them identify your style and genre of writing, others are going to be put off by it.

“Bragging is often counterproductive,” MacAlister said. “Unless you are writing concerning some sort of a promotion where your bestseller status, book blurbs, rave reviews from the trade magazines, etc., are helpful (and expected), a little humility and a brief mention of your accolades are often enough to clue the recipient in.”

Lastly, watch your tone. While this point would seem obvious, some people have not gotten this memo.

“Entitlement is (at least to me) super irritating,” MacAlister said. “Years ago I was featured in a national women’s magazine, and one writer who read the article sent me a letter insisting that since I had my big break, I owed it to her to help her get published. You can imagine how motivated I was to do that.”

---

*Trish Milburn is the author of more than 50 novels and novellas, including her current *Idol in Love* series set in the world of K-pop.*



# Be Your Own PR Person, Part 4

## What to do when the world blows up

By Michele Dunaway & Nicole Evelina



*When life gives you lemons... squeeze the crap out of them.*

As authors, we've survived one-star reviews and editors who didn't like us. At the same time, we've had five-star reviews and editors who love us. Highs and lows are a part of life.

But there's one thing that strikes fear into a person no matter what—it's that if we make one wrong misstep somewhere, the entire universe can turn against us in an instant. One day you can be on the top of the world and everyone loves you, and the next you could be social media's latest villain and have everyone calling for your head—even if you didn't do anything but make a Facebook post or tweet.

In this article, we're going to look at a few scenarios so you can prepare your disaster kit. After all, it is always better to have all the tools set aside long before you need them, or as people found out in this pandemic, it's better to have a few extra rolls of toilet paper stashed away.

### **Scenario One: When someone backstabs you online**

With the advent of social media, anyone can say anything about you. We've previously talked about in Michele's article "How Not to be Successfully Sued for What You Post Online" (Nink March 2020), about slander and libel so that you can watch what you say. But what if you are the target of what is being said? What if what is being said about you isn't true? And maybe you didn't even do anything?

Let's use an education example. Teacher A trips over something in the classroom. Then one student who thinks that's funny tweets, "Teacher A trips in class because he's drunk. Always knew he had a drinking problem." Let's say now everyone piles on and says, "Oh my god, he's got to be a drunk. Do you see his hair? What a rat's nest! Does he ever look in a mirror?" Then someone else says, "He's so horrid he won't let me ever use the restroom and I ask every day," and someone else says "He should be fired because he never lets me turn in my work late because he's hung over and admin never listens to us."

Okay, this is an extremely fictional account, but you'd be amazed (or maybe not once you look at Twitter) what people say about others.

Teacher A is unaware of this Twitter discussion. But let's say his principal sees the tweets, conducts an investigation, discovers it's not true, and that's the end of it as far as administration is concerned. Oh and the local paper also called administration because it's doing a story on horrible teachers, saw some tweets and wanted to know if they knew the school employed drunk teachers. They gave the standard answer, "We do not discuss personal matters."

It's not until the principal goes to Teacher A to let him know that administration has dealt with the situation that Teacher A learns what has been said. Oh, and then Teacher A reads about some fictional account in the paper a week later.

### **Applying in the author world**

Now while this is a fictional story, similar things can take place in our author world. Imagine a person is claiming you don't really write your own books. This could be a person claiming you plagiarize. Maybe it's a person who gives you one star reviews all the time because "you're a sloppy writer." This could be the person who crawls out of junior high and says, "I can't believe that Susie pretends to be a \_\_\_\_\_ now, especially since she was such a \_\_\_\_\_." Or it's the person who sees your social media posts about your cats (or whatever) and simply starts tweeting about how you're a \_\_\_\_\_ simply because they're a jerk. Fill in the blank and it's probably been said or occurred.

Then your agent/editor/publisher brings it to you because it came up somehow in their social media feed. In this case, you have to make a few decisions, all which rest on your objective analysis of the situation. And if you can't be objective, find someone who can, like a trusted friend.

**1. One of the first things for you to decide is whether what is being said is worthy of a response.** While you may have to respond to your agent or editor (just as the teacher talks to the principal), giving credence to the situation in the greater big bad world might not be worth it.

To analyze the situation, set aside your emotions and think like a journalist. What are the news elements? (See June 2020 *Nink* for Part 2 of this series). Is this story about you really newsworthy? If you feel the answer is no, it might be better for you to do nothing, especially if the news media never contacts you and nothing gets published.

Depending on what's said, your agent/publisher etc. might also simply say "We do not address rumors." That means that the only thing the newspaper has is a bunch of tweets about how students say the teacher was a drunk or some person who is accusing you of not writing your books without backing it up.

**2. If you are going to respond, you have to decide if you should contact the media first in a preemptive strike? And if you do, will you add oxygen to the flames or extinguish them?** Or, maybe it's better to simply wait it out. If the story is red flagged—that is, it is clearly based on one-sided narratives that offer no proof—it might not even be a story anymore. So, by doing

nothing, the fire might die before it really started. Plus, if a story gets published without the reporter contacting you, you may have a defamation case.

**3. What if the media contacts you?** Truth is always your ultimate defense. However, the problem is that the situation—because of what was said online, you are on the defensive. This is a huge mental stress, especially as narratives are hard to prove—especially when it's one person's word against another. Here are some tips:

- Keep your message simple and concise. Going back to the drunk teacher example, Teacher A should reply, "This is not true. It was investigated and I was exonerated." Or in the example of plagiarism, an author would say, "This is not true. I stand by my work, as I created every word."
- Always stay on message. To every question the reporter asks, Teacher A and the author should return to this same message. Not giving the reporter any additional information can be the best course of action.
- Don't justify your actions or try to defend yourself. If you do, you are simply giving the media more fuel and may accidentally put yourself in a worse situation. Don't say you're upset. Don't say you can't believe the kids thought so poorly of you. Don't say your hair was bad because you had insomnia that night and you snoozed your alarm one too many times. Don't say you can't believe someone accused you of stealing words. Don't say that anyone who accuses you is jealous.
- Stick to the message that tells the media if they print this story, they will be guilty of libel because you will come after them and prove what they printed was false.

**4. Report the tweets and negative reviews containing these lies as violations of the social media policies.** If Twitter, etc. decide in your favor, great. That means the posts will be removed and that could be more proof of the person's harassment and defamation.

**5.** If the person continues harassing you online or if the paper prints things that defame you, **contact a good libel attorney.** Your options will vary from depending on the situation from anything from a cease-and-desist letter to taking legal action.

Notice, though, these are huge and potentially costly escalations. However, depending on the potential and current damage to your reputation and the degree of defamation, this may be the direction you want to or must go. A good attorney can give you the best advice.

We naturally want to fight all battles, but sometimes on social media it is better to let some go, especially if there's no real monetary/reputation loss or job insecurity as a result of someone taking aim at you. The fire may simply die down by itself; don't feed it unnecessarily.

## Your tool kit for potential online/media attacks

**1. Line up your legal counsel, even if not needed.** Even if you think this will never happen to you, go do some research now. It's better not to be scrambling after something occurs. Find an attorney, even if you don't contact them, and keep their name and contact information in your phone just in case you ever need it.

**2. If there is a situation, decide if it's worth a response.** Will responding make it better or worse? If worse, it might be better not to take action unless the situation escalates naturally. If you aren't sure, contact a media professional or the libel attorney you found in step one.

**3. If responding might make it better, who should the response be directed at?** What is the truth of the matter and how will this be factually communicated? Develop a crisis message map (See *Nink* April 2020 for the first "Be Your Own PR Person" article). If you aren't sure how to respond, or if you feel you can't keep it together (which is absolutely normal), this might be when you use your attorney or find a crisis public relations firm to speak for you.

## Scenario Two: When what you say causes outrage

We all know that idiom of sticking your foot in your mouth, and chances are good that we've all done it a time or two. The trouble with anything posted online is that once you post it to social media, publish a blog post, or email it to a list serve, it's around forever. Even if you delete it, Google will have indexed it or someone will have a screenshot, especially the more well-known you are.

Even if you didn't mean what you said, or if it was taken the wrong way, or even if you did mean it but the world disagrees with you (case-in-point: J.K. Rowling), the reactions begin immediately and then you go viral, and not in a good way. The public wants to see an execution and you're in their crosshairs. Your innocence, ignorance, human frailty and/or past popularity and good deeds don't matter—justice must be served.

Vengeance is usually swift and brutal. Attacks can range from people responding to you online (reading you the riot act, which might involve calling you vicious names), to doxing (publishing online your private and identifying information with intent to cause harm), or even threats to your life or those of your family members. We've seen all three and the authors involved were midlist, not even household names.

When it feels as the whole of social media and public opinion comes after you, as a single person entity, you don't have the option to fire people or shift the blame (which you shouldn't do anyway). However, you can be dropped from your publisher or agent, and/or lose readers. So, the moment the issue begins, you need to think like a crisis communicator.

Your gut reaction will likely be to delete the tweet/post. You can do that but know doing so can make you appear as though you have something to hide (just like answering "no comment" to the media) and it won't make the situation go away. As mentioned above, someone will have a copy of it and it will continue to circulate. It may be better to leave it alone and even post a reply in the comments (more on what that should say in a minute).

**1. If you are an author who has an agent and/or publicist, you'll want to make them immediately aware of what is happening.** They likely will want to help you craft a response that will minimize the damage. (Your agent can advise you on whether or not to get your publisher involved, depending on the seriousness of the situation.)

But even if you are alone in the situation, you can handle it.

**2. Take a deep breath and try to pretend it is happening to someone else.** (easier said than done, but it will give you some objective distance.)

**3. Then start crafting your response.** The very first thing you learn in crisis communications are four basic steps to responding to a crisis:

- Admit you are at fault.
- Apologize and take responsibility for any harm that may have been caused.
- Clearly state what you are doing to remedy the matter.
- Explain what you will do to avoid this happening in the future.

Any statement you make, whether it is a tweet, a press release, or on camera should include these four elements and not deviate from them. Just as in the first scenario, you should resist the temptation to justify or defend yourself, which will only dig the hole deeper and keep the subject at the forefront of everyone's minds.

So, using J.K. Rowling as an example, this is a statement she could have issued after her initial tweetstorm, had she wanted to:

*Earlier today I sent out a series of tweets implying that transsexual women are not real women. I realize now that I was in error and truly apologize for any harm, offense, or distress this may have caused my fans and members of the trans community at large. I spoke out of ignorance and for that there is no excuse. Please be assured that I have the utmost respect for all people, regardless of gender, race, sexuality or other characteristic. In order to be more open-minded in the future, I will be listening to members of the trans community and educating myself on issues related to their lifestyle and special concerns.*

**Write this formula down and keep it in your toolkit:**

[Time you committed the error] I [name the error]. I am truly sorry for any harm, offense or distress this may have caused my fans and [name anyone else who may have been affected]. In order to address this issue I am [name what you are doing to fix things]. To avoid a similar circumstance in the future I am [name what you are going to do to avoid making the same mistake again].

This formula has been used by everyone from Tylenol in the 80s with their tampering crisis to Exxon during the Exxon Valdez oil spill, so it is time-tested. You'll see that the J.K. Rowling example is more detailed because it is tailored to the situation. The formula above is only a template and should be customized to fit your situation. **The biggest key here is to be honest.** If you say you are going to do one thing but then do another, you are going to be in a worse situation than if you had said nothing. And if you aren't sorry, it is probably better to remain silent.



5. Release your response wherever it makes sense. Usually this will be on all social media channels, your website/blog, and maybe your newsletter, depending on the reach of the issue. Remember how I advised not deleting the original post? That's because you can include your statement in the comments. That way, if anyone stumbles across it in the future, they will also see your response and that should avoid any future flare ups. For bigger issues, you may have to issue a press release, but hopefully you'll have a lawyer or publicist to advise you in those situations.

6. Once you've gotten your side of the story out there (and the sooner you can do that, the better), **lay low for a while**. Do not respond to people who attack you; all that will do is egg them on. However, if someone says something useful or educational in the comments or provides a good resource, you can thank them. Or if part of what you need to do is listen to others (let's say people of color, for example, if you've been accused of being racially insensitive), you can thank those who volunteer their stories for helping you learn.

7. **Follow up** is the final step to de-escalating a crisis you created. People need to see you are walking the walk and doing what you said you would. You don't have to go overboard, but sharing articles about the subject you stuck your foot in your mouth on (obviously not expressing the same opinion that got you into trouble) can show you are learning and can serve as a teaching moment for others. You can even invite your fans to help you learn. Going back to J.K., she could have followed up our fictitious statement with a call to the trans community to share their stories with her or asked for resources where she could learn more. As long as it is genuine, such interaction with your community can go a long way toward showing you've learned your lesson.

### **Your tool kit in case you mess up**

1. **Think before you type.** The biggest thing you can do to avoid accidentally creating a scandal is never create one and that involves forethought.

- Don't post things in anger, fear, or when you've been drinking.
- When speaking publicly about hot topics, give yourself time to cool off and see the issue rationally.
- Think through how what you say or the memes you share could be taken by others before you press publish.
- If you choose to take a controversial stand, be prepared for the fallout.

2. **Memorize or keep the crisis statement formula above in a safe place.** You might even want to craft a sample statement just to get the feel for it when you are calm and not facing a crisis.

3. **Create a crisis communications plan now.** Companies create a plan for every worst-case scenario from natural disasters to a consumer being killed by their product/service. Think of

what could go wrong, how you will respond, and who should be involved. Use the three scenarios in this article as a starting place, then think of things your author friends have gone through. If a crisis ever occurs, you will be grateful you planned ahead.

4. Just as you have a lawyer in mind, **it couldn't hurt to have a publicist in mind as well.**

### **Scenario Three: When you have a counterfeit personality/online stalker**

This is when someone who means to harm you takes your images and makes an account that pretends to be you. It's common on Facebook profiles and pages, but can be extremely damaging on Twitter, especially if you do not have a verified check mark proving you are you.

This counterfeiting goes far beyond needing to change your passwords (which you should always do frequently). The counterfeiter doesn't necessarily have control of your actual account—they are making new accounts that look like yours in an attempt to deceive those who follow you, or they may be commenting on your friends' posts pretending to be you, etc. Getting rid of these people and accounts can feel like a whack-a-mole game as each social media site has its own policies and some enable hackers to create a new account just as soon as the first one is shut down.

1. Once again (we know we sound like a broken record), **the first thing is to decide your tolerance limit.** Do you want to handle this quietly, or do you want to unleash all of your followers on the counterfeit to report and block them? For Twitter, the more complaints Twitter gets, the faster it might move. We know of a person who got the fake account taken down within five hours after reporting the harassment, but that was after the account tweeted directly at the person's clients and used photos of his daughter.

2. **Report the account however you can.** Each social media company has different ways to get things deleted.

- On Twitter, you might have to report harassment and prove the violator is not a parody account.
- On Instagram, you should approach it as a copyright violation—they are stealing your photos.
- Facebook doesn't want people impersonating you, so report the account as "Pretending to be someone" and then you.

In all situations, be prepared with your driver's license or ID, because you might need to submit those in order to prove your real identity.

3. **Return to your crisis messaging.** If the counterfeit account made hardly a ripple, it might be something to simply let go and move forward from. If it was a huge disruption, you may want to craft a factual statement you can release on all your platforms.

4. If the issues continue (or another account pops up by the same person), **you may need to have your lawyer send a cease and desist** or hire a cybersecurity firm to track down the offender. Your final option is to lock down your entire account to only those who follow you.

## **Your tool kit for potential online copycats/stalkers**

### **1. Take proactive steps.**

- Do a privacy checkup to control what you share.
- Turn off location services for posts.
- Review your social media through the eyes of a counterfeiter. What might you delete and/or avoid posting in the future because someone could use it against you?
- Determine how much you will share with your followers. What are you comfortable with? Many of us share pictures of our families, and our kids on either or FB pages or our personal friend page, or we tweet things. Remember, no matter how locked down something is, it's never foolproof.
- Consider using TweetDelete, which will erase your tweets and likes for you on a timeline you specify. Do you really want a year's worth of things out there, much less 10 years of things out there? If you are worried about the WayBack Machine, go [here](#) to read more.
- Limit past posts on Facebook, especially if friend posts are public. Go to your privacy settings, activity, then limit past posts.
- Screenshot, report and block all trolls. Always.

### **2. Review and know the reporting procedures for the social media accounts you have.**

- What is the process for how to get accounts taken down?
- What data/identification do they need?
- What are the words that will get the fastest results?

3. **Make a list of about 10-15 trusted friends and family** you can text/call who will immediately go online to report the fake account using the verbiage you provide.

4. **If you haven't already, have contact information for legal counsel** on hand in case you need it.

### **5. Find a cybersecurity firm before you need it.**

- If you've been a victim of an attack, a cybersecurity firm can help you navigate it.
- They can also do a red team exercise where they act like bad guys and proactively examine your accounts to expose your vulnerabilities and help you fix them.
- They can also hack those who attack you, which may or may not be legal. Be sure to ask.

**6. Communicate clearly with your followers what is going on if someone attacks you,** which can include screenshots so followers can spot the fake account. Create crisis messaging for this possibility. Remember that message map? Take your situation and map it out.

**7. Set up a Google alert for your name.** While it won't capture social media, it will find other things you might need to see from websites, blogs and news sources. If you see news sources, you should consult your crisis communication steps.

## **Final thoughts**

**1. Never let them see the hammer behind your back until you hit them with it.** In all these scenarios, we've glossed over that "do you respond" question because there is no right answer that fits all scenarios. Deciding if you interact with the person harassing you is like deciding if you respond to a negative review. It's a personal choice you must weigh as to its benefit. If you choose to engage, before you even begin, have your hammer ready. Then be polite, as calm as possible, and professional. Only hit them if they need it.

**2. Why me?** Sometimes bad things happen to good people, and as cliché as that sounds, sometimes it's the only answer you are going to get. Trying to figure out why someone tried to hurt you can simply be a waste of time and energy better spent on moving forward through disaster remediation and recovery. It sounds brutal, but focus on what you can control rather than what you cannot. Speed is often of the essence in deciding how to handle the situation.

Squeeze the crap out of those lemons, add some sugar and ice (maybe add a little Bird Dog Blackberry Whiskey or Smirnoff Vodka—trust us, these combos are really good), and go drink that lemonade. You've earned it.

---

*Michele Dunaway has an M.A. in Media Communications and for almost 30 years has been teaching media and journalism. She's also a contemporary author and your Nink editor.*

*Nicole Evelina also has an M.A. in Media Communications and is an accredited professional communicator who has handled internal and crisis communications for a large health-care company for nearly 16 years, including communicating about COVID-19 and a direct hit by a tornado to one of the company's hospitals. She's also a historical and non-fiction author and your Nink assistant editor.*

# Getting Started in Audiobook Production

Or starting to start, anyway

By Steven Womack



When the *Nink* assistant editor asked me to write an article about DIY Audio Production, my first thought was *why me?* I'm a total newbie audiobook creator. I've produced and narrated a couple of podcasts and one short story that's a freebie on my website. I'm working on producing audiobook versions of my rights-reverted backlist, but as one of the IT guys at the college where I taught for 25 years once marvelously said: *I'm just starting to start.*

The more I thought about it, though, the more I felt this might be exactly what this article needs: somebody who can demystify the process for beginners and point aspiring audiobook creators to resources that will be helpful when starting this journey.

So that's where this is going. If you're an experienced audiobook producer, feel free to pass this one by. But if you're looking at the audiobook world and pondering how to get started, read on.

Here's the best reason for taking the plunge: there's an incredible demand for content. Jane Friedman, in her newsletter *The Hot Sheet*, predicts that audiobooks will overtake print by 2023. Even if she's off just a little bit, this still represents a lucrative revenue stream and I want to wade in it.

When considering jumping into the indie audiobook business (especially self-narrating), there are two things most people find daunting: 1) the technical demands and skills needed and 2) what consumers really look for in an audiobook.

So if you're looking to produce your own audiobooks, the two biggest anxieties are:

- *Can I handle the technical aspects?*
- *Does my voice suck?*



## Handling the tech

Randy O'Brien is a Nashville-based novelist and a retired radio journalist with over 40 years of experience in broadcast journalism, voice-over acting and audio production. In 2008, he self-produced an audio version of his novel *Judge Fogg*. He's also a huge audiobook consumer; he's been reviewing audiobooks for *Audiophile Magazine* since 1997.

I asked him about the costs and expertise needed to create a home studio.

"A home studio," he said, "that 10 years ago would have cost \$100,000 can be built today for less than a thousand dollars. What was once a luxury for rich rock n' rollers is now accessible to even a poor-assed novelist."

The important thing, O'Brien added, is to have a good microphone and a computer with an adequate sound card.

Legendary voice-over actor/coach/audiobook producer and publisher Joe Loesch—whose [website](#) and [YouTube channel](#) are both invaluable resources—agrees.

"The heart of any studio is, of course, the microphone," he said. And people think a good microphone costs thousands. I've seen \$150 microphones that are as good a quality as the \$3,600 microphone I have in my studio. What people have to remember is that every microphone is different and every voice is different. Your voice is like your fingerprint—totally unique. The trick is to find just the right combination of voice and microphone that works."

Both O'Brien and Loesch agree that this means trying out multiple microphones. Retail audio equipment dealers are usually open to this.

The other key component of the audiobook recording process is the editing software and its accompanying learning curve. Even that's gotten cheaper and simpler over the years.

"High-end software packages like Pro Tools and Adobe Audition are overkill for audiobook production. You don't need multi-track recording and sophisticated music and sound effects," Loesch said. "I use a simple program for Macs called [Twisted Wave](#). It costs about \$80 and is very intuitive."

Both O'Brien and Loesch agree that if you're on a PC, the go-to app is a free shareware program called [Audacity](#). There's a huge community of developers and users who have taken this app a long way in the last twenty years. There are tons of resources for learning Audacity on YouTube, [Lynda.com](#), and a variety of other places. It's not hard to find tutorials and help.

I've found the Audacity learning curve very manageable. There are a dozens of plug-ins and add-ons that are more than sufficient to get a good product out.

The last big hurdle is your recording space. The physics of sound is way beyond the scope of this article, but the key thing to remember is that sound bounces off flat surfaces. Almost any good microphone is going to pick that up. So just recording in your home office with flat walls is problematic.

The other issue is ambient sound. A car going by outside, the hiss of your HVAC system as it kicks on, the phone ringing or the kids getting in an argument, are all going to cause problems.

To complicate this even further, you don't want an environment that is too dead. This creates a hollow, empty room sound that doesn't work well in audio production.

The most innovative solution I've seen, and one that I'm using now: a walk-in closet, preferably one without an HVAC vent. Clothes hanging in a walk-in closet are natural sound baffles.

### Now here's the art part

You may wonder if you have the right kind of voice for audiobook narration. Or even worse, like me you may *hate* the sound of your own recorded voice.

The key thing to remember, Loesch says, is that listeners don't want to be read to.

"I don't want you to *read* me a story," he said, "I want you to *tell* me a story. There's a difference."

Loesch adds that for anyone interested in really pursuing this industry, it's extremely helpful to take voice-over classes and acting lessons.

"That's why they call it voice-over *acting*," he maintains.

O'Brien adds that the kind of voice that works depends on the book and the genre. A mystery or suspense thriller will require a different voice from a romance (although gender is pertinent only in that the gender of the audiobook narrator generally should match the gender of the narrator or protagonist in the book).

"What the listener wants is authenticity," he maintains.

One important thing to remember, both Loesch and O'Brien agree, is that audiobook narration is hard work. A nine-hour audio book requires 30-40 hours of raw recording. You'll need stamina, breath control, and preparation. You'll need to stay hydrated and lubricated with whatever works for you.

There are many resources available online if, after reading this, you still want to wade into that stream:

- Los Angeles-based author and audiobook producer Derek Doepker has a marvelous [beginner's course](#) that I took at a discount after watching one of his webinars.
- [AudibleACX's YouTube channel](#) has almost 100 videos that cover everything from the beginning technical aspects to the business itself.
- Aliso Creek has a series of videos on YouTube that cover many aspects of voice-over audio production. Just search for her.

Like any other aspect of the indie book industry, producing audiobooks is a journey. It doesn't require a lot of money. The investment is almost all sweat equity and time. Doing it right, though, will be very rewarding, not just in terms of that revenue stream, but in finding yet another way to connect with readers.

---

*Former Novelists, Inc. president [Steven Womack](#) is the Edgar and Shamus Award-winning author of the Harry James Denton mystery series, as well as a few other books. A screenwriter as well, he co-wrote a couple of television movies a long time ago. For 25 years, he taught screenwriting in the film program at Watkins College Of Art in Nashville, Tennessee. When the college went out of business in May, Womack ecstatically went back to full-time writing.*

# More Ways to Stay Creative

*By Denise A. Agnew*



Even as a creativity coach, I can have days where I'm not feeling as creative as I would like. This led me to think of other ways I could boost my creativity. Based on what I discovered, I've listed more ways you can boost your creativity quotient.

## **Open up to random thoughts**

Writers can sometimes unknowingly stifle their creativity. Remember when you were a kid and someone told you to stop daydreaming? You may be doing something similar to yourself and not realizing it. What if paying closer attention to your random thoughts and fantasies could generate fresh ideas?

We've all heard that we have a ton of thoughts pass through our minds each day, much of it useless chatter. As published authors, we often judge both the quality of our ideas and the validity of them. However, as creative people, our imaginations are an integral part of our ability to create story. Many writers who work on building book series have told me they sometimes feel as if they're on an assembly line churning out the same ole same ole. This adherence to "expected" series parameters can be draining and can strangle creativity. Instead of allowing your imagination to go where it wants, you're forcing it to go where you think it is supposed to go.

Granted, you can't stop and write down every single thought or fantasy you have in your head, and you can't necessarily take your series from the Wild West to outer space (well, maybe you can), but you can harness as many ideas as possible. Are there any story ideas you are dying to write but you're ignoring them? Do you think the ideas are too far out of the lane you've been following for years? Consider how you can write more of what you long to write rather than constantly shoving down your creative desires.

Write down any wild thoughts that come into your head, even if they don't seem to equate to an actual plot or story line at this time and even if they are completely nonsensical. If you remember your dreams, write them down as well. You never know where these ideas will lead in the future.

## **Imagine you're somewhere else**

Because of the pandemic, many writers haven't been on vacation, much less left the house. So let your mind take you.

Find a quiet time where you won't be disturbed. Put on soothing music. Close your eyes and imagine, in as much detail as possible, a place you long to be. This can be a place you've been to before or a new place you would like to visit.

If you want, write down as many details about that vacation fantasy as you can. Go hog wild and enjoy yourself. Why not? Not only is it fun, but you might even get an idea for a story in the process.

## **Watch more movies and television series**

Many people proudly announce that they don't watch television series or movies. Watching television rots your brain, right? While anything taken to an extreme could have a negative effect, TV and movies can give your brain a mental break. You can also use this time to analyze why you like or don't like some movies and television programs. This can provide perspective into your own creativity and spark new ideas.

Start with the genre you write. Watch a few movies in that genre. How would you have written the story? If there's a movie or television series you love, why do you love it? Be completely honest with yourself why you like it (or how you would have done it better). You aren't showing your innermost thoughts to anyone else. Thinking about why you like or don't like something can move your creative thinking in a new direction.

In this way, watching a movie or television series is like reading someone else's book and recognizing why you enjoyed the book or would've written it differently. This perspective change can jumpstart the creative part of your brain.

## **Read screenplays and write screenplays**

Writing a screenplay is, in many ways, completely different than writing a novel; it forces you to create differently. When writing a screenplay, a writer relies far more on dialogue and very little on description. It gives your brain a creative workout. How are you going to say, in the dialogue, what you may have left up to description alone?

When I decided to begin writing screenplays, I first read a few to obtain both an understanding of formatting and to get a general feel of how screenplays *sound*. (Beware, though. Screenwriting formatting has changed over the years, so modern screenplays have some different rules than screenplays written even a decade ago.) Reading and writing screenplays opens your mind to a different way of experiencing storytelling.

## **Make memes/graphics**

Is there something you want to say? Making a meme in a program such as Canva or Book Brush can be a great way to enhance your social media presence and express yourself creatively. Making graphics requires both visuals and the words you want to say. If I want to take a break from writing, I often make a meme or a graphic for one of my published or soon-to-be-

published books or some other random thing I want to express. It's refreshing. After I've made a graphic, I am ready to start writing again.

### **Do nothing for fifteen minutes**

I know what you're going to say. "Denise, I have a busy life and don't have 15 minutes to spare." To that I would say, "Are you sure?"

While sitting in relative quiet outside among nature or inside with some soothing music or even no sound can make some people feel twitchy, it's about balance. As an experiment, to see if it works for you, try doing absolutely nothing for 15 minutes a day for a least three days and see how you feel. The 15 minutes does not need to be formal meditation. Write down how you felt and if you received any creative ideas during that time. My guess is you will not only get ideas, you might feel physically and mentally refreshed because you're not pushing so hard all the time.

### **Connect (even just virtually) with others**

This pandemic has kept many of us inside, including missing NINC. Is there a dear friend, writer or not, who you used to sit down with in person and hash over creative issues? If you haven't talked to them in ages, give them a call or set up a Skype or visual chat session. They'll love it, you will too, and the creative ideas you generate could be some of the best you've ever designed.

---

*Denise A. Agnew is the award-winning author and screenwriter of over 69 novels and several optioned screenplays and television series. She's written in a variety of genres including horror, romance and historical. Over the years she's also enjoyed participating in archaeology and archery. Reading is a huge love! She was fortunate enough to live in England and Hawaii and travel throughout the UK and Ireland. Denise is also a producer, paranormal investigator, Certified Creativity Coach, Reiki Master, and evidential medium. She lives in Arizona with her husband and a mini schnauzer. You can find her at [www.deniseagnew.com](http://www.deniseagnew.com) and [www.agnewcreativemedium.com](http://www.agnewcreativemedium.com).*

# The Mad Scribbler

## Five years on

By Laura Resnick



*"My advice on dealing with publishers: Let your agent do it. Agents are more important than publishers. Agents are more important than anyone. Which brings me to my advice on dealing with agents. You can't. They won't speak to you. They're too important."*

—P.J. O'Rourke

In the December 2014 edition of *Nink*, author Cheryl Bolen, reporting on a session at that year's NINC conference, wrote that prominent literary agent Steven Axelrod "forecasts that five years from now there won't be any agents sitting on NINC panels."

Bolen reported on a future of publishing session that focused on the specific question of where publishing would be in five years. The panel included professionals in traditional publishing, such as Axelrod, as well as people deeply involved in the "digital disruption" of the publishing market, such as bestselling indie author Hugh Howey and executives from Kobo Writing Life and Amazon's Kindle Direct Publishing.

Agenting is a profession built on being the intermediary between authors and publishers in the traditional publishing paradigm, and it became clear at the 2014 conference that those foundations were shifting beneath agents' feet. By then there was a tsunami of talented and experienced writers embracing a business model that didn't involve agents at all, and the conference was heavily focused on tools and opportunities in the rapidly expanding indie world.

Hence, Mr. Axelrod's prediction that we wouldn't have any agents on program at NINC in five years' time.

He was right. I reviewed the 2019 conference program to refresh my memory, and didn't see a single agent listed among the many speakers. (I also don't see any on the 2020 program, as it happens.)

Also five years on from that forecast, NINC commissioned a survey in September 2019 to gather feedback from members about *Nink*. (See my June 2020 *Nink* column for a report on what we learned.) We also used that survey to collect some standard data about our members, which is something NINC does every few years.

And the one piece of member data that I thought really sprang off the page, when studying the analyst's report, was that 64% of NINC members do not have an agent, and another 5% responded, "It's complicated."

Seventy-five percent of NINC members have published traditionally, but only 31% of you currently reported having a literary agent.

I've been curious about these seemingly skewed numbers, since the remaining data in the survey showed (as our surveys typically do) that NINC members are well-established in their careers. Overall, most NINC members have been writing professionally for more than five years, have released many books, earn much or all of their income from writing, and have won awards or appeared on bestseller lists. Viewing those kind of statistics, I think most people would assume that most NINC members have a literary agent.

Yet most do not; a full two-thirds, in fact.

So I asked members for feedback about this. Many of the answers were in keeping with the shift that was already well underway at that 2014 conference.

Incoming 2021 NINC treasurer Timothy L. Cerepaka, who writes as [Lucas Flint](#), said, "I'm exclusively indie publishing at the moment. Seeing as you don't need an agent to indie publish, I haven't felt any great need to approach agents. I don't know if that will change in the future. I'm not going to say I will *never* have an agent, but I also don't think it's very likely that I will get one anytime soon."

"I had several agents while I was still publishing traditionally, but once I went all indie in 2009 I could not see the point," wrote *USA Today* bestselling author [Edie Claire](#).

"I've never had an agent," reported [Barbara Meyers](#). "I had agents be interested, but they never committed to represent me. I published with small publishers and didn't need an agent, so problem solved."

Meyers continued, "Now, I don't want one. Traditional publishing is not the route for me... I also don't want to spend the time querying, waiting for an answer, perhaps getting an agent, waiting for responses from editors, waiting for the actual publication of a book. It takes years. I'm old. I don't have that kind of time to spend on such an iffy proposition. I like the control of self-publishing even if I'm bumbling the process. I don't want to give my rights away."

A writer who prefers not to be named said, "I queried and found an agent when I first started writing seriously back in 2006. She got me a deal to write an in-house series of cozy mysteries (I wrote the books, [the publisher] kept the copyright)... After several books I was chafing a bit, and wanted to try other things in addition to the cozies, and the agent wasn't all that keen on pitching other things.



"On a few occasions, when we had nibbles from editors in other genres, she went out of her way to screw things up, or at least that's the way it felt to me. Once, she kept me writing and rewriting the first chapter of a submission for three weeks, until the acquiring editor turned it down because it was 'overwritten,' (which it would be, when you spend three weeks rewriting 16 pages)."

And the problems continued.

The author said, "We parted ways in 2012. My choice. I had gotten into self-publishing by then, and with her attitude, I also felt I could do a better job selling myself to editors than she could, or at least than she would. I did end up selling several books to a romance publisher on my own, so I was right about that.

"I've been concentrating on self-pub since my last trad book came out in late 2013, so I haven't felt the need to replace the agent, and I'm probably a little wary, too. I don't want to end up with another agent who feels like she's doing me a favor by representing me, and who tells me I need to write what she wants me to write... I'm independent enough to like the fact that I'm controlling my own career (for better or worse) so I don't know that I'd ever seriously do anything about it."

So a lot of NINC members are indie all-the-way these days, which means they don't need an agent. They also like the efficiency of a business model that eliminates spending months (or years!) querying agent after agent or repeatedly rewriting material for an agent.

There is also the question of earnings. *USA Today* bestseller [Chris Keniston](#) shared the following: "I have been indie pubbed since 2013. In those first six months, I put out my under-the-bed books (three), and I earned something like \$45K. Books [that New York publishers] didn't know what to do with. I've never earned less than six figures a year since. All without an agent."

Like the other authors quoted here, Keniston prefers the freedom and control she finds in indie publishing. Taking that into account, as well as her earnings, she has no interest in traditional publishing, and therefore no interest in agents.

She adds, "Even consider audio production—there are producers such as Tantor who reach out to authors directly. Perhaps better deals could be had with an agent, but for many authors, adding audio to their self-managed repertoire is more lucrative.

"Foreign translations is another avenue that an agent could be helpful, but many know that foreign houses are slow to pay out, if it all. Hence, as with indie pubbing in English, managing your own translations can be a very lucrative situation."

Edie Claire's experience has been consistent with that view: "I did eventually decide that it might be wise to seek out an agent willing to sign on for subsidiary rights only, and fortunately I was able to attract a well-regarded one. We had a year-long contract, and 12 months later I fired him, as he had sold absolutely nothing. When he asked why and I said I believed I could do better myself, his exact words to me were, 'Good luck with that.' I proceeded to sell two foreign translations and three multi-title audiobook contracts, through connections made at NINC conferences and with the help of a literary lawyer (also met through NINC.) So no...

unless the concept of the agent's role changes drastically from its current form, I cannot envision why I would ever employ another."

However, it's not only indie-all-the-way authors who are agentless. One NINC member shared this: "I have had several agents over the years and only one was worthwhile. She quit the business. I went on to have two 'big name' agents, neither one worked out. Either we didn't agree on my books and career, or the agent worked in a manner that didn't work for me. I have been without an agent for a number of years now and am very happy. I'm trad and indie pubbed. Currently working either indie or with publishers with whom I don't need an agent. I doubt I'll ever have one again."

Obviously, the big shift toward indie publishing is a major factor in so many career novelists in NINC working without agents these days.

However, I remain curious about writers who, like the NINC member in that last example, continue to publish traditionally but without an agent. I'm also still wondering about members who *want* an agent but don't have one. If either of these situations describes you, please contact me with your story (and be sure to tell me if you want your **name withheld**): [LLR1962@yahoo.com](mailto:LLR1962@yahoo.com).

---

*Laura Resnick writes novels, short stories, and nonfiction.*

# Membership Benefits

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

Are you taking advantage of all your member benefits?

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

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

## Networking

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

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

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

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

## Newsletter

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Welcome Packet: <http://ninc.com/system/assets/uploads/>

[2017/01/2017\\_New\\_Member\\_Welcome\\_Packet-public.pdf](#)

## Member discounts

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

## **Volunteer**

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

Open positions include:

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



*Founded in 1989*

### **NINC Statement of Principle**

Novelists, Inc., in acknowledgment of the crucial creative contributions novelists make to society, asserts the right of novelists to be treated with dignity and in good faith; to be recognized as the sole owners of their literary creations; to be fairly compensated for their creations when other entities are profiting from those creations; and to be accorded the respect and support of the society they serve.

### **Founders**

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

### **2020 Board of Directors**

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

- Interim President: Tawdra Kandle
- Interim President-Elect: Lisa Hughey
- Secretary: Hallee Bridgeman
- Treasurer: Pam McCutcheon
- Newsletter Editor: Michele Dunaway
- Advisory Council Representative: Lou Aronica

### **Advisory Council**

- Lou Aronica
- Brenda Hiatt Barber
- Linda Barlow
- Jean Brashear
- Janice Young Brooks
- Laura Parker Castoro
- Meredith Efken
- Donna Fletcher
- Kay Hooper

- Barbara Keiler
- Julie Leto
- Pat McLaughlin
- Kasey Michaels
- Julie Ortolon
- Diana Peterfreund
- Pat Rice
- Erica Ridley
- Marianne Shock
- Wayne Stinnett
- Vicki Lewis Thompson
- Victoria Thompson
- Steven Womack

## 2020 Committees

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

- 2020 Conference Committee:
  - Conference Coordinator: Mel Jolly
  - Programming Chair: Tawdra Kandle
  - Asst. Prog. Chair & Trade Show: Lisa Hughey
  - Sponsorship & Trade Show: Rochelle Paige
  - Traditional Publishing Liaison: Victoria Thompson
  - Annabel Chase
- Authors Coalition Rep: Laura Phillips & Sue Phillips
- Social Media Committee:
  - Chair: Jenna Kernan
  - Rick Gualteieri
  - Lisa Hughey
  - Christine Breen
- Membership Committee
  - Sarah Woodbury
  - Boyd Craven
- *Nink* Newsletter
  - Editor: Michele Dunaway
  - Assistant Editor: Nicole Evelina
  - Copy Editor: Cynthia Moyer
  - Production Manager: Laura Resnick
- Nominating Committee:
  - Tanya Anne Crosby
  - Kathy Carmichael
  - Kristine Smith
  - Jenny Gardiner
  - Rick Gualtieri

- Technology Committee
  - Nick Thacker
  - Elizabeth Ann West
  - Jamie McFarlane
  - Erica Ridley
- Discount Program Chair: Emilie Richards
- Volunteer Jobs (Just One Thing) Coordinator: Lois Lavrisa

### **Central Coordinator**

Novelists, Inc. c/o Terese Ramin

P.O. Box 54, Hartland MI 48353

[admin@ninc.com](mailto:admin@ninc.com)

*Address changes may be made on the website.*

### **Nink Newsletter**

*October 2020 edition – Vol. 31, No. 10*

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

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

Publication: 12 issues annually. Available in PDF, mobi and epub formats. Public issues redact NINC members-only information.

To change subscription preferences, please contact [admin@ninc.com](mailto:admin@ninc.com).

---

*Copyright ©2020 by Novelists, Inc. All rights reserved. No part of this newsletter may be used or reproduced in any manner without written permission.*