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a professional organization
of writers of popular fiction

 **novelists,
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President's Voice

By Tawdra Kandle



It's April at last! If you're in the Northern Hemisphere, spring may finally be upon you, bringing with it warmer days, the fabled showers, and pretty flowers. In Florida, where I live, we tend to jump directly into summer, but I'm enjoying the few days of not-quite-hot weather now.

What's more astounding to me is that I'm over a quarter of the way through my year as NINC president. Time truly is flying ... so much to do! I have decided to focus my work for this year on three main goals: first, to ensure that NINC has a user-friendly website that can more easily offer our members access to information they need and that can be updated and maintained by our central coordinator and volunteers as needed; second, to promote the value of our organization to its members year-round, not only during the conference; and finally, to support and encourage our Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Committee to lead us in the real work that should be done to make certain that NINC is a safe and welcoming community for all who qualify for membership. It is this third goal that I'd like to chat about this month.

Last month, as I prepared to share about the DEI Committee, a question arose as to the meaning of letter 'E' in the title: was it *equality* or *equity*? I asked members to weigh in, and I provided my own research on the difference of the words, particularly the following explanation found on the [Annie E. Casey Foundation](#) website:

Equity involves trying to understand and give people what they need to enjoy full, healthy lives. Equality, in contrast, aims to ensure that everyone gets the same things in order to enjoy full, healthy lives. Like equity, equality aims to promote fairness and justice, but it can only work if everyone starts from the same place and needs the same things.

During the ensuing discussion, DEI member Samantha Silver shared with the committee the image that accompanies this column. Although I'd bet all of us in this community would consider ourselves passionate about the written word, there is no denying that in this case, the picture says it all.

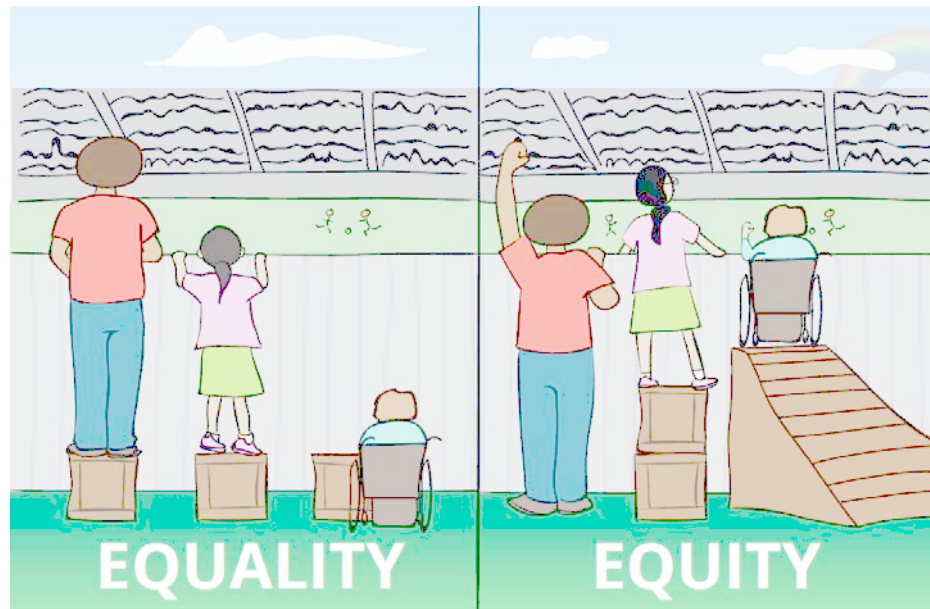


Image courtesy [Maryam Abdul-Kareem](#).

Most of us would love to believe that all people—and in our particular case, all authors—start on a level playing field. But we know that is not true. We don't begin the same way, nor do we have the same needs as we make our author journey. We have a responsibility to make sure that every one of our members is provided what he, she or they need to enjoy a full and satisfying experience within our organization.

During my time in leadership of NINC, I can attest that all of our members are unique. A decision that pleases one may cause another great angst. While we can't make everyone happy all the time, we are still small enough that we can sometimes address needs on an individual basis as long as doing so doesn't violate the rights of other members. Though we expect to see a continuation of NINC's recent growth, I hope we're never so large that we can't care about each member.

Equity means that sometimes, some members may need more than others in order to participate fully in our community. I really like this explanation, also included on the Annie E. Casey Foundation site: *It is helpful to think of equity as not simply a desired state of affairs or a lofty value. To be achieved and sustained, equity needs to be thought of as a structural and systemic concept.*

In other words, it's essential that we do more than want Diversity, Equity and Inclusion; we can't just form a committee and pat ourselves on the back. We must weave these tenets into our organization's actions and decisions. We must take intentional action when called for to ensure that all of our members have the opportunity to participate fully, no matter where we begin.

We're excited about the work of the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Committee. I look forward to sharing with you more of the committee's work and ideas in the coming months.

Tawdra Kandle

Tawdra Kandle is a USA Today best-selling romance author with over 100 books released. Her titles include new adult and adult contemporary romance; under the pen name Tamara Kendall, she writes paranormal romance, and under the pen name Tessa Kent, she writes erotic romance.

About NINC

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

About Nink

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

NINC Member Benefits

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

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

Accessing the NINC Website

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



On March 16th limited registration for the 2021 NINC Conference opened. Out of an abundance of caution and carefully following the [guidelines](#) set by the Centers for Disease Control, our programming committee and the board agreed to cap initial registration at 200 attendees. This number allows us to maintain the recommended social distancing in workshops and at meals.

We reached that number of attendees on Wednesday afternoon and closed registration at that time. Registration for the 2021 conference is now closed for the time being.

Waitlist

We do not have a waitlist for potential openings, nor will we open one.

Re-opening registration

If and when we are able to open conference registration for more attendees, we will send an email. We will also share the date in our NINC email loop and on our social media channels:

Facebook Page: <https://www.facebook.com/novelists.inc>

Facebook Members Group: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/NovelistsInc/>

Twitter: https://twitter.com/Novelists_Inc

Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/novelistsinc/>

We will give members a one-week advance notice, and then another reminder two days before registration re-opens. We will explain exactly how to register at that time.

If and when we open registration again, we do expect it to fill up quickly, so we recommend watching your email closely for the notice.

Assistant registration

At this time, we have not opened registration for assistants. If we can accommodate assistants at a later date, we will inform you.

Hotel reservations

A reminder, too, that we ask you not to make a hotel reservation until you have a confirmed, paid conference registration.

Refunds

Our refund policy states that registrants who cancel before August 15, 2021 will receive an 80 percent refund of their conference fee. No refunds will be issued after August 15 except for instances of extreme medical emergencies.

A request

Finally, please be thoughtful about registering for the conference. If you have concerns about attending, if you have serious doubts that your country's borders will be open by September, or if you are not almost positive that you'll be able to be there, please do not hold a spot "just in case" and thus deny another member who could definitely attend the option of registering.

Thank you for your patience as we continue to do our best to protect our members while providing a valuable conference experience.

Tawdra Kandle
NINC 2021 President

A License to Steal

My annual conversations with a Special Agent for the IRS
(Yes, that really is research and it's deductible)

By Patricia Burroughs



Ever heard of the Internal Revenue Service Criminal Investigation Special Agents?

They're the folks who bring down the mob when the FBI can't. They also back up the Secret Service when needed, as they are all special Treasury Department agents.

One of them married my best friend.

Poor guy. For a few years he fielded my annual phone calls about whether or not something was deductible—always with my justification for why it *should* be deductible for me, a writer.

Fortunately, the Special Agent always found my latest research expenses entertaining, and always responded, “Yes, for you that would be deductible.”

This finally resulted in his pronouncement made with a lot of humor and no little bit of awe:

“Pooks, being a writer is having a license to steal.”

Let me give credit where credit is due. I'm not a tax professional of any kind, nor would I ever give anybody tax or legal advice. I only knew what unexpected expenditures might be deductible from the collective experiences of many other writers since I first became a Schedule C-filing writer in 1986.

It's all in the name of research. Only a writer's R&D is a wee bit different from a tech firm's. Let's look.

All it took was 17 years of newspaper subscriptions and two words.

Case Study No. 1: From the beginning, authors told me that every movie I watched, every book I bought, etc., was deductible as research—not just the ones specific to subjects I was writing about right then. This even included newspaper and magazine subscriptions.

As if on cue, an author friend who had claimed her daily newspaper subscription for years saw a small filler article buried deep in the back. Two words jumped out at her. Two words, and she was off to start scribbling down her idea.

The words? *Heir hunter*.

The newspaper gave a few bare facts about a private eye who specialized in finding heirs for wills that need to be settled.

Carol Jerina sold that romantic comedy/adventure, *Tropic Gold*. It took years of time and reading and subscription fees before she found those two words but they paid off.

“I wish somebody would pay me to write about wine.”

Case Study No. 2: Editor and SFF author Laura Anne Gilman is a wine aficionado. She and her agent were commiserating one day about a food and wine expo they both yearned to attend but couldn't because of work and expense.

“Write a fantasy about wine,” her agent said and they both laughed.

The next day Laura Anne sent back an outline for a fantasy trilogy where the magic was in wine. Not stopping at the kind of book that would justify the expenses of a wine expo or two, in her world each wine's magical powers were influenced by the soil they were grown in, the very things that make regional wines different in our world. Her agent sold it, and Laura Anne took a dream trip to vineyards across Europe, to learn firsthand about the way the soil and climate affected the wines, the way they might go wrong, or how they might go very, very right. Those wine regions became the basis of the lands in her fantasy world, their terrain, weather, and other details provided by their European counterparts.

The first book in The Vineart Wars trilogy, *Flesh & Fire*, was on *Library Journal's* “Best Books of 2009” list and was a Nebula Nominee for Best Novel that same year.

“Every trip I take is a research trip. Every. Single. One. I make sure of it.”

Case Study No. 3: Another writer considers almost every trip he takes as research because his magpie brain is collecting ideas everywhere he goes. He buys books—often many books—about local history that tantalizes him, and about the local fauna and flora. He buys a local newspaper so he'll have a deeper feel for what the place is like. He always talks to people; he's a people person. But these conversations also become more research as he jots down any local jargon or phrasings along with brief notes on an attitude, a facial tic, any significant details that seem idiosyncratic to that place.

Once he's home he organizes his notes, adds to them as things pop up from his memory, and jots down the story ideas that might have flitted through his muse's imagination, if there are any. He “sets up the desk,” so to speak, so it will be organized and at his fingertips whether he returns to it in 10 days or 10 years. It may not be sheer happenstance that this material, along with his receipts from the trip, might come in handy if he gets audited.

He's been surprised at what he ends up using later and how he uses it, but then should he be? He wouldn't have been drawn to those tantalizing and peculiar things in the first place if they hadn't tickled his muse.

The reason so many of writers claim deductions for every single book they buy, movie they rent, symphony they attend, trip they take, etc., is because they *are* research.

For writers, everything is grist for the mill.

We all know this because we all can point to ideas that seemingly came from nowhere. But where do you think those alluvial layers of creativity in our brains come from in the first place?

They accumulate in layer over layer of experience, reading, watching, learning, even hearing music that raises the hair on our arms. They become the primordial soup where stories begin.

Educators often look for the siblings of a gifted child to also show giftedness. Genetic? Maybe, but there's more. The same family culture that allowed that giftedness to broaden—being read to *often*, being given experiences beyond the home—will be at play with the younger siblings as well.

That's our brains—our gifted children that need to be fed with a vastness of input from many directions if we want to create.

But just between us, is it realistic to claim all my reading expenses?

Reading is research, even when it doesn't seem like it.

Books, movies, and television, can be our continuing education. They keep us current on the marketplace—what genres are trending, what kinds of books are selling.

Beyond that, whether we're reading a centuries old classic or the hot, fluffy new comic novel that everybody's talking about, we're always analyzing and assessing at some level; we may be noting story structure or character tells or new voices. How many times have you been distracted from the story you're watching or reading because the writer made a misstep and it annoyed you? Because the plot is lagging and you're now analyzing what should have been cut instead of who the killer will cut next? How many writers have said, "I just can't enjoy books or movies anymore because I end up dissecting them?"

And then there are all the sparks of ideas we've been talking about. Ideas pop up even if we are supposedly reading something that has nothing to do with what we write, even if we're reading true crime and writing sweet romance.

In Case Study No. 1, the newspaper subscription that didn't look like research to a non-writer eventually paid off with two words that led to a contract, advance, and royalties.

The writer in Case Study No. 2 grabbed the power to make her passion tax deductible. She fanned the flames into a trilogy that took her on a dream trip she'd never have been able to afford otherwise.

In Case Study No. 3, the writer considers every trip he takes as a research trip and claims the expenses on his taxes. He likes the deductions on his Schedule C, but knows that any of the materials he picks up or buys can end up in an article, a novel, a short story, or a screenplay.

The bottom line for any deduction in the case of an audit is, can you prove it is valid?

Prove you spent the money and keep those receipts. It's then up to the auditor to determine whether said expenses were spent in the pursuit of your business rather than your hobby. You have to justify it as a business expense.

One friend has been audited more than once and has never had to prove a thing. She explained to the auditor that she was a pro writer first published in whatever year, and had published novels, short stories, and articles. Her secret weapon was the thick file folders of ongoing projects. She figured they wouldn't want to dig through them but, if they did, she'd let them know that the rest of her proof was still in the car, that she hadn't wanted to carry in the boxes unless absolutely necessary. She didn't need them, but she'd been prepared to prove her claims.

Look, taxes are scary. Everybody's tax situation is different. As a reminder, none of the above is meant as tax advice.

But as for that license to steal?

This is our truth. We aren't stealing anything.

We spin straw into gold, and if we learn how to make that straw more financially beneficial to our bottom line? That's just business.

*Award-winning screenwriter and novelist [Patricia Burroughs](#) is a lifelong Anglophile. She travels the British Isles researching *The Fury Triad*, the epic YA romantic fantasy that she is currently completing. She knows which dog breeds get capitalized and which do not. She and her husband are living happily-ever-after in Dallas.*

Finding the Sweet Spot

Using keywords and market research to plan your novel or series

By Tara Wyatt



Starting a new book or series can be daunting, especially if you're not sure what you want to write is marketable. Using keyword research and market analysis can help you determine where you fit in the current marketplace. It can also improve your chances of writing a more marketable, sellable book. Even if you're writing in a tiny niche, keywords can show where your book fits in today's marketplace.

In this article, we'll cover how to do the actual research (both the paid way and the free way), and we'll take a look at author Ines Johnson and how she put keyword research to use in planning her wildly successful series.

It starts with you

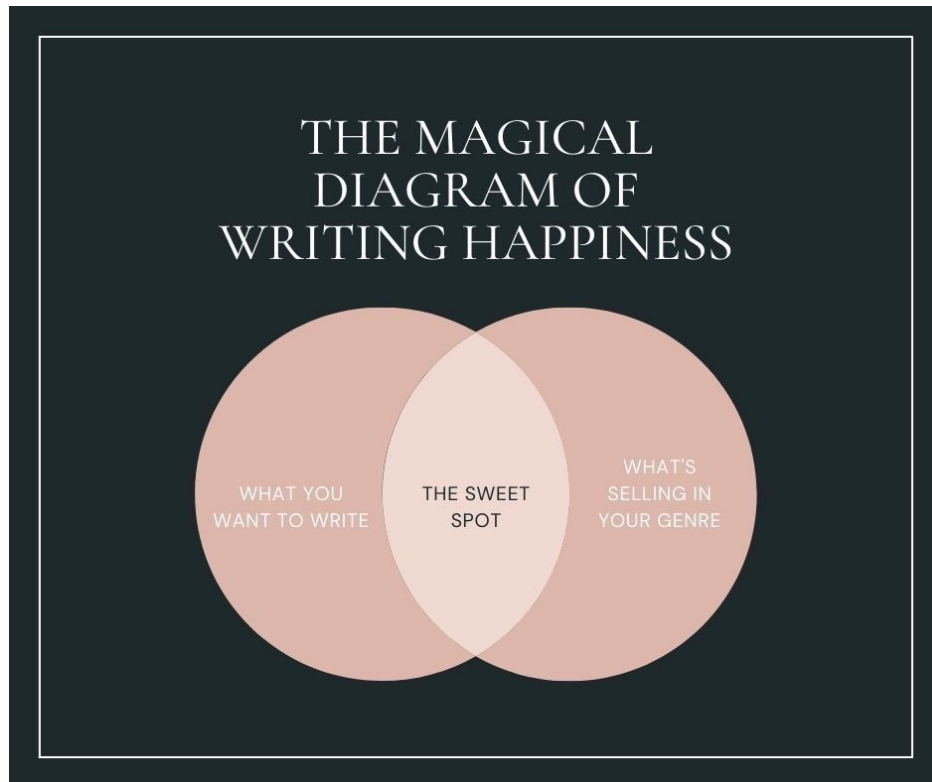
Get clear on something crucial before you start diving into this exciting market research. What do you *want* to write? There will be people who tell you to write the "book of your heart" and others who'll tell you to write to market. I don't think those two things are necessarily separate. If you look at the *Magical Diagram of Writing Happiness* you'll see that there's a sweet spot where what you want to write overlaps with what's selling in your genre. Using keyword and market research can help you find this sweet spot and nail down where your book fits.

But before you start digging into the metadata available, you need to come to it with an understanding of what you want to write.

If you write romance, know what subgenre you're writing in, whether it's contemporary, historical or paranormal, for example. Know what heat level you're aiming for—are you sweet, or are you so spicy your books melt readers' Kindles? If you see something dominating the bestseller list, you don't need to pivot your plans to follow the trend. Don't write a dragon shifter romance if you're not interested in writing a dragon shifter romance. Part of the beauty

of keyword and market research is finding where you fit. I believe we can all find that sweet spot where you're writing what makes you happy while satisfying the needs of readers.

Once you know what you want to write, it's time to delve into the nitty gritty of keyword and market research.



Paid vs. free keyword research

When it comes to doing keyword research, you can either spend money or you can spend time. The size of your budget and where you are in your writing career will likely inform this decision. If your time is limited and you want the research done for you, then I highly recommend a tool called [K-lytics](#). K-lytics is a website where you can purchase reports that analyze the ebook market. The reports are divided by genre, and examine sales volume, rank momentum, pricing, competition levels, keywords, tropes, and categories. The reports are quite lengthy and detailed, but everything you could possibly want is at your fingertips. All you have to do is sort through and analyze the information in front of you.

However, there are a couple of drawbacks to using K-lytics. It's a helpful resource, but far from free. Individual reports start at \$37, and each report only focuses on one genre or subgenre. So, if you're researching multiple genres, it can get pricey quickly. Another drawback is that all of the data is from Amazon. And while Amazon is still far and away the number one platform, it doesn't take into account other ebook vendors, such as Apple, Nook, Google or Kobo. Lastly,

reports are only released or updated once per year, and as we all know, a lot can change in a year. There's a small chance you're working with slightly outdated information. That being said, I still believe K-lytics reports are useful tools—more on that in a bit.

If you don't want to spend the money, then you'll have to spend the time to do the research yourself. Start by examining the top 100 bestselling books in your genre or subgenre, and drill down as far as the bestseller list will let you. For example, if you're writing a romance set in 1308, don't just look at the historical romance bestsellers. Drill down to medieval romance and start looking at the top 100 books in that category. Read the blurbs to see what keywords jump out at you and write them down. Not only is jotting down keywords part of researching the market, but it's an excellent brainstorming exercise. For example, you might write down keywords such as "castle," "knight," "time travel," "bride," "royalty," "highlander," and so on. Playing with the keywords in different combinations can spark story ideas that are still fresh, but fit the current marketplace. You're writing what you want—a medieval romance—but with an eye on the market thanks to your research.

From reading the blurbs, you can also glean an understanding of what the popular tropes are, and you should write those down as well. For example, you might have tropes such as marriage of convenience, forbidden love, handsome protector, and enemies to lovers written down. Just like keywords, these function as both market research and brainstorming fodder.

While looking at the top 100 books, pay attention to the books' other categories. Make a note of how the books are priced, if they're part of a series, and any commonalities among the covers. Is the trend to have a couple? A single shirtless man? A woman in a gorgeous gown? What colors and fonts stand out? Look at all the metadata available to you, even page count because this will give you a sense of word count in the most popular books in your desired category.

Coming back to your list of keywords, open a private or incognito window in your browser, head to Amazon and start searching. See what other suggestions come up when you type "time travel romance" and look at the books in your search results. Doing this kind of research can be tedious and time consuming, but also invaluable when it comes to understanding the market and where the book you want to write will fit.

Putting it all together: keyword analysis and market research in action

Overwhelmed yet? Don't be. While the process can seem daunting, it's not. To walk us through a real-life example, I spoke to author Ines Johnson, who writes sweet romance under the pen name Shanae Johnson. Johnson used keyword research and K-lytics reports when planning to launch her new pen name.

"I knew I wanted to jump into the sweet [romance] market and I wanted to have that as a second business to complement my steamy name," said Johnson. To learn more about the market, she turned to K-lytics and spent a lot of time pouring over the data in that year's clean romance report. "I was interested in what tropes were popular with clean and wholesome romance. I was interested in what keywords were the most popular as well as what people were typing into Amazon. I wanted to see any patterns. I wanted to understand how to price my books."

From this research, her popular series *The Brides of Purple Heart Ranch* was born. Johnson analyzed the keywords in the report to come up with a series concept that fit the sweet category, but that hadn't already been done to death. Using the K-lytics report, she was able to gain an understanding of what readers in her target category (what she knew she wanted to write) were interested in and wanting more of. She also learned what to avoid and what was oversaturated. By analyzing the tropes, categories, keywords and trends, Johnson was able to craft a unique series concept, price it appropriately, give it covers that fit with the bestselling books in her subgenre, and realize her dream of paying her bills with her writing.

"When I first started, my goal was to make \$85 a day because that [added up to] \$2500 a month. That's what it cost me to pay my rent, buy groceries, pay the electric bill and get my kids to and from school," said Johnson. Using keyword research to plan a series—by writing both what she wanted and something that fit within the marketplace, she accomplished her goal.

Now Johnson uses her strategy to energize her backlist as well. "I think we forget about the backlist," she said. "It's already written; how can we keep selling those books? New release money is nice but backlist money is constant. So, look at the bestseller list, look at what's hot and trending now. How can that apply to your backlist?"

Ways to improve the backlist include re-writing blurbs to emphasize popular tropes or keywords, or rebranding with new covers.

Whether you choose to spend the money or the time, engaging in keyword and market research is invaluable for authors who want their books to find a home in today's crowded marketplace. It's possible to write both the book of your heart and a book that will sell. You just have to find that sweet spot. Understanding the market will help you do just that.

- For more information on K-lytics reports, visit www.k-lytics.com.
- For more information on Shanae Johnson and *The Brides of Purple Heart Ranch*, visit www.shanaejohnson.com.

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

Using Broadcast TV Techniques

To put your best face forward on Zoom

By Michele Dunaway



One thing that won't change once the pandemic ends is the move to virtual meetings. Investors predict a hybrid-style work and school future.

While holding meetings and presentations virtually allows authors an exciting new way to reach readers—readers can watch Facebook Live or sign up to do a virtual meeting or workshop with you—going virtual presents its own unique challenges.

The camera, it is said, adds five pounds. And that's just a photograph. And your hair or skin may look great in the mirror every morning, but the moment you are on Zoom, how is it you see every single flaw?

By applying some easy broadcast photography techniques, you can fix those things that drive you crazy and put your best face forward.

Bird's eye vs. eye level vs. worm's eye

Every videographer knows that, depending on the angle of the camera lens, perspective changes. If the camera is high and looking down, this is bird's eye. If the camera is low and looking up, this is worm's eye. Straight on, normal perspective is eye level.

Where is your camera situated? Turn your camera on and look at yourself. Is the person viewing you looking up at you? If so, you are at a worm's eye view, even if it's slight. Depending on the angle, worm's eye will make you appear larger, wider and perhaps even dominating your screen. This position can be viewed as intimidating, especially if there is little background visible behind you.

If the camera is looking down on you or your eyes are looking up at your camera, you are in bird's eye view. Bird's eye view makes things being seen on camera appear smaller, which also can have the effect of making you appear subordinate or less powerful. Also, as people are literally looking down at you, you could be projecting a subliminal message of weakness, even

more so if you are centered in the screen with a lot of background visible above and around your head and body.

Eye level is the great equalizer. Ever notice how in a news broadcast the anchors are all the same height when seated? There is very little difference, even if one would be six foot when standing and the other not even five foot. Same for when they are being filmed at a medium shot from chest up.

Experiment by moving your chair up or down. Or maybe stack your laptop on books to make it the right height. Find the place where you are most comfortable with the eye-level image you are projecting, and then adjust.

Foregrounds & backgrounds

When filming or taking photos, the foreground is what is in front of the subject and the background is what is behind the subject. In an online meeting where you speak, you are one of the subjects being viewed. You project the image you choose. No worries if hanging with your best friends or meeting informally. But if you are interviewing for a magazine? Or hosting a workshop? Definitely take a look around the room before you get online.

First, your foreground. This will be the area in front of you. In broadcast news, microphones remain unobtrusive. Unless you are wanting to project the image that you are in a radio or music studio, any external microphone should either be (a) not visible or (b) under your chin no higher than breastbone, or use a lavalier-size mic that clips to your clothes. Often larger microphones block views of your lips or, depending on perspective, block your face.

Same for headphones. EarPods are usually seen as professional and acceptable. If yours have strings, secure them unobtrusively so they don't move every time you do. Gigantic, noise-blocking headphones again project a radio studio image.

(Notice how even in the busy pic above there is nothing blocking my daughter's face and you do not see her EarPods.)

Now backgrounds.

While many of us don't have the option to move a laptop somewhere because we zoom off a fixed-in-place PC, there are things to consider when using a virtual background.

The first rule is considering what image you want to project. Your viewers know you are not at the beach or a park.

If you do a virtual background, ask yourself, why this image? What is it communicating? Is it overwhelming? Does it fit your brand? Does it allow the viewer to focus on my face?

Finally, be sure distortion doesn't occur every time you move or that your viewers do not see you outlined against the virtual background—you don't want that halo effect or even the slightest, sporadic glimpse of one. You want any virtual background to be clean, seamless and sharp in resolution. Many recommend using a clean office background that frames you.

If you choose to go with your natural camera background, survey your space using the same questions above. What image do you want to project? Cozy? Business oriented?

When you are on screen, you will physically block anything in your background. Put your camera on and survey your room. Busy backgrounds can make it appear as if things are coming out of your ears or the top of your head (these are called mergers). Be sure books don't appear

as if they're about to fall on you. Or that a statue or vase nearby is the same size as you. And you certainly don't want to be like the woman whose photo is circulating as a meme online because of her penis statue/dildo sitting on the bookcase behind her.

Busy backgrounds often detract, so the cleaner and simpler a background, the better.

However, at the same time, a too plain background such as an empty wall or corner can make you appear as if you are in a mugshot (minus the lines).

Remember, your viewer should be focused on your face, but when they look around you, they should get a sense of who you are before being directed back when you speak. Remove things that distract.

And watch windows. Depending on the time of day, any window behind you can make you appear silhouetted.

When reporters go onsite, they survey the location as to the best place to stand. Notice any White House or Capitol correspondent. They will have their location clearly visible but the camera is chest up for a medium shot so that any distractions in that background will be minimal.

Where you are in your frame is called...

Wide, medium or close-up

For online meetings, the medium shot is best.

Wide is where we can see the entire room and your feet. Close-up is literally just your face looming close to the camera—which happens more often than you know. (Try also to avoid the top of your head only shots where your head comes up as if you are rising out of the water) Being too close can make your face appear wider, as if you've gained weight.

Medium is waist or chest up with the top of the screen leaving about two-tenths of the vertical axis just above the top of your head. Medium shots naturally keep the backgrounds to a minimum. Remember, you will be centered on screen.

Lighting

The basics are that light can make you look either healthy or half dead. First, where is your light source? Overhead? A lamp off to the side? You want one main light and it should be on your face. However, it should not be a hard, bright light which washes you out.

(For an example of hard light, go [here](#). Notice how in this photo there are awkward shadows that makes her skin almost appear like plastic.)

You should also avoid having light coming from behind you or from your side. Strong overhead light can give you shadows under your nose and chin, and side light can create shadows on one side of your face.

(For an example of side light, go [here](#). Notice how one part of the face is visible and one is not. While this is a portrait, many Zoomers do this without noticing. For an example of harsh top light, go [here](#). Harsh overhead lighting can make you appear a bit formidable unless tempered by other light sources.)

If you are online a lot, consider adding an external light source that you can direct onto your face. This will also help with the second question, which is, what type of light do you

have? Is it warm? Cool? Warm light provides red, orange and yellow tones while cool light brings more blues and violets. If you are looking too red or too washed out, the fix could be as easy as changing your light bulbs.

For a good photography lighting tutorial (the concepts are similar), go [here](#).

Last but not least: your name

Your online name should be visible. In Zoom, you have the option of changing your name once you connect or you can set it in your profile before you connect. Professionally, you could also consider adding your pronouns. Example: Michele Dunaway (she/her).

To sum up in three steps what you can do:

1. Eliminate noise in your background.
2. Medium shots work best and fill the frame.
3. Add a soft front light to your natural light.

In addition to writing 29-plus contemporary romances, [Michele Dunaway](#) is an award-winning English and journalism teacher. She holds an M.A. in Media Communications and is a 20-year Master Journalism Educator.

Copyright Term

How long do you own your rights?

By Mindy Klasky



This article discusses copyright under the laws of the United States. Copyright laws vary by country, and the information here may not apply to your circumstances if you live in another country. This article is not legal advice for your specific circumstances.

As authors, we generate valuable intellectual property—books that are protected by copyright laws. This article covers *what* is protected under U.S. copyright law, *who* owns those rights, how to put the world on *notice* of those rights, and *how long* those rights last.

What is protected

The first U.S. copyright law was passed in 1790. That statute has been amended many times, including a major overhaul in 1909 and another in 1976. Works created today are controlled by the Copyright Act of 1976, as amended, which is available at <https://www.copyright.gov/title17>.

Under the Copyright Act of 1976, copyright protection begins the moment a work is “fixed” (e.g., written by hand on paper, typed on a computer, or otherwise reduced to a tangible record), even if that work is not registered with the United States Copyright Office.

Ordinarily, a copyright is owned by the author of the work. There are, though, some exceptions, which can affect the duration of the copyright. Exceptions include:

- “Joint works” are created by more than one author. Both authors have a copyright interest in the work.
- “Works made for hire” are created by employees within the scope of their employment. The employer, often a corporation, has a copyright interest in the work.
- “Collective works” (such as an anthology or a bundle) are created by the person who brings together the individual works in that collective work. The editor or compiler has a copyright interest in the collective work, but individual authors retain their copyright in the works they contribute.

Putting the world on notice (starting the clock)

The act of creating a work starts the clock of copyright ownership. Therefore, each copyrighted work should include a copyright notice, indicating who owns the work and when it was created. While copyright notices are not mandatory, failure to put one on a book limits the damages authors can collect in infringement litigation.

Proper copyright notice looks like this: Copyright © 2015 by Mindy Klasky

Technically, it is not necessary to spell out “copyright” *and* include the ©; however, spelling the word provides clear notice to people reading the text, and some international conventions require the © symbol. (No law prohibits using both.)

When authors make minor changes in their works (e.g., correcting a handful of typos), they do not need to change the copyright notice. If, however, they make major changes, they should update their copyright notices. There is no absolute formula for what constitutes a “major change.” Some authors use a 10 percent rule; others use a 20 percent rule or more. In any case, when a work has been subject to major changes, it deserves a new copyright notice with the year the changes were completed: Copyright © 2021 by Mindy Klasky

If authors’ changes are made by adding new sections, such as additional chapters or epilogues, then the copyright notice should indicate both the date of the original work (which still exists in its original form) and the added work: Copyright © 2015, 2021 by Mindy Klasky

How long does the clock run?

The duration of a copyright depends on when the work was created, whether the work has more than one author, and whether the author published the work under a pen name, published the work anonymously, or transferred ownership of the work to a corporation. Here’s the breakdown for works created on or after Jan. 1, 1978, (as controlled by the Copyright Act of 1976):

- **Most new works:** Works created by one author using her own name have a copyright term of the author’s life plus 70 years.
- **Joint works:** The copyright term lasts for 70 years after the last surviving author’s death.
- **Pseudonymous works, anonymous works, or corporate works (works created by an author and assigned to a corporation or works made for hire owned by a corporation):** The copyright term is 95 years from the date of first publication or 120 years from creation, whichever is shorter.

Here are some examples, to study the duration of copyrights created under different circumstances. Consider two authors, Amy Author and Wanda Writer:

- Wanda Writer is born on Jan. 1, 1943.
- Wanda writes the oddly titled *Pseudonym Psyche* on Jan. 2, 1953 (when she is 10 years old).
- Amy Author is born on March 1, 2000.
- Amy writes the also oddly titled *Pen Name Prose* on March 2, 2010 (when she is 10 years old).

- Amy publishes *Great American Novel*, on March 2, 2018 (when she is 18 years old).
- Amy publishes *Pen Name Prose* (written when she was 10 years old) under the pen name Petra Pen-Name on March 3, 2018 (when she is 18 years old).
- Wanda publishes *Nobel-Worthy Novel* on Jan. 2, 2018 (when she is 75 years old).
- Wanda publishes *Pseudonym Psyche* (written when she was 10 years old) under the pen name Sally Pseudonym on Jan. 2, 2018 (when she is 75 years old).
- Amy and Wanda publish the joint work *Astounding Collaboration* on March 2, 2018. (It was a busy year for both of them, with multiple works published.)
- Amy dies an untimely death on March 3, 2019 (when she is 19 years old).
- Wanda dies on Jan. 3, 2043 (when she is 100 years old).

Here are the copyright terms for Amy and Wanda's books:

- *Great American Novel*: Copyright expires on March 3, 2089 (life of Amy Author plus 70 years).
- *Pen Name Prose*: Copyright expires on March 3, 2113 [Date of first publication plus 95 years, which is earlier than March 2, 2130 (date of creation plus 120 years)].
- *Nobel-Worthy Novel*: Copyright expires on Jan. 3, 2113 (life of Wanda Writer plus 70 years).
- *Pseudonym Psyche*: Copyright expires on Jan. 2, 2073 (date of creation plus 120 years, which is earlier than Jan. 2, 2113 (date of first publication plus 95 years)).
- *Astounding Collaboration*: Copyright expires on Jan. 1, 2113 (life of surviving co-author Wanda Writer plus 70 years).

As these examples show, some young authors might choose to publish works pseudonymously or assign their copyrights to corporations to extend their copyright terms. Older authors might choose to use their real names and refrain from assigning copyrights to corporations to extend their copyright terms. Authors publishing works created a long time in the past might choose to use real names to extend copyright terms.

What about older works?

Works created prior to Jan. 1, 1978, are controlled by predecessors to the Copyright Act of 1976, with a variety of amendments that make generalizations difficult. Among other complicating factors, the Copyright Act of 1909 *required* copyright notice and permitted copyright renewals. A chart outlining types of work, dates of publication (if any) and copyright terms is published by Cornell University here. (<https://copyright.cornell.edu/publicdomain>)

In general, works published prior to 1925 are in the public domain because their copyright has expired. Notable books that entered the public domain this year (and can now be the subject of derivative works such as sequels and screenplays) include F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*, Theodore Dreiser's *An American Tragedy*, Sinclair Lewis's *Arrowsmith*, and Agatha Christie's *The Secret of Chimneys*.

A handful of works, however, remain under copyright protection, even though they pre-date 1925. For example, many of Emily Dickinson's poems were written in the middle of the

19th century, but they remained unpublished until the 1950s (subject to the 1909 Copyright Act), and the copyright is currently owned by Harvard University.

Effect of long copyright terms

As illustrated above, most copyrights last for decades after an author dies. Therefore, authors must have plans in place to manage their intellectual property after death. Those plans likely include transferring copyrights through a will or a trust. They might also include appointing an individual to manage potentially valuable intellectual property for decades to come.

USA Today bestselling author [Mindy Klasky](#) learned to read when her parents shoved a book in her hands and told her she could travel anywhere through stories. As a writer, Mindy has traveled through various genres, including romantic comedy, contemporary romance, and traditional fantasy. In her spare time, Mindy knits, quilts, and tries to tame her to-be-read shelf.

The Mad Scribbler

Is the Doctor In?

By Laura Resnick



“Whether we call it cancel culture, social action, or tikkun olam, may we all be able to look inside and make the necessary changes for a better tomorrow for every ‘Who Down in Whoville.’”

—Rachel Spezia, “Dr. Seuss’ Six Nixed Just Couldn’t Be Fixed,” March 16, 2021

Tikkun olam, a Hebrew phrase often translated as “repair of the world,” is a Jewish concept that goes back centuries. It embodies the notion of taking steps to improve the world. What qualifies as a better world depends on your point of view, but the theme of *tikkun olam* is usually about striving for a society where justice and kindness prevail.

Rachel Spezia, writing for a community newspaper called *The St. Louis Jewish Light*, was reflecting on *tikkun olam* in relation to the public announcement last month that six books written by the iconic Dr. Seuss (Theodor Seuss Geisel, 1904-1991) will no longer be published.

“Throughout [that] day, posts were popping up on my friends’ social media pages,” wrote Spezia, mother of a young child. “While many agreed with me that pulling these titles was the right thing to do, a number of posts regarded the act as a product of an overly sensitive society and a casualty of cancel culture.”

The decision to withdraw six Dr. Seuss books from publication met not only with controversy, but also with an avalanche of misinformation.

So let’s start with what actually happened.

On March 2, Dr. Seuss Enterprises (originally founded by the author’s widow to manage the literary estate she’d inherited) issued the following public [statement](#):

Today, on Dr. Seuss's Birthday, Dr. Seuss Enterprises celebrates reading and also our mission of supporting all children and families with messages of hope, inspiration, inclusion, and friendship.

We are committed to action. To that end, Dr. Seuss Enterprises, working with a panel of experts, including educators, reviewed our catalog of titles and made the decision last year to cease publication and licensing of the following titles: *And to Think That I Saw It on Mulberry Street*, *If I Ran the Zoo*, *McElligot's Pool*, *On Beyond Zebra!*, *Scrambled Eggs Super!*, and *The Cat's Quizzer*. These books portray people in ways that are hurtful and wrong.

Ceasing sales of these books is only part of our commitment and our broader plan to ensure Dr. Seuss Enterprises' catalog represents and supports all communities and families.

So this was a voluntary decision, made internally by the managers of the Seuss estate.

The six books in question were not banned or banished.

No one refused to publish, stock, or sell them.

Dr. Seuss was not censored or denied freedom of speech.

Also, as Spezia points out, "Since the six nixed books were 'canceled' voluntarily by Dr. Seuss Enterprises, it doesn't quite fit the description of cancel culture, which typically starts by being called out by the public."

Finally, these six titles were very obscure books in the famous author's canon, and his many beloved classics will remain in wide circulation.

Yet some of the rhetoric issued publicly at the time, in reaction to the announcement, might reasonably have given you the impression that angry torch-wielding mobs stormed the gates of bookstores and libraries all over the land to burn enormous piles of your favorite Dr. Seuss titles.

As a side effect of all the sudden focus on Dr. Seuss, readers flocked to his works and a number of his titles appeared on bestseller lists. (In any case, the Seuss estate [reportedly](#) earned more than \$30 million last year, so his heirs aren't going hungry.)

A couple of years ago, I also chose to withdraw some of my oldest, most obscure titles from publication permanently. In most cases, it was because the books just aren't very good; but in a couple of cases, it was because I and the culture I inhabit have grown since then, and there are some scenes I wrote 30 years ago that I don't want out there today.

Sadly, though, my decision to withdraw some of my books from circulation has not led to denunciations in Congress, hashtags on Twitter, or bestsellerdom on Amazon. I feel so left out.

I got interested in the Seuss story primarily due to my own childhood trauma. My father often read Dr. Seuss books to me at bedtime when I was very little, which I initially enjoyed. But when we got to *Fox In Socks*, a tale told via the author's most notorious tongue twisters ever, my bedtime turned into a sort of endless verbal WWF.

We should have heeded the book's opening warning: "Take it slowly. This book is dangerous!" For example:

When beetles fight these battles in a bottle with their paddles and the bottle's on a poodle and the poodle's eating noodles... they call this a muddle puddle tweetle poodle beetle noodle bottle paddle battle.

My father, who wrote dozens of novels and hundreds of short stories during his lifetime, was highly articulate. He was also extremely competitive. The upshot was that he became obsessed with the challenge of reading *Fox In Socks* aloud to me, all the way through, without making a single mistake.

This doomed enterprise became, from my perspective, an endless marathon of hearing the same bedtime story over and over and over and *over*:

Through three cheese trees three free fleas flew.
While these fleas flew, freezy breeze blew.
Freezy breeze made these three trees freeze.
Freezy trees made these trees' cheese freeze.
That's what made these three free fleas sneeze.

The experience left me scarred for life and unwilling ever to hear another Dr. Seuss book read aloud. To this day, I still run screaming from the room if someone starts speaking in rhyme.

Anyhow, the Seuss estate has not specified its reasons, as far as I can ascertain, for asking a panel of relevant experts to review the author's catalogue. However, the decision to do so doesn't seem surprising, given the era we're living in of widespread reexamination of numerous societal issues, including racism. Additionally, this incident occurs amidst a larger debate in the field of children's literature which is, as [Vox reports](#), in the process of figuring out "how it wants to handle the many other pieces of beloved children's literature that include harmful racial attitudes: books like Laura Ingalls Wilder's Little House series, with its fraught treatment of Indigenous peoples; the Narnia books, with their deeply uncomfortable Middle Eastern villains; the redface fantasies of Peter Pan."

Maybe you're wondering, "How can classic books that I loved as a kid, books I read to my own children or grandchildren, *harm* children?"

In an interesting [article](#) about the value of *recategorizing* rather than erasing such works, Professor Monica Patterson of Carleton University explains, "No children should see racism as something that is normal or funny. There is a lot of research that has examined the impact of the overwhelmingly negative representations of racialized people in popular culture. The research shows that images hurt people. That they contribute to assumptions that translate into discrimination in hiring, renting, selling, lending, treating, teaching and policing in ways that are hugely consequential for all of us. These realities accumulate across people's lifetimes in ways that devalue us all because they perpetuate unconscious and conscious racism and inequality. Retiring racist texts from children's literature is a crucial step in interrupting the racist legacies that continue to hurt and divide us."

I was struck by that phrase "interrupting racist legacies"—the *interruption* of a steady stream of long-accepted "norms" that are, in fact, very harmful to many people.

Writing about the Seuss controversy, Black columnist Charles M. Blow [tells us](#), “As a child, I was led to believe that Blackness was inferior. And I was not alone. The Black society into which I was born was riddled with these beliefs... We had been trained in it, bathed in it, acculturated to hate ourselves. It happened for children in the most inconspicuous of ways: It was relayed through toys and dolls, cartoons and children’s shows, fairy tales and children’s books.”

It happened for children *in children’s books*.

For example, in *If I Ran the Zoo*, one of the books that the Seuss estate is withdrawing from circulation, the book’s two Black characters are portrayed as monkeys.

“It will cause people to re-evaluate the legacy of Dr. Seuss, and I think that’s a good thing,” Philip Nel [told](#) the *New York Times*. Nel, who is a children’s literature scholar at Kansas State University and the author of *Dr. Seuss: American Icon*, said, “There are parts of his legacy one should honor, and parts of his legacy that one should not.”

Indeed. Like many people and many things in life, Dr. Seuss and his legacy are complex. His books often advocated tolerance and love for everyone. In his younger days, his editorial cartoons elevated him as a voice of principle in his field, as his work decried Jim Crow laws in the U.S. and anti-Semitism in Nazi Germany. As the *Vox* article notes, any of his children’s books are justifiably “lauded for their celebration of all that makes us different, and Seuss books like *Horton Hears A Who* and *The Sneetches* appear frequently in anti-racism curricula for children.”

Nel said about the Seuss estate’s decision, “They may be motivated by the fact that racism is bad for the brand, or they may be motivated by a deeper sense of racial justice.”

It should also be noted that our own era is not unique in rethinking representation. A few years after my father ruined Dr. Seuss for me, I became a huge fan of Nancy Drew, the iconic teenage detective, and read all 50 books about her that existed at the time. So I was interested to read recently in a *Wall Street Journal* [article](#) about the Seuss controversy: “In 1959 and 1960, some of the world’s most beloved fictional characters—Nancy Drew, Frank and Joe Hardy, Tom Swift and others—received a face-lift as publishers grappled with a similar challenge. In 1959, series fiction published by the Stratemeyer Syndicate underwent a multiyear rewrite, ostensibly to eliminate racial and ethnic stereotypes and to conform to modern times.”

Sorting through the depictions in classic children’s literature that reflected a world in need of repairing is a complex issue, and even the best intentions will also include appalling mistakes. I tend to agree with *Vox*’s Constance Grady that “it’s unlikely that as children’s literature struggles with this dilemma, anyone is going to be appreciably hurt because they cannot find an in-print copy of *McElligot’s Pool*.” But a century from now, perhaps we’ll be proved dead wrong on that point.

I also agree with Professor Patterson: “It is past time we reach social consensus that racist caricatures should be obsolete. Not everything from the past should be kept alive through republication.”

Finally, I think the point of the Seuss estate’s decision has been overshadowed by the uproar that surrounds it. They withdrew six titles from circulation because “these books portray people in ways that are hurtful and wrong,” and that’s contrary to “our mission of supporting

all children and families with messages of hope, inspiration, inclusion, and friendship.”

Seems to me they’re trying to repair the world a little.

As Spezia wrote upon learning of their decision: “But canceled or not, there is something to consider in all of this. Dr. Seuss Enterprises took an introspective look into their books, their messaging, and their role in children’s literature and made a change.”

Laura Resnick writes fiction, nonfiction, and short fiction.

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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>

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Welcome Packet: *A link to the new member packet will be included as soon as it's been updated.*

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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.

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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

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

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2021 Committees

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

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Address changes may be made on the website.

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