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President's Voice

By Tawdra Kandle



In just over two weeks, NINC's annual conference will kick off in St. Pete Beach, Florida. I don't know about everyone else, but it feels as though it's been eons since I've been with my author community. While last year's event certainly had its own charms, I'm very excited to see even more of my people, to talk and catch up, and to learn what's been working and what hasn't.

For some of us, it's been a while since we've been in conference mode. Maybe we haven't been around more people than those who live in our house or our small social bubble. As part of the conference committee, I've been discussing with the rest of the team the many ways in which all of us can have our best possible event.

First things first: as you prepare to travel to St. Pete Beach, whether you're flying across the country or driving across the state, it's a good idea to pack comfortable clothes that can work for workshops, hanging out at the Tiki Bar, and of course, for walks on the beach. Sometimes the meeting rooms can be a little chilly, so we suggest you include a sweater or sweatshirt in your packing. And comfortable shoes are a definite need—if you're new to the TradeWinds, some hotel rooms are a bit of a walk from the main conference floor.

In this age of caution, it's a good idea to bring your own masks to protect yourselves as you travel and for use at the resort. While masks will be provided to attendees, after nearly two years of battling a pandemic, we know having more than one on hand is important.

On a more prosaic note, having notebooks and pens and a handy laptop for taking notes is essential. This year, the conference committee's goal has been to ensure that every workshop includes several actionable takeaways. Make sure you're ready to take advantage of those.

Of course, you'll want your smartphone, too! In the next few weeks, those of you attending the conference will receive information on downloading and registering to use our conference app. The schedule and map are in the app; it will also allow you to connect not only with other attendees but also with speakers, sponsors, and industry guests. Some of our vendors will offer

one-on-one meetings (either in-person or virtual, depending on their status), and others will provide links to recorded presentations on their products or companies. Please remember that access to the conference app is limited to our registered attendees.

As you build your packing lists and prepare to embark on your NINC conference journey, remember that along with sunscreen, hand sanitizer, and business cards, one essential bring-along is your laid-back, positive attitude. While there will be more of us at the TradeWinds this year, we're not back to a business-as-usual event. You'll find some changes as we continue to take precautions. All of us can enjoy learning, sharing, and networking even more if we can give each other—and especially your conference committee!—a little leeway. Practicing patience and maintaining good humor are more important than ever.

I'm so excited about the workshops and other opportunities our team has prepared this year—and I can't wait to experience this conference with the rest of our attendees as we all prepare to **Level Up!**

See you at the beach!

~Tawdra Kandle

P.S. To our dear friends who can't make it this year—please know that we understand and we will miss you. Look for the **conference reports** in the **November** and **December** newsletters! We're all crossing our fingers for 2022.

Tawdra Kandle is a USA Today bestselling 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/>



The Novelists, Inc. Conference, **Level Up**, is right around the corner.

We are so excited about our conference lineup! You can [view the schedule on our website](#). Please remember that the schedule may change before the conference starts, but you will be able to confirm events using the [Whova app](#).

If you are not attending, remember that we will have recap articles covering **every single workshop** in the November and December *Nink*. For those able to attend the conference, here are a few updates:

New this year!

We are thrilled to let you know that we will now have **sponsored coffee service** for attendees on Thursday, Friday, and Saturday morning. We will also have a charging station available in case your devices need an extra boost.

We are changing the format of the evening sessions. Join us at NINC **After Dark in the Courtyard**. We will be having roundtables each evening along with a cash bar and sponsored dessert treats.

Sponsors

The board and conference leadership are enormously grateful to our sponsors for their ongoing support. Even if a sponsor is not able to attend in person, there will be opportunities to meet with them via the [Whova app](#). If you see a sponsor at the conference or online, please do express your appreciation to these wonderful businesses!

Registration and Q&A Desk

You can pick up your registration packet at the desk in the Grand Colonnade on **Wednesday 2:00-6:30 p.m.** or **Thursday 9:00-10:00 a.m.** The Q&A desk will be open 9:00-10:00 a.m. on Friday. When we don't have a volunteer at the desk, we'll have a phone number posted for you to text/call with questions!

Masks

Masks are requested at all indoor conference events. We'll be providing one reusable mask, plus filters, but don't forget to bring some from home as well.

First-timers Orientation – Wednesday at 6:30 p.m.

If this is your first time attending the conference, please join the conference committee for a quick informational talk on how to get the most out of the conference.

Welcome Reception – Wednesday at 7:00 p.m.

We hope you'll join us in the resort's tropical courtyard for an all-attendees gathering that will include heavy appetizers, a dessert buffet, and cash bar.

Workshops

Workshops will not be recorded, but each workshop will be attended by a *Nink* reporter and full write-ups will appear in future *Nink* editions. We have increased the room size to allow for some social distancing. The hotel will sanitize between each workshop.

Meals

Thursday and Friday include a lunch buffet served by hotel employees (there will be takeout containers available if you would prefer to eat outside or in your room). Dinner will be on your own. There are numerous restaurants within easy walking distance and several on the TradeWinds property. [Click here for a list of restaurants at the Tradewinds.](#) On Saturday, lunch will be on your own, but we hope you'll join us for our **Beachside Blowout Buffet** at 7:00 p.m.

Grocery

There is a Publix close to the resort and you can get [deliveries via Instacart.](#)

Attire

NINC is a high-level conference in a casual atmosphere; feel free to leave your suit and tie at home. Attendees generally wear shorts, sundresses, jeans and tees. Conference rooms can be **cold**, so pack some layers.

Ground transportation

To get to and from the airport (or anywhere in St. Pete) you have two main options. To arrange the **resort shuttle**, call 866-403-3303. Alternately, Uber and Lyft both operate in the area.

Hotel

TradeWinds Island Resort
5500 Gulf Blvd, St Pete Beach, FL 33706
(727) 367-6461
www.tradewindsresort.com

We are looking forward to seeing you at the beach!

Your Conference Committee,

- Lisa Hughey – 2021 Programming Chair
- Tawdra Kandle – 2021 Assistant Programming Chair
- Mel Jolly – 2021 Conference Coordinator
- Terese Daly Ramin – NINC Central Coordinator

We couldn't have done it without you!

A huge thank you to our sponsors for helping make NINC 2021 LEVEL UP a success!



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Written Word **MEDIA**

From the Editor

By Harper St. George



I can't believe it's September already. September means we're gearing up here at *Nink* to bring you all the details from this year's conference. If you're new to NINC, one great feature of our newsletter is that the November and December issues are devoted to bringing you information directly from the conference workshops. We have a reporter stationed in every session taking notes which will be presented in a series of informative articles.

Whether you can't make it to the conference this year, or you can't make a particular session because you attended a different presentation at the same time, we've got you covered. Be sure to check out the November and December issues to find the information you might have missed. I can't wait to see you all at the conference!

September also means that we are beginning to plan our newsletter content for next year. I'd love to add a column (in addition to Laura Resnick's great monthly contribution), and we'd like to know any topics you want us to cover for future articles.

Please take this short one-minute survey to let us know what you'd like to see:

[Take survey.](#)

~Harper

Harper St. George writes historical romance and lives in the Atlanta area.

Donning Yet Another Hat

Selling direct through author websites

By Mindy Klasky



This article discusses U.S. and international taxation law, which varies by country, state, province, territory, and municipality. The information here may not apply to your specific circumstances and is not legal advice.

Authors wear multiple hats, including writer, researcher, editor, and marketer. As e-commerce continues to expand, authors can add yet another identity to their figurative wardrobe: owner/operator of an online store.

Online stores allow authors to control the sale of their books far more than they can through traditional vendors. Authors can set prices without worrying about artificial pricing floors or ceilings.* They can also offer unique products not available at traditional vendors.

Authors generally earn higher royalties on sales through their own websites than those through traditional vendors. The details vary, depending on store platform (e.g., Payhip or WooCommerce), payment gateway (e.g., PayPal or Stripe), and product cost, but most authors receive 80-85% of the cover price of their goods.

But website stores present some challenges—most notably issues in delivering goods to purchasers and in handling taxation.

I conducted a survey in late June 2021, asking authors to report on their experiences running stores on their websites. All percentages noted below are derived from that survey. (Due to rounding, not all numbers add up to 100 percent.)

Building the store

There are many customizable e-commerce platforms designed to provide individualized stores on websites. Each integrates with an existing website to display goods, allow customers to order, and accept payment. Some systems also take care of fulfillment (delivering goods to buyers).

Popular e-commerce platforms include Payhip (used by 35% of survey respondents), WooCommerce (29%), and Shopify (12%). It is also possible to build a store entirely from scratch, using HTML code to create buttons and accepting payment through PayPal or Stripe.

Not all e-commerce platforms function on all website platforms. For example, WooCommerce is designed to work as a plugin on WordPress websites; it's not available on other website platforms such as SquareSpace, Wix, or Weebly.

Some authors (including approximately 64% of the survey respondents) set up their stores themselves, adding the code to their existing website and optimizing it to best reflect their brands. Another 6% had their personal assistant set up their stores, while 30% hired a programmer or web admin to create the store.

Once a store is created, it needs to be maintained. Software requires occasional updates to run smoothly and to minimize the risk of hacking. New products (e.g., newly published books) must be added. Authors can run sales, including special prices for specific time periods. Eighty-two percent of survey respondents reported maintaining their own store or having their personal assistant maintain it. The remainder hired a programmer or web admin for at least some of the maintenance.

Stocking the store

Once a store is installed on a website, an author has a lot of leeway about what products to stock. Among survey respondents, 60% sell ebooks and 53% sell print books. Thirty percent sell audiobooks, 35% sell swag, and 6% sell membership in classes, seminars, or public appearances.

Owning a store allows an author to develop unique products only available at that store. For example, they can build unique boxed sets, including the first book in multiple series, books collected according to tropes, or books related to a specific holiday. Authors can also pair books with swag in unique packages.

Moreover, authors can provide a high level of "fan service," offering books in their own stores prior to releasing those books through traditional vendors. Such early releases reward dedicated readers while simultaneously increasing the value of an author's newsletter (because interested readers will click on links in that newsletter, further building ties to the author and increasing the deliverability of future newsletters).

Delivering goods

When customers purchase electronic goods (e.g., ebooks, audiobooks, class memberships), they typically expect those products to be delivered immediately. The leader in electronic goods fulfillment is [BookFunnel](#), which walks customers through the process of "sideloading" (adding new purchases to e-readers or computers, without the delivery apparatus of a traditional vendor). Sixty-five percent of survey respondents report using the service, which automates delivery of electronic files.

Fulfillment is somewhat more complicated for physical goods (e.g., print books, swag). Fifty-nine percent of survey respondents report that they or their personal assistant handle shipping of at least some physical goods. In addition, 18% of respondents rely on a print-on-

demand store to deliver products. (Shipping directly from a print-on-demand store avoids paying twice for moving the same items.)

Tax concerns

Many authors shy away from website stores because they are concerned about the tax implications of running an online business. Recent [United States Supreme Court rulings](#) have clarified that online store owners are obligated to collect and remit sales tax for all states where their *customers* reside. (This represents a change from the earlier rule, where owners only needed to remit sales tax in states where the owner had a business presence. In the United States, sales tax is managed on a state-by-state basis; there is no federal sales tax.)

Some states classify ebooks as “electronic products” that are not subject to sales tax. And most states further relieve the burden through “garage sale” laws, stating that it’s not necessary to remit sales tax on small or “de minimis” sales. (One of the last holdouts for a de minimis exception, Kansas, rectified the oversight with an exception that became effective on July 1, 2021.) Laws change frequently, though, and store owners should remain current on the requirements to collect and remit sales tax. An overview of U.S. laws on sales tax can be found at [Tax Jar](#).

Store owners may also be liable to pay value-added tax (VAT) on sales made to residents of foreign countries. While some countries have exceptions that cover ebooks, others explicitly state that all sales of all goods, no matter how small, remain taxable.

Store platform Payhip, which is based in the United Kingdom, proudly handles collecting and remitting VAT for store owners. As of this writing, no other major store platform provides that service.

Store owners take a variety of actions regarding collecting and remitting taxes. For authors based in the United States, 79% of respondents accept customers from anywhere; the others limit their sales based on country. (All respondents based in other countries accept customers from everywhere.)

Store owners based in the United States exhibited a great deal of confusion when surveyed about taxes. Some know that they’re selling taxable items. Many aren’t aware that their goods might be taxable. Many rely on the de minimis exemptions (although most say they have not researched those exemptions specifically). Some rely on Payhip (although Payhip might not remit taxes to all tax authorities worldwide).

Overall cost to set up store

The cost of installing a web store varies widely. The store requires a website (usually the same as the author’s), which in turn requires hosting from a service like SiteGround, Bluehost, or GoDaddy.

The website must use a theme or template that is capable of supporting a web store. Many of those themes and templates are free, but paid themes and templates tend to provide a greater range of functions, a more specialized design that might stand out in a crowded field, a higher level of customer support, and more frequent updates. Popular themes include Storefront, Divi, and Astra.

Some store software is free (such as WooCommerce). Other store software—e.g., Payhip and Shopify—have tiers of pricing, providing different features at various price points. Most store software providers offer a free trial for users to experiment with the features for 14 days.

Finally, website stores generally rely on payment gateways such as PayPal or Stripe to accept customers' payment for goods. Those gateways charge a transaction fee for every sale (e.g., \$0.49), plus a percentage of the cost of the item sold (e.g., 2.49%).

Of course, no single author's store is going to challenge the reach of the Amazon behemoth or other traditional vendors. Ninety-five percent of surveyed authors noted that their website stores were less profitable than any of their top three venues. (The remaining 5% were unwilling to answer the question.) While one author reported website sales equaling 10-24.99% of their total sales and another reported website sales of 5-9.99%, all other respondents who answered the question were equally divided between sales of less than 1% and sales of 1-4.99% of their total income.

The future of stores

Many respondents noted that their stores are not currently key income-generating pieces of their sales strategy; however, they are bulwarks against the harsh strategies and potential failure of traditional vendors. Several respondents called for authors to increase the training of their readers, helping potential customers become more comfortable with sideloading.

Website stores remain a tantalizing prospect for authors. In the short term, they offer increased income, with a huge potential as customers become receptive to buying outside the structure of traditional vendors.

At the same time, creating and maintaining a store (especially the international taxation issues associated with the operation of that store) are intimidating for many authors. While there are rumors of third-party sites offering the opportunity for authors to create self-branded stores with minimal fuss, those rumors are not yet public.

*While Amazon reserves the right to match prices to other vendors—including authors selling direct—they're unlikely to discover pricing on most authors' websites.

*USA Today bestselling author [Mindy Klasky](#)'s most recent novel is the romantic comedy *The C Word*, the first volume in her *Love in the Age of COVID* series. Mindy 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, she knits, quilts, and tries to tame her to-be-read shelf.*

Productivity: Part One

Where and when we write

By Michele Dunaway



Ninety-nine. That's how many of you answered my unscientific survey during the last week of May. This first of two articles plans to unpack some of that data and look at the writing process. First, as of June 1, NINC had about 1,100 members, meaning the 99 who responded represent approximately 9% of NINC.

As I went through the data, I learned that, while all of us write, our productivity strategies come down to individual preferences of what we've found that works. Thus, the focus of these articles won't be on a one-size-fits-all silver bullet that will make you more productive, but rather a sharing of strategies that successful authors use, with the hope that you may find something new to try or remember something you used to do but perhaps put aside for whatever reason.

(Full disclosure, I did not take the survey, so my data is not included in any data percentages below.)

Where we write

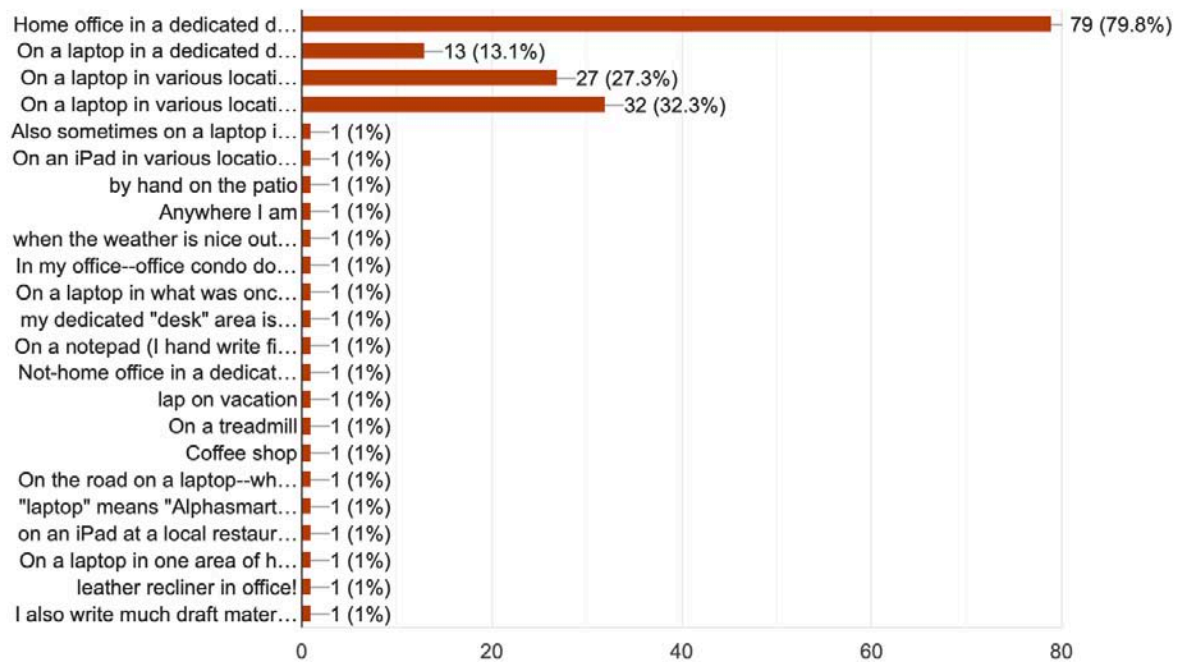
The first question asked about NINC members' writing spaces, with respondents able to check more than one box. The majority of respondents (79.9%) write in a home office with a dedicated desk area.

The second most popular answer saw 32.3% write on a laptop in various spots in or outside the house. Still, it's clear the home office/ dedicated space is critical for members.

Where do you write? Check all that apply



99 responses



Several NINC members even had dedicated space outside their homes, from sheds in the backyard to an offsite office, citing this as helpful for productivity.

"I have a dedicated writing space which is a separate office building in our backyard," [R.L. King](#) said. "The mindset of leaving the house and entering the office is great for productivity."

Once at the office, King also deliberately leaves the work computer devoid of Facebook.

[Pamela Kelley](#) also found having an offsite space helpful, writing in an office condo downtown. "I have committed to regular, daily writing, and since I got an office downtown, when I go there I shift into work mode more easily."

Making a transition to "work/writing mode" was a strategy for many, so they could, as [M.L. Buchman](#) said, "Put butt in chair. Move fingers." While Buchman has "no fancy rituals," minus maybe some music or brain.fm, other authors exercised or developed key habits.

"First, I dress for work every day," [Tara Taylor Quinn](#) said. "I put on makeup, do my hair, dress for success. Then I leave the house and get my Diet Coke. When I come home, I'm coming to work. I come straight to my office and start the day. I am a writer. More than anything, I want to be a writer. And so I write. I sit in the chair, present myself to the keyboard and write. If the words aren't coming, I free write whatever I'm thinking in the actual book (and then delete of course). This all might sound hokey and overkill, but it's worked for me for over 25 years. I've been contracted all of that time and written over 100 books."

Exercise also seemed a good way to get into the writing mode, with many authors saying that they often walked or exercised before going to their computers. [MJ Fredrick](#) said, "After I

exercise, I sit on my chaise (how very romance writerly!) or on my back patio with my laptop and Diet Coke, and get to work. I try to put myself in the story while exercising, but that doesn't always work. I try to minimize interruptions, so it is best if I set my phone somewhere else."

[Gerry Bartlett](#) worked exercise as well as regular accountability into her writing routine, thus adding to her word count, enjoying a bit of socializing, and taking care of her health.

"I have a friend who has challenged me to walk with her each day about 8 a.m., then we start writing in 30-minute sprints with five-minute breaks. We get at least two hours of writing done each morning. We set a timer and call and check in every 30 minutes, walking around our respective houses while we do it, since I'd read it was bad to sit longer than the 30 without a break (she has back issues, I have butt issues)," Bartlett said. "We talk about what we got accomplished. This was new for me this past year and really made me more productive. When I'm in the groove, I keep going and can get many more hours in after our 'accountability' time is done. We do this five days a week, no excuses."

[Misty M. Beller](#) used exercise as her office, combining fresh air and movement to fuel productivity.

"For a little over a year, I've been dictating my writing into my phone, usually as I walk in our neighborhood. I've found the movement really helps my creativity. I copy and paste the dictation from the Dragon App to the Google Docs app, then when I'm back at my computer, I paste the dictation into my main Word doc for the book," Beller said.

Other authors did business tasks first, getting them out of the way. [Cathy McDavid](#) spends the first couple of hours each day around 7-9 a.m. on writing business (emails, promo and marketing, etc.) and reading the news online.

"Then, around 10 a.m., I start writing for the day," McDavid said. "This includes producing new pages, editing old pages, brainstorming, plotting, outlining scenes, working through problems, revising, and rewriting."

When we write

A key to productivity is knowing when you are most productive and protecting that time for writing.

When asked to pick the one time of the day when they felt most productive, almost half (49.5%) said from 8-11 a.m. After that, 14.1 percent said afternoon from 3-5 p.m., closely followed by 13.1% who felt most productive from noon to 2 p.m. Only 7.1% chose 4-7 a.m. Clearly the majority of those surveyed felt most productive before 5 p.m.

What time do you feel write best? (Even if you write more than one block, choose the one where you feel most productive.)

99 responses



Many respondents even had a set process of what occurred when, emphasizing the importance of this kind of structure to putting words on the page.

“If I don’t have a schedule I’m doomed,” [Linda Winstead Jones](#) said. “Working Monday through Friday with a word count goal, and then taking the weekend off like a real person works for me. Setting my own deadline doesn’t work, but moving forward five days a week does the trick.”

“I usually write in two or three chunks of about 1.5 hours and have word count goals,” [E. Chris Ambrose](#) said. “I aim for at least 2,000 words per day when I’m drafting.”

Like Ambrose, [Kris Michaels](#) writes on a set schedule from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. “I sprint for 45 minutes and take 15-minute breaks,” Michaels said.

Although many did have set writing hours, that wasn’t the case for everyone. Only 36.4% write every day, but the hours vary, while 29.3% write every day with set hours. Rounding out the top three was that 20.2% do not write every day and the writing hours may vary.

Do you have set or scheduled hours/days for your writing? Pick the one that BEST describes your average, WEEKLY writing schedule.

99 responses



[Lenora Worth](#) writes every day at various times but finds herself most productive in the afternoon.

“I stick to my schedule as much as possible,” Worth said. “It’s a job, so I go to work each day. I keep running notes on what I need to get done. I figure my word count and then how long to the deadline, and then I see how many words per day I need to hit. Breaking the word count down to days needed helps with my productivity.”

[Amanda M. Lee/Lily Harper Hart](#), who writes 30 books a year that range from 60,000 to 95,000 words, also writes at various times throughout the day, but the key is that she writes every day on an iPad at various locations in and out of the house. She writes 17 chapters in a normal week.

“I write 3K an hour,” Lee said. “On Monday through Friday I have to finish three chapters a day. Each chapter is 2,800-3,500 words. I also never stop in the middle of a chapter. On Saturday and Sunday I write one chapter a day. All the writing is done in the morning, usually by 1 p.m. at the latest. So, I basically write 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. weekdays, including breaks between chapters. Then in the afternoon I edit a different three chapters, which usually takes me about an hour.”

[Michele Dunaway](#) writes contemporary romance and teaches full-time high school English and journalism. She’s currently at work on two new series.

Know Better, Do Better

How to address problematic content in your published works

By Trish Milburn



We are currently living in a time of increased awareness of society's wrongs regarding racism, homophobia, transphobia, ableism, religious intolerance, misogyny, and other prejudices, as well as the resulting efforts to improve going forward. Fiction is often a reflection of society, so those societal problems are present in prose. Readers are quick to point out, privately or publicly, when they read something offensive or triggering.

So how can authors handle situations in which their work may have problematic elements, whether self-identified or pointed out by readers? Thinking about this thoroughly before acting as a precautionary measure will prevent knee-jerk reactions that can make a delicate situation even worse and do permanent damage to your career.

How to respond to readers who voice problems

If a reader contacts you regarding potentially problematic content in one of your books, you don't have to respond immediately. It is best not to respond to accusations when your emotions are heightened, regardless of whether the accusations are valid.

[Jeannie Lin](#) said it's important to respond calmly when you do reply and typically limits her interaction to one response.

"I have a generic response that strives for a courteous and friendly tone," Lin said. "Something along the lines of: 'Thanks for reaching out. Wow, I didn't think of it that way' or 'OMG, how did I miss that?' or 'You've given me something to think of.' Then if the person is angry, offended, I'd sincerely apologize. And then if it's fixable, say you will take a look into it and will try better in the future."

[Donna Alward](#) believes it's important to really listen to any feedback and criticism because there may be validity to it.

“You have to remember that this is not about you,” Alward said. “This is about another human being standing up and saying, ‘This is injurious to me.’ If that’s the case, the only course of action is to exercise compassion and understanding. It costs \$0 to be kind and inclusive. We all make mistakes. The difference is doing better once we know better.”

Alward said that whatever you do, don’t dig in your heels, double down, or relentlessly explain. This never goes well.

If you are called out on social media instead of privately, Lin said she would not reply at all unless you are savvy on social media and really know how to diffuse the situation.

“Social media is a strange beast,” Lin said. “I don’t like it when people try to give rules about what to do on social media because it’s seriously a bad place for nuanced interaction, and how you generally conduct yourself will determine a lot. So the only rule I’d say is if you are being called out on social media—just don’t respond. If they want to rant about how ugly and awful your book is and they are a stranger to you, you have to just let it slide. Don’t quote tweet snark back. Don’t subtweet. Just let it go.”

If there is merit to what they’ve said, Lin suggested taking steps to fix the issue and then provide a public statement about what you’ve done to remedy the situation.

“Authors who are worried about being in this position should consider that it is a daily struggle of trying to ‘do the right thing’ for marginalized authors,” Lin said. “And this policy of not reacting immediately, of processing my feelings, of constructing a measured response that’s not all about me—this is what I’ve had to do on a daily basis to deal with the challenges and microaggressions of publishing the non-mainstream stories I write.”

How to address problematic content

Something that is perceived as offensive or problematic to someone else, you may not have thought of it being received that way or may have even forgotten it’s in your book. This is particularly true of older books when viewed through a modern lens.

Once you have been made aware of problematic content, it is up to you as the author whether you change or address it. If you own the rights, it makes changes easier. When a publisher owns the rights, however, things are more difficult and the content at issue may not be able to be changed, at least not quickly.

So how do you determine if it rises to the level of something you want to change?

“Now that someone’s called you out, you can’t hide behind ‘I didn’t know’ any longer,” Lin said. “That doesn’t mean you have to rush and change things, but is it something you want associated with you? If you want to keep it, be prepared to live with it, knowing that it may cause hurt, anger, or offense.”

Lin said if the content is going to stay the same, you may address this in an author’s note in the book or on your website. If you don’t own the rights, however, contact your publisher to discuss the situation. If they can’t or won’t make the change, you may put an explanatory note on your site and possibly the Amazon page if you feel it’s necessary to speak up about it.

When [Jacqueline Diamond](#) got the rights back to several backlist titles, she re-read them with an eye toward polishing and updating. She came across some areas that didn't seem problematic when she wrote them but bothered her when she re-read the books. In some instances, all she had to do was replace or remove a line to alleviate the problem.

In another book, one with a wizard hero, the problems were more troubling.

"The opening scene especially concerned me because he and the heroine fell under a sort of spell and made love soon after meeting," Diamond said. "Reading with today's eye, I thought it might sound as if the heroine had been drugged."

This, combined with another dated aspect of the story, led Diamond to retire the book.

The use of sensitivity readers can be beneficial if you're going to be republishing older books after some sprucing up. Alward used a sensitivity reader for one of her books and was made aware of something she decided to change before republishing.

"I have a mixed-race heroine," Alward said. "It was mentioned that the heroine was perhaps too comfortable with the hero being a cop, and I realized my reader was right. I didn't have to make a huge change because the hero was also someone the heroine had known since childhood, so there was still a level of trust there. But I did make changes acknowledging the perspective of a person of color and law enforcement. It doesn't form a big part of the plot, so it was really about layering at a character level in a particular scene."

[Pamela Gibson](#) said she's surprised none of her readers ever pointed out how in her older books the heroes sometimes did not heed the initial "no" by the heroines.

"When I got my rights back to the first two, the first thing I did was make changes that would be acceptable now, given the #MeToo movement," Gibson said.

It's in publishers' best interests to fix genuine problematic content when they can. Carol Dunsmore from Harlequin's Author Engagement and Communications team said Harlequin reviews popular backlist titles and books that are being reissued, working with authors to revise outdated content as needed.

"As you can expect, it would be a huge undertaking to review the tens of thousands of backlist titles in Harlequin's catalogue, but we take appropriate care to review backlist titles prior to reissuing to ensure they offer a positive reading experience," Dunsmore said.

When you may not want to make changes

To [Janis Susan May](#), authenticity in a historical novel is not something that should be changed to reflect modern viewpoints.

"Characters must be true to their upbringing, their beliefs, their time, their situation," she said.

Sometimes characters say and do awful things. In some stories they stay that way to illustrate a point or moral of the story. Others undergo a redemptive arc. But even in this, there is potential danger as evidenced by the [recent outcry](#) over a Christian novel winning a national award despite the hero in the book having taken part in the atrocities at Wounded Knee.

"Some characters are not politically correct, some are vulgar, some are cruel, some are racist, and others are psychopathic, but if that is their character, that is how I write them," May said. "I do try not to make such bad behavior heroic, though."

An upcoming story by [Laurie Alice Eakes](#) in an #OwnVoices anthology includes a couple of characters who are horribly ableist.

“This comes from personal experience and what I have gleaned from others’ experiences over the years,” Eakes said. “The story needs these characters’ behavior to work and to draw attention to the truth of the sorts of prejudices marginalized people face.”

[Jackie Barbosa](#) agreed that having characters that are racist, sexist, or homophobic reflects reality, with a caveat.

“Those things are **real**,” she said. “Portraying them is not, in and of itself, wrong. It’s portraying them as **right** that’s wrong.”

*[Trish Milburn](#) has written more than 50 novels and novellas, including her current *Idol in Love* series set in the world of K-pop. She currently is serving as the acquisitions editor for Nink.*

How To Write Body Language That Goes Deeper Than A Basic Shrug

By Joanne Grant



It is widely believed that at least 50% of human communication is nonverbal. That means that if you rely on dialogue alone to convey character, emotion and behaviour, then the reader will only get half of the story. But how do you utilise body language successfully and in a way that is more compelling than a run-of-the-mill nod or shrug?

In this article, I will give you tips on how to approach body language to ensure it has purpose and meaning, and how to go deeper with your body language descriptions.

Find the significance of body language scene by scene

Watch how humans interact. We're always moving our bodies, either consciously or subconsciously. If you don't describe enough body language in your writing, your characters can come across as wooden and unbelievable because this isn't how people interact.

However, it would be a mistake to try and capture every gesture and twitch a character makes. That would soon become distracting for the reader.

So, when is it good to show body language and what purpose can it have? Let's look at some examples:

- **Convey emotion** – Using nonverbal emotional responses can have far more impact than verbal responses alone, and emotional reactions are a great way to build and reveal character.
- **Set the tone** – Body language can convey tension and mood. If a character stands rigid and glowering when we first meet them, we can assume the situation they're in isn't great.

- **To break up dialogue** – Stretches of dialogue can feel like floating heads having a conversation. Interjections of nonverbal description will break up the dialogue and bring the scene to life whilst enhancing the meaning of the dialogue.
- **Show character** – Body language can help deepen characterisation. A lot can be inferred by the way someone moves and their facial expressions.
- **Add subtext** – Subtle or unusual body language can hint at something deeper. This can be used to great effect, for example, in crime novels, when the reader is looking for clues to the identity of the guilty party.
- **Create movement** – A scene lacking in any body language will feel static and unrealistic. Body language can breathe life into a scene.

Identifying why you're choosing to add in a body language description can be a good way to determine how much description is suitable.

For example, if it's a pivotal emotional scene, then it could have more impact to utilise a more evocative or detailed exploration of body language to convey the emotion a character is feeling. However, if you are punctuating quick-moving dialogue with movements, a lengthy pause to describe body language in detail may be unnecessary and can slow the pace.

Look at the context and what the purpose of the description is and focus on what adds to the story at that point in time, in terms of character, setting, or tone.

How to add depth to descriptions

Whether we like it or not, we all have habits that characterise us. When I asked my now husband what his first impressions of me were, he said, "You move your hands a lot when you speak." I'm not sure if this added to our attraction or not, but either way he married me! The notable thing is he noticed my nonverbal quirks.

And it's not all about the limbs either. We have around 42 muscles in our face that help us to convey emotions. I favoured the one-eyebrow rise during school years; it was the best nonverbal way to get my "I'm not impressed" point across to annoying teenage boys during class!

What is the meaning behind the movement?

I'd encourage you to think about how you and those around you use body language. Consider the nuances of the movements and what they mean. It's not unusual to gesticulate when speaking, but some people do it when they are nervous, others when they are excited. Think about the meaning behind that movement, then how you can show it in more depth. Is there a slight tremble that is at odds with the seemingly confident movement in those hands?

And did I, in fact, save my most withering of one-eyebrow raises for the boys I secretly liked? Think about how you could show this with other nonverbal cues—a slight quirk upwards of the mouth, an unconscious hand to the hair.

Body language is open to interpretation and you can add depth to your description by identifying the meaning you want to convey. After all, each of us is unique, just like characters, which is why writing deeper body language will flow from getting to know your characters.

Let's dig deeper

Think about how your character would behave on an average day. How would they walk and gesture when they talk? What about their facial expressions? Now turn the dial up—because let's be honest, no one wants to read about an average day! How would they express themselves on an awesome day? Would their body movements change? Would their facial expressions be more exaggerated?

Now let's get mean and dial it right back down. How about a really bad day? Think of the range of emotions: fear, grief, anger, disappointment, and how they may express them in a nonverbal way.

If you complete this exercise for two or more characters and their reactions are the same, then their unique personalities are not yet coming through with their actions. There will be similarities in the way humans express emotions—tears for grief, smiling for happiness—but knowing your character as an individual will help to create nuances in how they express these emotions. Their body language should stem from their character. Return to who they are and build out their movements from there.

The signature “tell”

Body language can be great at creating subtext by dropping clues for the reader and other characters to pick up on and interpret, or misinterpret. It can be fun to give a character a signature “tell” or a physical habit that holds greater meaning, whether they are aware of it or not.

Think of poker, where getting to understand other players' “tells” can help you win or lose the game, depending on whether you read the tell correctly. Those tells are subtle, often unconscious movements, but in writing, they will have attention drawn to them because they will be described.

If you want to give your character a signature tell, it's best to save it for scenes of stress and significance; otherwise it may be too obvious. And if you're curious, look up poker tells for some inspiration of subtle movements and what they often mean.

How to avoid clichéd body language

There is a fine line between a convention of a genre and a cliché, and this can also depend on personal preference. But anything that is overused, either in your own work or within your genre, can feel tired and clichéd. So how can you avoid this?

Check repetition

Recognise if you use similar phrases, or types of signature tells, to describe body language book after book. Readers will notice if your heroine always bites her lip when nervous or characters always dip their chin to mean “yes.”

Be mindful of characters within a story displaying the same body language. This, again, suggests they are not unique characters, unless they are intentionally or subconsciously mirroring one another.

If you are repeating yourself, return to your characters and think about what body language is unique to them.

Balance is everything

Too much emphasis on body language and overly detailed descriptions can be distracting. They can also slow the pace and be disconcerting—what’s with all the arms flailing about?! And if you give your character a really quirky habit, use it sparingly and for effect. You don’t want to pull the reader out of the story.

On the flip side, too little description and you end up with one-dimensional characters and the story feels flat. Achieving balance is important in bringing your characters to life and can really elevate your storytelling.

Utilising body language is an incredible tool for showing rather than telling, as well as for creating believable, well-rounded characters. If you want to deepen the way you express body language, start with your character. If you know your character how you know yourself, you can uncover the nuances of movements and reactions.

But understanding the significance of the movement in the context of the story is also very important. Sometimes you will want to show the subtle raise of the shoulders as a character lowers their eyes and hangs their head as the fight drains out of them. And other times, you may just need to tell the reader that they shrugged.

Joanne Grant is an editorial coach with nearly two decades of publishing and editing experience. Joanne’s publishing pedigree was forged at Harlequin and she has edited hundreds of romance novels over the years. She loves nothing more than coaching writers of all genres to overcome their barriers to deliver their best work. If you’re interested in finding out how she can help you achieve your writing goals, get in touch—Joanne loves to chat! For inspiration, tips and offers, sign up for her [newsletter](#), join her [Motivation for Writers!](#) Facebook group, or connect on Twitter [@JoanneMGrant](#).

The Mad Scribbler

Awards Madness

By Laura Resnick



“Winning the National Book Award for your first book is an efficient way to lose your writer friends. People are cheered by your success—but only up to a point.”

—Ron Chernow, biographer

“Are there any die-hard defenders of the Pulitzers—outside of Pulitzer winners, Pulitzer finalists, and prize-mad editors?” journalist Jack Shafer asks in his article, [“The Pulitzer Prize Scam.”](#)

The Pulitzer Prize was established in 1917 at Columbia University via a posthumous endowment by publisher Joseph Pulitzer. Shafer’s article discusses how winners are chosen (“in secret, with the jurors deliberating in seclusion like the College of Cardinals electing a new pope”), describes decades of intense competition (a.k.a. “prize-whoring”) for the prize, and shares bald criticism of the winners: “frivolous,” “arbitrary,” and “difficult to justify.”

Such criticism isn’t new or specific to Shafer. Nearly 40 years ago, in a book called *Press Watch*, journalist David Shaw explored a raft of gossip and allegations surrounding this prestigious award, such as: people traded favors for votes; the same people and publisher won the award too often; some people had been finalists so many times, it was just “their turn” to win; the awards were dominated by big Eastern newspapers and white males; the awards were dominated by diversity of region, gender, and race because there was a conscious attempt to negate the impression that they were dominated by big Eastern newspapers and white males.

Stop me if this sound so familiar you suspect I’ve gotten a bit muddled and am actually writing about awards in your fiction genre today.

It is a reliable constant throughout the writing world (and, yes, in other fields, too) that awards make people crazy. Writers can become obsessed by the desire to win, bitterly envious

of others who win, enraged by the “wrong” works winning, and plagued by feelings of inadequacy for not winning.

Although I am not that fixated on awards, I understand. Probably most of us do.

For example, I was once a finalist for the RITA Award, given by the Romance Writers of America (RWA). It was years ago, and I still remember how much I wanted to win. Numerous editors had turned down the book in question, and a couple of agents had refused to represent it. So winning a RITA Award would have meant tremendous vindication and triumph for me. I also thought that winning a RITA might position me to write more romance, a genre where I’d always had such a high rejection rate that I had more or less left it by then and was making my living by writing fantasy full-time.

So *not* winning that RITA was a deep disappointment, one that stayed with me for months. And, yes, for a while, my disappointment made me irrational enough to resent the winner, a bestselling author who’d already won many RITAs. I felt—and let me specify, my feelings were unreasonable—that she shouldn’t have entered the contest. I believed (without any evidence at all) that winning that award would change my career; whereas for her, it was (I assumed without asking her) just one more addition to her collection of identical trophies.

I only stopped resenting her after I became rational enough to realize that her victory didn’t necessarily take anything from *me*; if she hadn’t won, then perhaps a different finalist would have won instead. I’m embarrassed to recall how long it took me to recognize that.

So, yeah, I understand the craving for award recognition, as well as the emotional morass one experiences over not getting it.

I also recognize that winning awards isn’t just a matter of ego or gratification. They can be an author’s path to success. Although my father, Mike Resnick (1942-2020), published dozens of science fiction novels, he’s best known for the many awards and nominations he received primarily for his short fiction over the years. He held the record for the most Hugo Award nominations of any writer in science fiction history, getting nominated 37 times and winning five times. He was also the first person to be nominated for four Hugo Awards in a single year. He was nominated 11 times for the Nebula Award (given by SFWA, the Science Fiction/Fantasy Writers of America), and he also won or was nominated for awards in Japan, Australia, Spain, France, Italy, Croatia, and Poland. This level of award recognition was central to his professional profile and success.

And according to a recent article in *The Guardian*, writer Phillip Roth (1933-2018) aggressively engaged in self-promotion, “collusion, networking and back-scratching” to win prestigious literary awards. The article quotes one of Roth’s biographers describing him as “pushy” and “wheeler-dealing” in his private correspondence with people who could help him win, including accounts of quid pro quo favors Roth did for people who sat on committees that presented him with the prestigious awards that became part of his profile as (per the *Guardian*) “one of America’s foremost novelists.”

So it’s not surprising that something so fervently desired and sought as award recognition can—and sometimes does—reach a dangerous tipping point and spill over into madness.

One prominent example of this is the Puppy controversy over the Hugo Awards which consumed the sf/f community for a couple of years.

The Hugo Awards are given by the World Science Fiction Convention; anyone who registers as a member of the convention can nominate their favorite works and then vote on the resultant lists of nominees. So despite the traditional annual round of “have we lived and fought in vain?” among sf/f fans and writers when the nominees and winners are announced each year, the results reflect the will of the voters.

Well, several years ago, two similar factions, known as the Sad Puppies and the Rabid Puppies (official names which they chose themselves, for reasons too tedious to recount), decided they were dissatisfied with the works that got nominated for Hugo Awards and wanted to shake things up. They collectively became known in sf/f as the Puppies.

The sort of works they thought were getting unjustly overlooked by the Hugo Awards were—brace yourself for a shock!—mostly the sort of work the Puppy ringleaders and their friends wrote and their editors published.

The Puppies urged their friends, allies, readers, and followers to register and vote, and by their second year, they got a few works onto the Hugo ballot (but no winners). They got more organized by the third year (though they denied organizing), when they posted a slate (which they denied was a slate), essentially telling their supporters exactly what to nominate. Hundreds of people all nominating the *exact* same works turned out to be a very effective way to game the nominating process (they denied gaming), and the entire Hugo ballot that year was nearly identical to the Puppies’ slate. Hugo voters reacted by choosing “No Award” as the winner in every category on the ballot where there was no non-Puppy nominee to choose, which also proved to be very effective.

These events expanded to widespread quarreling throughout the sf/f community. Personal friendships ended. Professional relationships ended. People who wanted no part of any of this became the target of enraged blog posts and scathing debates because they had won a Hugo in the past, or because they had *not* won a Hugo in the past. People who had no interest in this quarrel found themselves under pressure to withdraw—or *not* to withdraw—from the Hugo ballots because the Puppies had slated their nomination. *Game of Thrones* author George R.R. Martin wrote lengthy essays on his blog arguing with the Puppies—possibly because everything GRRM writes is lengthy? At one point, the Puppies announced they were boycotting Tor Books, the biggest publisher in sf/f (because...reasons, blah blah). And they accused Tor and its authors of winning too often.

The whole mess wound up in the media, reported on by *The Wall Street Journal*, *The New York Times*, *Entertainment Weekly*, *Slate*, *The Washington Post*, and *Salon*.

What eventually resolved all this was *not*, you’ll be astonished to learn, award-maddened people suddenly coming to their senses. Instead, it was some math geeks and data wizards who came up with a method of tabulating votes that mitigated the effects of block voting in the nominations process. It effectively neutered the Puppies (sorry, I couldn’t resist), who lost interest after that.

Today, the Hugos remain a prestigious award, but the sf/f community is permanently changed by those events.

Admittedly, the sf/f genre has a well-deserved reputation for being unusually volatile (off the top of my head, I could also recount recent controversies in the World Fantasy Award and

the Nebula Award), but awards madness is by no means particular to that community.

For example, RWA, which has had previous controversies over its annual awards, experienced another one this summer. The recipient of the first annual Vivian Award (replacing the retired RITA) in the “Romance with Religious or Spiritual Elements” category was a novel that many members found extremely offensive. There was a prompt online eruption of anger, including stated decisions to quit the organization.

RWA released a [statement](#) supporting the judging process and the book’s win. Some of the reasoning deepened the anger of members who were already very upset. Citing that statement as “the last straw,” another Vivian winner [announced](#) she was returning her award and resigning her membership.

Then, about a day later, RWA angered any member who was not *already* infuriated (such as admirers of the book in question, as well as friends and fans of the author) by changing its position and [rescinding the award](#).

It seems a sure bet to say the organization will be a long time recovering from this episode.

Nor is RWA the only organization that has enraged pretty much all its members first by giving someone an award and then by rescinding it.

When the Mystery Writers of America (MWA) announced bestselling novelist Linda Fairstein would receive the organization’s prestigious 2019 Grand Master Award, controversy erupted immediately.

“In her former life working for the Manhattan district attorney’s office, she oversaw the prosecution of the Central Park Five,” MWA member Steph Cha wrote in the [Los Angeles Times](#). “Fairstein was personally involved in securing the false confessions that formed the prosecution’s entire case... The Five served six to 13 years in prison before their convictions were vacated following the confession of a serial rapist, confirmed by DNA evidence, in 2002. Fairstein has never apologized or changed her position on their guilt.”

Writer Attica Locke, who had recently won MWA’s Edgar Award, publicly urged the organization to reconsider and rescind. A number of other writers also called for revocation of the award.

A few days later, MWA released a [statement](#): “After profound reflection, the Board has decided that MWA cannot move forward with an award that lacks the support of such a large percentage of our members. Therefore, the Board of Directors has decided to withdraw the Linda Fairstein Grand Master award. We realize that this action will be unsatisfactory to many.”

And, indeed, it was. NYT bestseller Andrew Gross commented, “For a person who has devoted her career to real-world situations that have advanced women’s rights, to be attacked and demonized by people whose toughest real-world decisions are how to define a gerund or what book to review is a sign that the inmates are truly running the asylum.”

All of the events I’ve described were hugely disruptive to the organizations presenting the awards and to their communities of writers. Moreover, even when they don’t get bogged down in controversy, writing awards are a substantial drain on an organization’s resources and focus.

All of that, plus the oft-observed phenomenon that awards tend to make people crazy, are among the reasons that one of NINC’s founding rules, debated and voted upon at the first-ever NINC business meetings back in 1989, was that we would never have awards.

We believed that awards would soak up far too much time, focus, volunteer work, and budget within NINC, and do so without serving the organization's mission, which has always been mutual education, networking, and advocacy for career novelists.

Since voting with the majority to ban writing awards in NINC all those years ago, I have witnessed numerous events that have convinced me again and again that we made the right decision back then, and that we've been right to stick to it ever since.

Mind you, like most other writers (I assume), I would be very happy to receive award recognition. Just not from NINC.

Laura Resnick lives trophy-free in the Ohio River Valley and wrote this article with a recently-rescued litter of newborn kittens napping under her desk.

NINC Member Discounts



Crafting beautiful books is at the heart of everything that **Reedsy** does. Founded in the summer of 2014, Reedsy has built a community of over 1 million authors and 2,500 freelance professionals to help bring more than 15,000 books to market each year.

Reedsy wants to help NINC members build their publishing team, editors, designers, marketers, or translators to help bring your books to life. Maintaining a diverse roster of professionals ensures that authors can find the right people to help. Reedsy allows you to exercise your creativity by making sure their services are perfectly suited to your genre and budget.

Learn more at <https://reedsy.com/>

NINC members receive a \$50 discount. Find out how at [Member Freebies and Discounts](#) on our website.

Membership Benefits

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

Are you taking advantage of all your member benefits?

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

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

Networking

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

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

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

Follow NINC on Twitter: https://twitter.com/Novelists_Inc

Conference:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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Address changes may be made on the website.

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

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