



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

 novelists,
inc.

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President's Voice

By Tawdra Kandle



I'm writing this column at the end of September, one day after I drove home from St. Pete Beach, the TradeWinds, and the NINC2021 Conference.

I don't think it's any secret that I've always loved this conference. For me, it was the first professional writer organization of which I'd been a member, and from the first year I attended, I met authors whom I'd fangirled over for years. But no one was aloof or stand-offish. Everyone was welcoming and gracious. The workshops were incredibly high-level and detailed. I came home that first time excited about the future of my career—and with a group of new friends and colleagues.

I wanted to be more involved—and so I volunteered. I reported on workshops. I moderated sessions. I facilitated roundtables and Night Owls (the precursor to our NINC After Dark program). And then eventually I volunteered to be assistant to the programming chair.

This year is the third conference I've been involved in planning and executing. 2019 was our highest-attendant event in recent history. 2020 was at the other end of the spectrum, with only about forty of us present. Consequently, 2021 was a welcome difference: we weren't quite up to 2019 standards, but over 200 attendees made the hotel feel positively full!

For all of you who wanted to be with us but couldn't, please know that you were missed. Everyone who attended—thank you for making 2021 possible and wonderful. All of your positivity, flexibility and appreciation made those of us involved in planning the conference so happy—and grateful.

As a group, we run the gamut from trad to indie, from wide to KU, from plotter to pantsers ... we're unique. Some of us have been published for decades, and some of us for fewer than five years. But at the end of the day, we're all professional novelists, and we all appreciate this organization that unites us.

And from my point of view, the best way to express how much you love NINC is to become part of our volunteer team! The newsletter is always looking for contributors and article suggestions. The Nominating Committee needs to fill board positions every year—and we also seat a new Nominating Committee each year. At the conference, we need reporters, moderators

... and for those daring enough, we're recruiting assistant chairs to several committees.

A wise person once said that volunteers are the lifeblood of any organization, and this is as true of NINC as of any other group. Over the next few years, my goal is to help refine our planning process so that each year, whoever is coordinating the event has a template for hitting goals. My hope is to leave the programming committee even better than I found it.

NINC is a vibrant, growing organization. It's up to all of us to make sure that we only improve as we move forward.

I hope you'll consider volunteering wherever you can! Feel free to reach out to me at president@ninc.com for more details. (On our new website, we'll have a page where you can fill out a form to express interest—more info on that in the near future.)

If you were with us this year, I hope you had a fabulous conference! If you weren't, I hope to see you next September.

~Tawdra Kandle

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/>



We are back home from sunny Florida and still processing all the fabulous information disseminated from our speakers and industry guests. We had 27 workshops, 40+ roundtables, 14 sponsors (be sure to thank them!), and 20 (in person) industry guests, plus various online availability to connect with industry guests who couldn't attend.

If you were unable to join us, there will be recaps of *all* the workshops in the next two newsletters. We hope you can make the trip to the beach next year!

And finally, a huge thank you to our conference team:

- Karen Fox – Hotel Liaison
- Mindy Neff – Registration (Thanks to Sue Philips, Sandy Chvostal, and Pam McCutcheon for manning the desk.)
- Harper St. George and Trish Milburn – Conference Reporter Coordinators
- Katy Madison – Moderator Coordinator
- Violet Howe – Social Media Chair
- Victoria Thompson – Trad Liaison
- Laura Hayden (Who did everything under the sun, including programming the app and assembling the brand-new charging station.)

Additional thanks to all the volunteers who were moderators, recorders, and roundtable facilitators.

We couldn't have done this without you, and we appreciate each and every one of you!!

Lisa Hughey, Programming Chair
Tawdra Kandle, Assistant Programming Chair
Mel Jolly, Conference Coordinator
Terese Ramin Daly, Central Coordinator

Don't Pants Your Career

Career plotting for mid-level authors

By Tara Wyatt



When it comes to writing our books, some of us are pantsers—those who write by the seat of their pants without a solid outline to guide them—and some are plotters. Some of us are a combination of the two. There's no one right way to write a book. In fact, if your method is resulting in completed projects that you're happy with, I'd say it's working for you.

However, when it comes to our careers, too many of us are pantsing it—moving forward without a plan, goal, or solid vision as to where we'd like to be six months, 12 months, or two years from now. While it's perfectly acceptable to pants your books (I've written more than 20 books this way), you can't pants your career.

If you're unsure where to start when it comes to career planning, keep reading.

Organize your workflow

Before you start planning, first do some reflecting and analyzing. Creating an effective and realistic plan requires a level of self-awareness when it comes to not only your goals, but also your capacity and capabilities. Open a blank Word document or grab a journal, and answer the following questions:

- How many books do I write a year, on average?
- How long does it take me to write and edit each book?
- Is my current pace sustainable? Could I do more? Should I do less? Where is my happy medium?

There are no right or wrong answers to these questions. Answer them honestly, and pay attention to how you feel as you answer them. Don't take on more than you know you can realistically handle, because that's a sure path to burnout.

Once you have a clear picture of how many books you can comfortably release in a year, create a spreadsheet with a column along the top labeled “new releases.” Down the side, create a row for each month of the coming year. Now that you know how long it takes you to write a book, slot in your releases for the next 12 months. (Note: If planning this far ahead stresses you out or doesn’t work for you, cap it at six months).

Plan your promotions

Now that you have a clear picture of your upcoming release schedule, it’s time to plan your promotions around those releases.

When you have a new release, look for what’s similar in your backlist to promote. If you write in series, this could be an earlier book in that series. If you write standalones, it could be a book with the same or similar trope, setting, or overall theme. It’s up to you when you’d like to run the promotion—a few weeks before the release, during the release, immediately after the release. Experiment and find what works best for you. Discounting a backlist book creates a low barrier to entry into your series or your books, enticing new readers. This is especially helpful if the new release is a later book in a series, which is more difficult to market to new readers. By discounting an earlier book in the series, you reclaim some of that marketing power. Once you’ve selected the backlist title to promote in support of your new release, note how you plan to promote it. Will it be on sale for 99 cents? Temporarily free? How are you going to market the sale? Are you going to apply for a BookBub? Submit to other newsletters such as Robin Reads, Ereader News Today, or Fussy Librarian?

When you’ve selected your backlist promotions, create a new column in your spreadsheet called “Discounted Backlist Book” and slot in your planned promotions next to your new releases. Now you’ll have a clear picture of not only the new books you’re releasing, but the backlist books you’re going to promote to support them.

Marketing activities

Now that you know what new books you’ll be releasing as well as what discounted books you’ll be promoting in support of that release, it’s time to plan your other marketing activities. Take a look at what you currently do and/or enjoy doing when it comes to marketing. Some examples of marketing activities outside of a discounted book promotion include:

- Social media: Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, Twitter
- Newsletter swaps with other authors
- Cost-per-click ads on platforms such as Facebook, Amazon, and BookBub
- Giveaways (joint giveaway with other authors, Goodreads giveaways)

Please note, I’m not saying that you should do all of these things. These are merely examples of marketing activities. What do you usually do? Is it working for you? How do you know? Analyze what you’ve done in the past to make the best possible decision for the future. When you’ve decided what marketing activities you’re going to undertake, create a new column in your spreadsheet called “Marketing” and slot in what you plan to do. It could be a

Goodreads giveaway, a Facebook ad campaign, newsletter swaps with other authors in your genre, all of the above, or something entirely different. But figure out what you'll be doing, and slot it in.

What if I'm a slow writer?

As we all know, the pace of the market is increasingly relentless. There are authors releasing a book a month, and if that's the speed where you're comfortable and fulfilled without burning out, power to you. However, many of us are not writing six, eight or 10 books a year, and that's fine. If you only write one or two books a year, there are ways to boost your income and round out your calendar.

1. *Rebrand an older book or series.* If you have a series that isn't selling well and is a few years old, consider putting new covers on the books (pay attention to what's selling in your genre to make sure your covers are right for the market) and writing fresh blurbs. Then discount the first book to 99 cents or free and promote it as best you can. Freshening up an older series can attract new readers, especially if you treat the rebrand just like a new release, with cover reveals, a sale, and other activities you do to promote your new releases.

2. *Write a free prequel to an existing series.* Consider writing a short story or novella that serves as a prequel to an existing series. Adding content to a series and creating a new entry point can bring in new readers. You could also treat the prequel just like a new release. Because it's shorter, it won't take as long to write but will still help boost sales of that series.

3. *Create box sets of existing content.* If you have a multi-book series that's at least five books long, you could create a box set of the first three books in the series and treat the release of the box set just like you would a new book. This box set can also act as an excellent promotional tool in the future. For example, if you have a new release in that series, you can offer the box set for 99 cents or \$1.99 as your discounted book. You could also create a box set of three or four first-in-series books if you have multiple series to play with, and treat that box set like a new release as well.

If you don't write in series, you could create a box set of two or three books with the same trope, theme, or even setting. Be creative! Another idea would be to team up with other authors in your genre and offer a multi-author box set for free for a limited time. This type of cross promotion is excellent for finding new readers.

4. *Create audio versions of your books.* This is a pricey option, to be sure, but audiobooks are a growing market. Creating audiobook versions of your backlist books is a way to find new readers, round out your release calendar, and diversify your income streams. However, it does come with a heavier investment than, say, putting together a box set. But it's an option if you have the cash flow.

Putting it all together

You should now have a clear picture of the next year (or six months, or possibly even 18 if you like to plan that far ahead) and all of the big, important pieces. What new books are you releasing and when? What backlist promotions will you do to support those new releases? What other marketing activities are you planning?

You can customize your spreadsheet to reflect your workflow and plans. For example, some people create a separate column to track applying for BookBub Featured Deals. Others create a column for cover reveals, or series rebrands, or audiobook releases. It's up to you how to use it. But I do encourage you to use it, even if you're a pantsier when it comes to your writing. With a little planning, strategy, and organization, it will be that much easier to grow your author career and take it to the next level.

Tara Wyatt is an award-winning contemporary romance and romantic suspense author of more than 20 books. She lives near Toronto, Ontario, Canada.

Productivity: Part Two

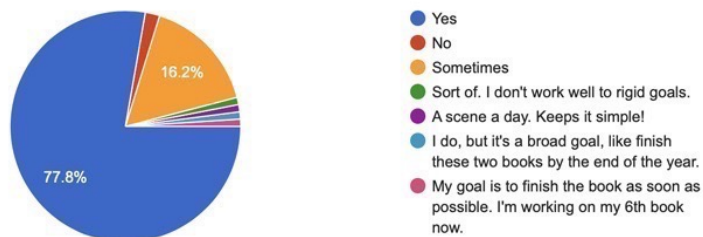
How we reach our writing goals

By Michele Dunaway



To increase productivity, 77.9% of those surveyed said they set goals; 16.2% said they set goals sometimes; 2 percent didn't set goals; and 3.9% answered "other," offering responses such as "It's a broad goal, like finish two books" ([Barbara Meyers](#)) or "I don't work well with rigid goals" ([Grace Greene](#)).

I set writing goals
99 responses



Goal setters used various approaches, but most began with books per year.

"My family has an annual tradition of "New Year's Pages" where we write down at least three successes from the past year, three disappointments, and three (or more) goals for the next year," [E. Chris Ambrose](#) said. "This is where I see how I did last year and look ahead to what I hope and intend for the coming year. I have a spreadsheet where I break these overall goals down into stages (research, brainstorming, drafting, revising, sending to betas and to my agent, prepping for publication, promotion), and I lay them out with theoretical deadlines. The dates are mostly there as a sorting mechanism and to remind me what to work on next when I have moved a given project onto the next phase."

As for setting daily, weekly or monthly word count goals, 61.6% did this, while 24.2% did not.

Do you set a daily, weekly, or monthly word count?
99 responses



[Maddie James](#) did not set word count or page goals. “It’s too much,” James said. “I started shooting for a scene a day (six days a week) a couple of years ago. It’s a simple enough goal and never becomes overwhelming. And if I can meet that daily, I can get several novels and novellas out in a year.”

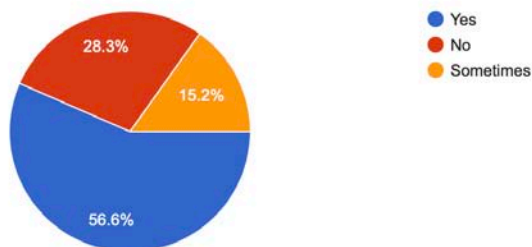
[Tara Taylor Quinn](#) made her goals flexible. “I determine how long I have to write the book, divide the number of words in the book by the number of days I have to write it—sometimes giving myself a day off a week, sometimes not—and from there I determine how many pages I have to do a day,” she said. “I like to stick to 5,000 words or under during a normal writing schedule so I have time to refill my well before the next day. I set goals I know I can meet. I know I can do 5,000 words in a day. If my timing lets me do less, I do so. Maybe one week I only do 2,500 words a day. Or I do 500 words a day if that’s what the project calls for and all I want to do.”

For [Cap Daniels](#), writing goals fell into two categories: general and specific. “Generally, I want every manuscript I write to be a little better than the previous creation,” Daniels said. Daniels constantly hones and improves as a daily practice. “Specific goals, for me, are usually release dates. I expect high daily word count from myself and determine my annual launch schedule prior to the new year.”

Many authors worked one to two years ahead, and 56.6% kept track of writing progress using calendars, spreadsheets, and other mediums.

Do you use to-do lists or check sheets, calendars or grids to keep track of your writing progress?

99 responses



“I create a publishing schedule for every calendar year. Once I know what and when I’m publishing, I book my editor/ cover art/etc. Having set deadlines does motivate me because (1) I’m feeding my family with my earnings and (2) so are my editors and cover artists,” [Mari Carr](#) said.

Author interests also drove productivity.

“I usually look at things first from a yearly perspective, ie: what do I want to accomplish? Self-publish a box set? Get a new book out with XYZ publisher? Take the Amazon Ads course... and actually do the work? Pitch a new series to ABC publisher? Then I decide which ones are doable, how the timing might work best for my life, and then zoom in to what has to happen quarterly, then monthly, then weekly, then daily,” [Roxanne Snopek](#) said.

After drafting, Snopek builds in a week or two for cover design, back cover copy, SEO-friendly hooks, pull-quotes for social-media memes or ads, website updates, newsletter issues, etc., before she returns to revisions.

“This is why I don’t claim to write every day, as in creating new words, but I work on my writing every day,” Snopek said. “It’s like gardening. There’s a lot going on under the surface that no one can see, and then all of a sudden, a book appears!”

Building in time helped reduce stress and burnout.

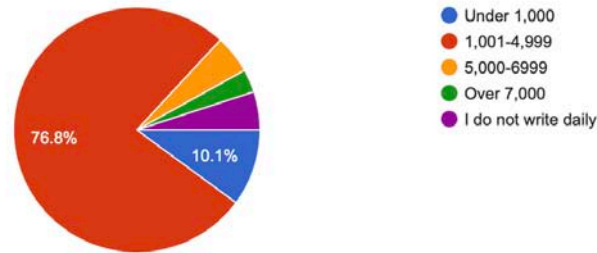
“I have a word or scene count goal that I track daily and weekly,” [Jessica Ellicott](#) said. “I block overflow time into my calendar in case I don’t meet my goal during my daily focus block earlier in the day. I use Google calendar to plan and the word count in Scrivener to keep track. I set goals that are audacious enough to create real momentum but not so bold as to create burnout. I’ve learned not to overdo it. I use a no more than “x,” no less than “y” approach to productivity. It helps me to move forward routinely without pushing too hard.”

“If I stay on track with my word count, the stress is less but never really gone,” [Leslie Langtry](#) said. “I keep my goals at a reasonable level, but sometimes life gets in the way. I can have a week where, because of an illness, crisis with the car/sewer line/missing cat, I don’t have the chance to write. Stress is unavoidable in this business where we’re inside our own heads all the time. But burnout can be deflected by having reasonable output goals and not trying to overextend ourselves.”

As for daily word counts, 76.8% write between 1,001-4,999 words on an average day, while 10.1% write less than 1,000 words. Five percent do not write daily, while another 5% write between 5,000-6,999 words. Three percent write more than 7,000 words on an average day.

How many words do you write on an average day?

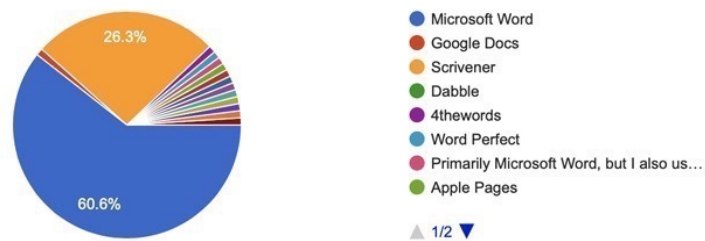
99 responses



To do the actual writing, 60.6% use Microsoft Word. The second most used software was Scrivener, chosen by 26.3%.

What is the main writing/word processing program/software do you use?

99 responses



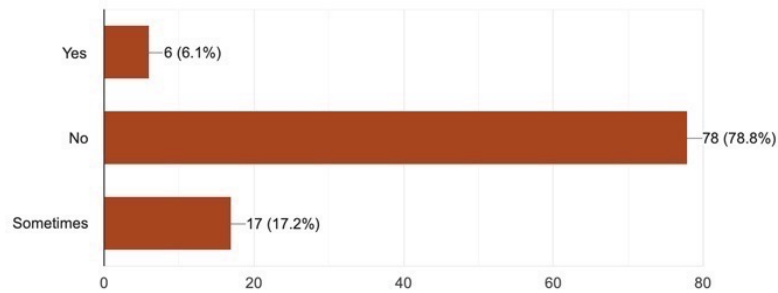
Jacqueline Diamond found the shortcuts in MS Word helpful, saying: “I’ve customized shortcuts such as using auto correct for long or difficult names. (Ever tried typing Elizabeth dozens or more times in a manuscript? I just type ‘Eliz’ and it fills it out). Each book gets its own Time file, with each chapter listed along with when, where and POV. Characters’ files are copied and then updated for subsequent books in a series.”

L. Penelope likes Scrivener, saying, “It allows me to keep my Story Bible and manuscript in one document and have templates for characters, locations, magic systems, and other world-building considerations. I can move my scenes easily if I need to rearrange them. I use the customizable metadata fields extensively to plan my scenes, I label each scene by POV character and use the status to mark drafts. Snapshots help me go back in time to see what I’ve written and archive scenes. There are so many ways that Scrivener has made me more efficient, I can’t even name them all.”

Only 6% of those surveyed created works using dictation, as 78% said they didn’t dictate. However, 17.2% sometimes used dictation.

Thinking of your works-in-process, do you dictate any of your words/story?

99 responses



“I found it massively upped my word count and added improved texture to my writing,” Ellicott said. “I feel as though I can hear my characters more clearly and that their voices come out even more naturally.”

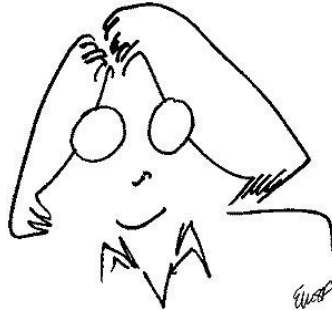
“I save my wrists from overuse injuries by dictating some parts of the story,” [Jenna Kernan](#) said. “I can walk and dictate. I can sit on the beach and dictate. I use a portable recorder and later attach it to the computer, press ‘Transpose’ and watch the words pour onto the page. That’s very satisfying. This really boosts the word count, but there is a lot more editing involved when I dictate.”

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

We are all Other

How authors can dive into cultural research

By Elizabeth MS Flynn



Authors are eternally curious, and they are fortunate in that they can not only assuage their curiosity by doing research for their latest work in progress, but also learn a lot of interesting (not necessarily related) facts as well. They can discover fun facts like when buttons came into use (earliest noted 5,000 years ago!), but they also can find out about other cultures and what makes them unique, and how that can be used for unique characters and stories.

But where do authors start? When researching other cultures—any culture at all, whether it's one we're familiar with or one with which we have no familiarity at all—we are faced with how to track down the information we need, ascertain accuracy, and enrich our work. Start at the basics:

General research

Wikipedia is *one* place to start, but can't be the *only* place. Believe it or not, another place would be children's books and textbooks, because those authors have to boil down and explain complex concepts to a younger audience. If you're trying to figure out how to tackle a subject and you're not sure where to begin, tracking down a children's book on the topic or a related one may be a good place to begin.

I asked [Lerner Books](#), the publisher of children's books and middle-grade books, what they would recommend for a start on difficult, complex subjects, and they responded with a few possibilities: For Black history, *Ruth and the Green Book* and *Unspeakable*. For Asian American/Pacific Islander history, they recommended *Kiyo Sato* and *Sachiko*. For LGBTQ history, Lerner recommended *No Way, They Were Gay?* Covering all of those plus Latinx and Indigenous, the publisher recommended *Into the Streets*, and, finally, for all of those and more, *Dictionary for a Better World*.

Interviews and biographies

Track down a member of the culture you're interested in (if you're doing research for a look at daily life circa 35 BCE, however, you may have to stick to the history books and biographies), but keep in mind that the responses you get may be specific and unique to that subject. *Always* keep in mind the background of the person. If possible, track down more than one interview subject.

If you can't, you may want to get the information by diving into a related point of interest, something you *can* find information about, and expand from there to find what you need. If you want an idea of some of the issues that were notable during the middle to late 20th century, for example, you could examine a biography of a notable person during that time. And keep in mind if you want to interview as a journalist, decide whether you want to get to the heart of the story or more about the people.

Social and religious attitudes

Anthropologists will tell you that you must separate your own beliefs and attitudes from that of your research subject if you want to understand the mindset of another. You may be a Christian, but to truly understand, say, Hinduism, you'll have to set aside your skepticism about the existence of multiple gods. Simply put, your beliefs are not necessarily those of another culture. Margaret Mead made her name as a young anthropologist in Samoa, but her work was eventually considered to be flawed because she made many of her conclusions based on her assumptions going into the study instead of describing the culture with an unbiased eye.

Authenticity readers (also known as sensitivity readers)

These readers are specialists in a given topic, and as author services provider [Reedsy](#) explains, they read manuscripts specifically to look for "cultural inaccuracies, representation issues, bias, stereotypes, or problematic language." One example might be focusing on the differences between China, Korea, and Japan. The latter two cultures have their origins from the former, but they are very different, and the languages are not intelligible to each other—in speech. The Korean and Japanese written languages have their origins in the Chinese language, and to *some* extent the Korean, Japanese, and Chinese people may be able to discern what is being written in the other language, but only to some degree.

Spoken language, though, requires an article on its own, as does being able to discern between the facial characteristics of the three cultures. (Hint: If the Asian cultures can't do it consistently, neither can anyone else.) All three of those cultures are different yet similar, not unlike how there are differences between Scotland, Ireland, and England, all of which have similarities but are different and also come from a long shared history. Differences can be hard to discern: if you're not from European ancestry, the differences between the Nordic people and the Mediterranean people may be negligible. If you're from European ancestry, you see the difference keenly.

Then there's **viewpoint**, which can be classified under social and religious attitudes. Consider the differences in how cultures think. To get an idea, you may do well to find books on sociology and anthropology. In his *Geography of Thought*, Richard Nisbett avers that there are

differences between Eastern and Western thinking; Western culture emphasizes individualism versus Eastern culture, which emphasizes common values within the society. Western goals of the individual aren't the same as the Eastern goals of the individual, which are counted into the goals of the society as a whole. But there are similarities, too. Both have the concept of family embarrassment—"saving face" is a common admonishment in Eastern societies (as in, don't bring shame to your social group), and is echoed in Western societies when you hear your parents saying, "Don't embarrass me." (On the other hand, according to Nisbett, to compliment someone in public can *give* face. And public praise in both Western and Eastern societies is a good thing.)

As [Asiaexchange.org blog](#) notes, it may take time to adapt to a culture different from your own, but your reward will be a deeper understanding of the culture and topic: "Embrace those things that are uncomfortable, those things that don't make sense, those things that are frustrating. Those are the things that will teach you the most."

There are mystifying elements in any society, ones that don't make sense to anyone not in the know. But there are elements common to every culture. Every culture, every society, every person needs food, shelter, community. But they may approach those things very differently. Knowing those things will flesh out your characters into real people, not stereotypes.

I have a [checklist](#) on my website that allows you to consider what makes your characters fully thought-out human beings. Taking a look at the elements allows you to decide whether your characters are real, memorable people.

So in this way we are all other. We have so many things in common; whether it's saving face or your parents saying, "Don't embarrass me," there's the element of "We do that too!" no matter where you go. All it takes is a little research.

Elizabeth MS Flynn is a professional editor and has been for more than forty years, working with topics as diverse as academia, technology, finance, genre fiction, and comic books. Her work for this article comes from her studies in anthropology, with a linguistics and folklore concentration.

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Behind the Curtain

Talking covers with Tordotcom's Christine Foltzer & indie authors

By Patricia Burroughs



Following up on the August 2021 *Nink* interview with Guido Carotti, senior designer at Harper Collins Mass Market Paperbacks, I interviewed Christine Foltzer, associate art director at [Tordotcom Publishing](#). Then the voices of indie authors, who serve as their own art directors, were added to the mix.

In the beginning, marketing?

For Christine Foltzer, everything begins when she receives a cover memo from the book's acquiring editor. The cover memo includes genre/subgenre, story summary, notes and/or visuals of locations, objects, characters, and comp covers of existing books that are representative of the mood, style, format, art, or other elements the author and editor like.

But before arriving in the art department, Tordotcom Marketing has already had input in the book's future, including determining which catalog the book will be in—spring/summer, fall, or winter—and thus its publication date. Work on the cover begins about a year in advance.

Foltzer adds the book to her bullet-point list of upcoming books. Many NINC authors also recommend scheduling far in advance, for many designers are booked solid for months.

Some authors are so prolific they also have to keep their version of a bullet-point list to keep up with multiple covers at a time.



But marketing is always the priority.

The purpose of a book cover is to market the book, which means visibility to the target readers.

That's where comp covers come in for the indie writers, too.

One NINC author spent “hundreds of hours” studying recent bestselling covers in her genre to find comps for the covers she DIYs herself. Again and again, our members stressed the importance of comp covers, of studying the competition, knowing which cover trends are current, and, most of all, understanding the common elements of your genre's/subgenre's covers.

Important and overlooked aspects of finding and choosing comp covers

- They shouldn't be written by authors whose names alone sell books. King, Rowling, Patterson, etc. Those books fall into an entirely different category.
- They should be successful. You don't want to emulate a cover with minimal sales and an unknown author. It's already not working for them.
- They must be in the exact genre/subgenre.

Too obvious? Not really. It's easy to fall in love with a cover or a style and *know* it's perfect for your story and want it—even though it fails the above tests. It's even more common to dislike the cover conventions of a genre/subgenre and decide to use something to your own preference.

You're the art director. And unless the author's going to buy 100,000 copies of their own book, our authors overwhelmingly say, kick that “author” to the curb and let marketing rule the day.

Regrets, we have a few

Given the freedom of going indie, I
indulged my artistic leanings.
However, in the last six months I've
recognized the folly of focusing on a
cover that isn't helping sell the
book. I'm now much more aware of
reader expectations for my genre
that are selling well.
Linda Cardillo

NINC indies mourn the money and time squandered on covers that didn't work yet could have had they understood the importance of genre conventions in a book's visibility and sales.

“The most brilliant cover concept
can fail terribly if you don’t
NAIL the genre dead center,
no matter how much
you hate the look.”
M.L. Buchman

Several authors ditched the bare chest covers common in romance. Low sales changed their minds, and with new covers sales have surged. Readers can now identify them as “their kind of book.”

The reverse can also be a problem. Without realizing it, some authors sent the wrong signals with their book covers. Reviewers told two authors that they expected a different kind of book from the cover. Coincidentally, both books—one a mystery and one a comic thriller—looked YA.

“My wife has some design skills
and lots of software. She does all
my ads. My sister-in-law has a
degree in graphic design. Neither
of them has training in book
covers, nor do they read in my
genre. You wouldn’t take your
Corvette to a diesel mechanic.”
B.R. Kingsolver

Book covers are labels, and readers expect to get what the label tells them is inside, whether authors like that labeling or not.

“I learned I have to
give my readers what they want in covers
or they don't buy the book.”
Desiree Holt

Foltzer shares cover ideas with editors, who consult their author. After adjustments and getting approval, Foltzer then starts the cover on its way to the actual art. She commissions original art for some, commissions freelance book designers for others, and does some in-house.

Regrets, we have more

The other top regret shared by many indie authors? Not commissioning professionals who are experts at book cover design and also the genre/subgenre of the book.

This is a three-pronged error:

- “Knowing Photoshop” isn’t enough.
- Even knowing graphic design isn’t enough.
- Even an award-winning book cover designer isn’t a good choice if their portfolio is in an entirely different genre.

You wouldn’t take your Corvette to a diesel mechanic. So why would you put your career and bank account in the hands of your neighbor/niece/coworker unless they are experienced, successful book designers in your genre? Most indies reported regretting that kind of early choice and would do it differently today.



Where to find a designer

- Word of mouth from successful indie authors in the same genre/subgenre
- Sometimes listed on copyright pages
- Reddit and other online communities where authors and artists gather
- Genre-specific Google searches (book cover designers + subgenre)
- Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, etc. (Twitter hashtag #portfolioday)

Rights and licenses

Questions to ask; not all necessarily apply to any specific situation:

- The prices of print and audiobook covers?
- Does your license include using the cover on web pages, store sites, social media, merchandise?
- Is the art/photo exclusively yours or also available for other authors?
- Can you share in-progress drafts with your readers to vote on options?
- How many sample designs, drafts, and revisions are provided?
- Do you provide other options, such as behind-the-scenes videos of photoshoots that the author can use in promotions?



Designing your own covers

DIY is a growing trend and one that, while tempting, can be as disastrous as using an inadequate designer.

Some respondents admitted that they liked their early attempts and were proud of them at the time. But down the road, they recognized the work was amateurish, which hurt sales. Readers assumed the insides were as amateur as the cover.

Many authors are thrilled with the skills they're learning and the new covers they are making. The learning curve on Photoshop, for example, has been tough but gratifying, and they know their covers will only improve as they learn more.

BookBrush and Canva

One writer says the combination of graphics experience and BookBrush has led to replacing older mystery covers.

Stock photos and premade covers

Book designers use stock photos as a starting place and then manipulate, layer and add objects or characters that are also digitally changed. But unadorned stock photos with text can work in some genres. Book designers often have premade covers on their websites. Authors sometimes find covers there. Two writers regretted snapping up premades, assuming they could write something to fit. They acknowledge they'll never do it again and wish they could have that money back.

It's amazing how many of us decide to learn to create book covers without any knowledge of Photoshop and go for it anyway. Some look at the many long hours of frustration and less-than-stellar results and consider the experience time and money wasted. Others take courses to learn or watch YouTube videos and ask for help in Facebook groups.

Several members can't visualize what they want until they play around with the elements themselves, which led to them finally acquiring enough skills to take on the task for good. Some take on DIY because they can make effective covers. Others are happy to turn the job over to the professionals when they can. And some take the hybrid road in covers, making some for

themselves and hiring professionals to do others. One such author mentioned hiring a romance cover designer because getting those right is imperative, whereas some of her other book covers are less demanding.

How do you know a cover works?

Crowd-sourcing your readers is a popular method to test covers. Some share on social media and may even let readers vote on options or models. Some create a private Facebook group or subset of their email list for this use.

One author showed three different male models to readers to choose between, only to have one of them dismissed overwhelmingly because the readers said he was on too many covers already.

Authors ask for the above feedback as a way to build anticipation for their new book, even if they're already pretty sure what they're going to do.

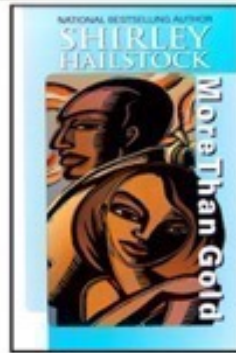
Keep in mind:

- If there's a free promotion and not a lot of downloads? Very likely, the cover isn't doing its job.
- Reviewers saying they expected a different kind of book from the cover? Again, the cover isn't doing its job.
- Some people change covers and sales surge.
- How many clicks an ad gets may be indicative of your cover's appeal.
- Your cover reveals on social media or in your newsletter should get responses.
- One author tested her covers with Facebook ads. Once she found the best, she went ahead and recovered an entire series.

Once is not enough

Several authors say they update covers every few years. Others change covers as soon as they suspect one isn't working. All say updated covers usually boost sales.

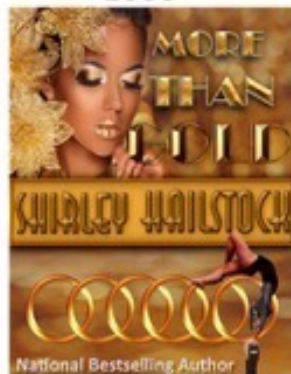
THE POWER TO UPDATE



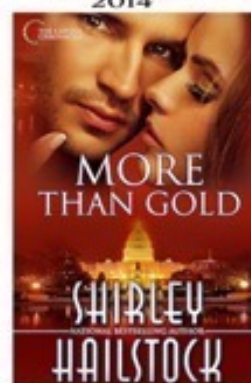
KENSINGTON
2000



SHIRLEY
HAILSTOCK
2014



SHIRLEY HAILSTOCK
2016



JAYCEE DELORENZO
SWEET 'N SPICY DESIGNS
2017

Summing up

Indie authors relish the control they have over their own covers, despite the learning curve they may hit and hard lessons learned through experience. If something isn't working, they have the flexibility to change it. And if it is working, they can enjoy the profits and perhaps use the lessons learned when designing their next cover.

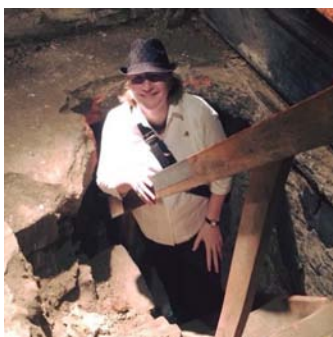
Pooks (a.k.a. Patricia Burroughs) is a novelist and screenwriter. She is an Academy Fellow, having received the Academy Nicholl Fellowship in Screenwriting (awarded by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts & Sciences). She loves Pratchett, Aaronovitch, Dunnett, and Heyer. She desperately needs a maid.

Christine Foltzer is art director at Tordotcom Publishing. She has overseen the development of covers and marketing since the launch of the imprint in 2015. After graduating from Pratt Institute with a BFA in Illustration, she also worked at St. Martin's Press, Oxford University Press, and Grand Central Publishing.

The Mad Scribbler

NINC On \$5 A Day

By Laura Resnick



You don't have to be rich to travel well.

—Eugene Fodor, travel writer & publisher

Many NINC members have recently returned from this organization's annual conference, and they're talking on Ninlink and in social media about how much they learned, how stimulating and educational the program sessions were, how much they enjoyed gathering with their friends and colleagues, and how eagerly they're already looking forward to next year's conference.

Maybe you wish you'd been there. Or maybe you hope to go next year but aren't sure you can.

There are all sorts of reasons people don't attend the conference, including scheduling conflicts, being too busy with other commitments, a disinclination to travel, a bitter resentment toward everyone and everything, paralyzing shyness, an unconquerable terror of seafood buffet dinners, and—more recently—a deadly contagion spreading around the globe.

(Several of those examples apply to me.)

Another reason—a pretty common one, I suspect—is the cost.

Due to years of volunteer work in NINC, I know firsthand how hard the BoD and the conference committee work to keep the conference affordable for members. But even so, it's inevitable that attending the conference is expensive for many of our members.

By the time you add up your conference fee, your airfare and baggage fees, additional travel expenses (ex. cabs and shuttles), your hotel room, the cost of meals and beverages not included in the conference fee, plus tips and miscellaneous expenses... Attendance is pricey even if you book a "basic economy" flight from a major hub airport, you share the cheapest hotel room available, and you spend very frugally for the duration of your trip. Depending on flight

costs, room choice, whether you're rooming alone, how many nights you stay, and what sort of non-conference meals, beverages, and recreation you choose while you're at NINC, the cost can get pretty steep.

Although that's a tax-deductible business expense that some authors can readily afford, there are people whose budgets can't comfortably accommodate that expenditure—not even for a conference where the education, networking, and contacts will benefit them professionally.

I'm usually one of those people, so I've learned how to defray NINC conference costs when I attend.

So if you're thinking, "I'd love to go to NINC next year, but I don't know if I can afford it," or, "I'm so glad I attended this year, but I really have to tighten my belt now to pay off what I spent there," here are some tips that might help you.

Apply for a conference scholarship

NINC's [Linda Kay West Memorial Fund](#) provides conference scholarships each year for up to three members.

The scholarship covers the entire cost of the conference fee—most recently, \$425. So that represents a substantial savings, if you want to attend but can't quite afford it.

Keep in mind, the scholarship covers *only* the conference fee. You still need to pay all your other expenses.

To apply, just email your request for a scholarship to the Central Coordinator, Terese Ramin, at admin@ninc.com. (There are no tests, essays, or references involved. You just need to be a member in good standing.) This process is confidential.

Note: You can only use this scholarship **one** time.

The Linda Kay West Memorial Fund, by the way, also covers the annual dues cost (\$85) for members who can't afford to renew. You can use this fund once every four years, if need be. This process is also confidential.

I used this fund to renew my membership a few years ago when I was going through a financially tough time. I recommend it to anyone who's struggling to stay afloat when they receive their renewal notice from NINC. When your writing isn't going well or your income is down the well, it's much better to apply for this fund and remain in NINC than to drop out and lose access to the resources and networking you need.

And we *want* you to be here. It's why the fund exists, after all.

Write conference reports for *Nink*

For members who aren't at the conference, as well as for attendees who cannot split into multiple self-clones and thereby attend every single session of the multi-track programming that's offered, *Nink* publishes detailed reports of every conference workshop, so that every member of NINC can access the information provided in those sessions.

Nink pays attending members to write those reports. For people whose budgets feel some strain from attending conference, writing such reports is an excellent way to recover some your expenses afterward.

Payment for conference reports is typically \$0.20/word, up to \$250. You can certainly write beyond that implied word-limit (and some reporters do), but you won't be paid more. (Just like you, *Nink* has a budget to consider.) You receive payment around the time your report is published, which will be early November or December.

If you want to volunteer to be a 2022 conference reporter, keep an eye on the [Open Positions](#) announcements at Ninc.com, and fill out the form when you see that position listed in the coming year. You might also see the *Nink* editor ask on Ninlink for volunteers, if you keep an eye out. But my best advice would be to contact the *Nink* editor directly (Ninkeditor@gmail.com) to express your interest.

Be aware that conference reporting is a serious assignment, an obligation to *Nink* and to NINC members, and you should only step forward for this task if you intend to treat it seriously. You get to select which sessions you want to report on, but having made that commitment, you *must* be there. Hospitalization is the only acceptable excuse I'm aware of for not being at a session you have committed to write up for *Nink*.

Also, you have to turn in a good report, one that delivers all the relevant information to members who read the conference editions of *Nink*. Read the reports in the upcoming editions to get a solid idea of what *Nink* needs.

Volunteer to serve on the NINC Board of Directors

There is one way to get nearly all of your NINC conference expenses covered—for several years, in fact! NINC comps the conference fee, hotel room, and travel expenses of the six BoD members each year.

The term for each of NINC's BoD officers is one year.

The treasurer, secretary, *Nink* editor, and Advisory Council Representative can each serve for up to three consecutive years. Advisory Council Reps can also serve again, after a break.

The president-elect serves for two years, becoming president in his/her second year on the BoD. So if, for example, you served as president-elect and then as president, you would attend conference for two years with all those expenses covered, and you'd also be able to attend on that basis in later years as Advisory Council Rep.

Such a deal!

The catch is... serving on the BoD is a lot of work. That's why BoD members attend the conference with all those expenses covered; it's the only perk they get, really.

You can find job descriptions for each BoD position [here](#). If you're seriously interested in filling one of those roles, contact someone on the newly-elected 2022 NINC nomination committee to let them know.

Serving on the BoD can be very rewarding, it's certainly educational, it's a way to "give back," and it's an opportunity to help steer NINC in the direction you want to see it go. So it's certainly **a thing** in its own right. But it also happens to be a way to attend conference with most of the costs covered.

Additionally, like any other attendee, BoD members can volunteer to be conference reporters, which would help cover any additional expenses (umbrella drinks on the beach, a fearless parasailing adventure, tickets to the Salvador Dali museum...).

In the next two editions, *Nink* will publish all of the 2021 conference reports, ensuring that members who were not at **NINC 2021: Level Up** can access and benefit from information shared in the formal sessions.

While some of you were at NINC this year, Laura Resnick was at home, wrestling with an overdue manuscript, guiding [Ultimate Underground tours](#), and raising a newborn litter of rescue kittens.

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

Newsletter

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

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

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

Website (You must be logged in to access these services.)

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

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

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

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

Welcome Packet: *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

2021 Board of Directors

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

- President: Tawdra Kandle
- President-Elect: Lisa Hughey
- Secretary: Hallee Bridgeman
- Treasurer: Timothy Cerepaka
- Newsletter Editor: Harper St. George
- Advisory Council Representative: Lou Aronica

Advisory Council

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

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

2021 Committees

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

- 2021 Conference Committee
 - Conference Director: Mel Jolly
 - Programming Chair: Lisa Hughey
 - Assistant Prog. Chair: Tawdra Kandle
 - Traditional Publishing Liaison: Victoria Thompson
 - Hotel Liaison: Karen Fox
- Authors Coalition Representative: Laura Phillips
- Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion Committee
 - Hildie McQueen
 - Gwen Hernandez
 - Lynn Emery
 - Pamela Kelley
 - Pooks Burroughs
 - Samantha Silver
 - Alison Perry
 - Misti Boehm
 - Harper St. George
 - Ellis Leigh
 - Malorie Cooper
- Social Media Committee: Violet Howe
- Membership Committee
 - Sarah Woodbury
 - Boyd Craven
- *Nink* Newsletter
 - Editor: Harper St. George
 - Acquisitions Editor: Trish Milburn
 - Copy Editor: Cynthia Moyer
 - Production Manager: Laura Resnick

- Nominating Committee:
 - Malorie Cooper
 - Tanya Anne Crosby
 - Kristine Smith
 - Jenny Gardiner
 - Judi Fennell
- Discounts Program: Emilie Richards

Central Coordinator

Novelists, Inc. c/o Terese Ramin
P.O. Box 54, Hartland MI 48353
admin@ninc.com

Address changes may be made on the website.

Nink Newsletter

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

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

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