

10 Tips for:
**ATTENDING
AUTHOR
CONFERENCES**

**Mindfulness
Practices to
Deep-Clean
Your Mental
Health during
the Holidays**

**Brush Up Your
Graphics with a
Platform Made
for Authors**

**Keeping with
Tradition
To Break into the
Brick-and-Mortar
Market**

**Shaping the Nation
As Managing Director of
Author Nation, Joe Solari Says
Indie Authors' Success Is Just
Good Business**

**INDIE AUTHOR
MAGAZINE**

PAID ADS

Issue 43

reedsystudio

Every writer needs a Studio

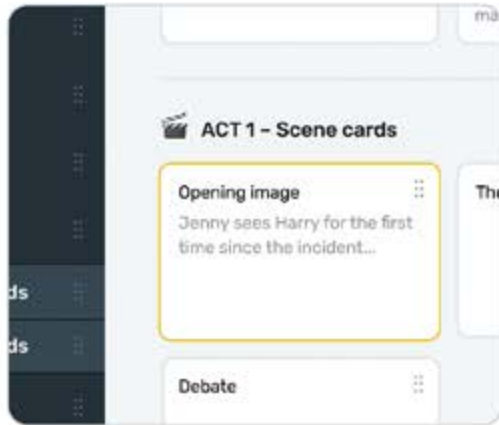
A **FREE** place to plan, draft, edit,
& typeset your book

The image displays a composite screenshot of the Reedsy Studio writing application. On the left is a dark sidebar menu with options: Manuscript (Add +), Front matter (edit), Copyright, Table of Contents (Drag chapters here), Body (edit), 1 Chapter 1, and Back matter (edit). The main workspace shows a document titled "Rocket Bride" with a chapter heading "The Rehearsal D" and a paragraph of text: "“Are you ready, Princess?” Bria placed the delicate silver crown “I don’t know.” Ximara pressed temples, just below where the c bit of a headache. Maybe it’s the braids?”". A rich text editor toolbar is visible below the text. On the right, a "Goals & insights" panel shows a calendar for October 23-27, a word count of 12,079 (30% progress), and a goal of 40,000 words due by 30 Nov. At the bottom, a "Main characters" panel features three character cards: Princess Andromeda, Aether Lefield, and Captain Perseus, each with a stylized illustration.

WRITE

Make yourself at home

The clean interface, chapter sidebar, and simple formatting controls make Studio feel instantly familiar.



PLAN

Organize your notes, characters, and research with Boards

Outline your manuscript with infinitely customizable, flexible Boards. Store research, keep track of characters, or build complex worlds.

REVISE

Work in sync

Stop sending files back and forth – keep your draft in one place and collaborate in real time with your co-author, editor, or proofreader.



EXPORT

Distribution ready

Exported files are ready for instant distribution to ebookstores, distributors and POD services such as Smashwords, IngramSpark, Amazon Kindle Direct Publishing, Apple iBooks and Kobo Writing Life.

Start your story → reedsy.com/studio

STORYTELLER OPERATING SYSTEM

NOTION FOR AUTHORS

LEARN:

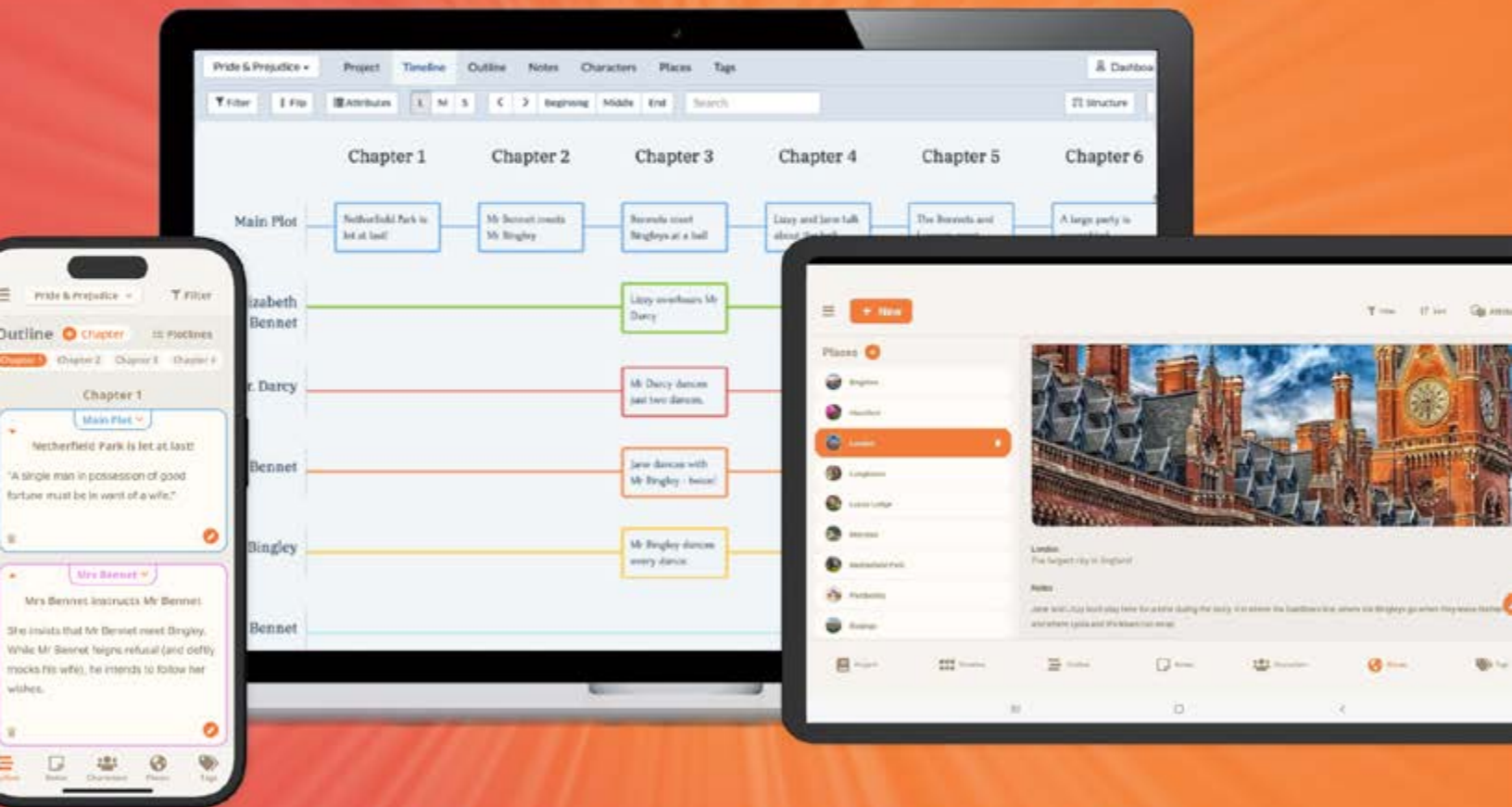
The PARA Method for Writers
Building Your Story Bible
Setting up Books and Series
Task Management for Writing
Task Management for Editing, ARCs, and Betas
Collaborating in Notion
Incorporating Other Apps into Notion
Automating Workflows
And More!

SIGN UP: [INDIEAUTHORTRAINING.COM](https://indieauthortraining.com)



Plan Your Books Like a Pro

The Future of Book Outlining is Already Here



www.plottr.com/future





FOR
SELF-PUBLISHING
**NOVELISTS,
POETS AND
NON-FICTION
AUTHORS**

Unlock your full potential as an Independent Author

**Access the support and resources of the
Alliance of Independent Authors**

Join the world's only
non-profit professional writing
organization representing
independent authors globally.

Harness a wealth of resources,
expertise, and community
support, all tailored for you
and your books.

- Tools & Resources
- Mentors & Advisors
- Legal & Rights
- Member Support Desk
- Webinars & Workshops
- Vibrant Community
- Discounts & Deals
- Free guidebooks, handbooks and member magazine



Become a member today, visit:
www.allianceindependentauthors.org/join
or Scan the QR code



“ I joined while having a crisis with Amazon KDP... The Alliance is a beacon of light. I recommend that all indie authors join... ”

Susan Marshall

“ The Alliance is about standing together. ”

Joanna Penn

“ It’s the good stuff, all on one place. ”

Richard Wright



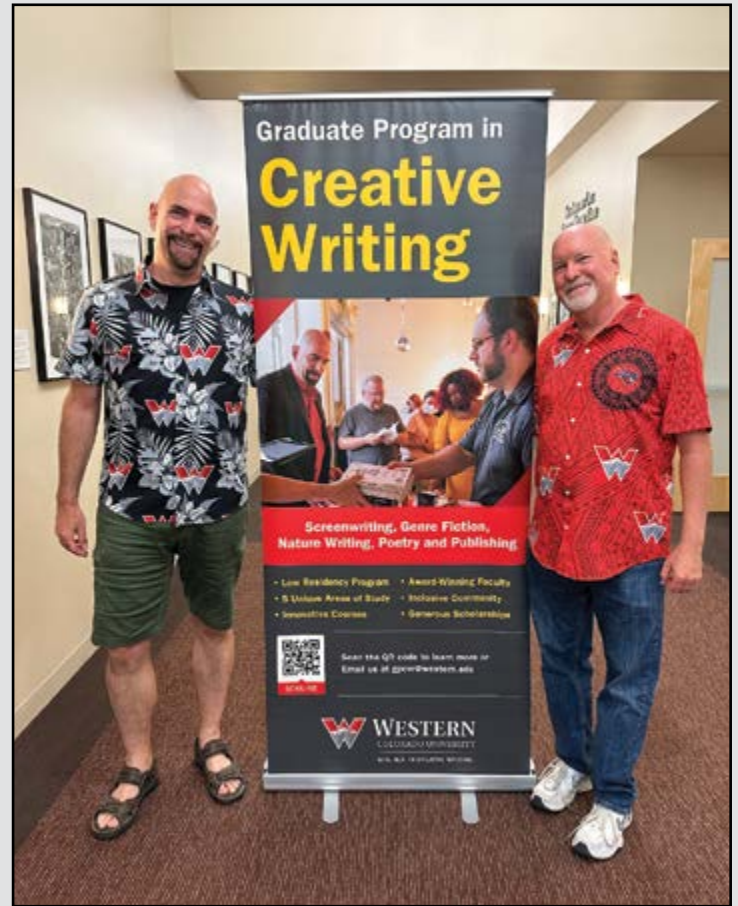
“ ALLi has helped me in myriad ways: discounts on services, vetting providers, charting a course to sales success. But more than anything it’s a community of friendly, knowledgeable, helpful people. ”

Beth Duke

See hundreds more testimonials at:
AllianceIndependentAuthors.org/testimonials

Become a Master in Publishing

with a Master's degree from
this intensive, dynamic program
built around practical and
useful information



Developed by *New York Times* bestselling author and co-founder of WordFire Press, Kevin J. Anderson, this Publishing Master of Arts degree offers an in-depth understanding of the publishing industry through a one-year, low-residency program taught by some of the most experienced professionals in the business.

“ I’ve been a guest speaker at numerous Honors and Masters programs across North America, but the one at Western is, by far, the most remarkable, relevant, and impactful. I loved what I was seeing so much, I had to apply to it in order to further enhance my more than thirty years of book industry experience. ”

— Mark Leslie Lefebvre, MA 2024



- Learn vital skills to succeed as an indie author or publisher: editing, design, distribution, marketing, advertising, copyright, and contracts.
- Low-residency model with online classes via Canvas and Zoom, with a one-week in-person residency in the Colorado mountains.



Now in its sixth year, the Western Publishing MA program has produced 53 books as class projects. Current and past students have published nearly 500 titles of their own.

Our curriculum evolves every year to reflect dramatic changes and opportunities in publishing



📖 Cutting-edge guest speakers—bestselling authors, major New York agents, Audible.com, Tor Books, Kindlepreneur, Draft2Digital, 20Booksto50K, BookFunnel, Grammar Girl, The Creative Penn, Reedsy, Greenleaf Distributing, and many more.

“ I learned more from Western’s publishing program in one week than I learned in five years of trying to figure it out on my own. ”

— Jared Nelson, MA 2025

Kevin J. Anderson and **Allyson Longueira** co-teach Western’s Publishing program. An extremely successful hybrid author, Kevin brings more than 40 years of experience in the publishing industry in books, comics, graphic novels, TV, and film. Allyson brings more than 20 years of experience in traditional and indie publishing in nonfiction and fiction and has won awards for her writing, editing, and design skills. **Gwyneth Gibby** and **Marie Whittaker** round out the program with their extensive experience in the indie publishing industry.



Learn more at western.edu/program/publishing/





PAID ADS

- 16 FROM THE EDITOR IN CHIEF**
- 18 MASTERS OF PUBLISHING**
Western Colorado University's Publishing MA Program, Led by Kevin J. Anderson, Teaches Students the Ins and Outs of the Industry
- 24 ALLI EXCLUSIVE**
It All 'Ads' Up
- 28 DEAR INDIE ANNIE**
Bad Review Blues
- 30 10 TIPS FOR ATTENDING AUTHOR CONFERENCES**
- 34 SHAPING THE NATION**
As Managing Director of Author Nation, Joe Solari Says Indie Authors' Success Is Just Good Business
- 39 BRUSH UP YOUR GRAPHICS WITH A PLATFORM MADE FOR AUTHORS**
Book Brush Offers Simple Graphic Creation Software Tailored to Authors' Needs
- 44 KEEPING WITH TRADITION**
To Break into the Brick-and-Mortar Market, Indie Authors Must Follow in Traditional Publishers' Footsteps
- 50 THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO EDITORIAL BOOK REVIEWS FOR INDIE AUTHORS**
- 56 HOW TO FORMAT YOUR BOOK**
- 60 INDIE AUTHOR TRAINING ROUNDUP**
- 61 FOCUS ON THE FAULTS**
Four Steps to Building Stronger Narratives Based on Your Character's Flaws
- 66 FROM THE STACKS**
- 68 MINDFULNESS PRACTICES TO DEEP-CLEAN YOUR MENTAL HEALTH DURING THE HOLIDAYS**



Ebook. Paperback. Hardcover.
Easy Formatting. On your own.

tryvellum.com

Never manually check your book stats again.

Rating, book rank, price... all tracked for you
by the **scrappy little appy** that helps
you monitor your books.



Try it for free!
(click or scan)



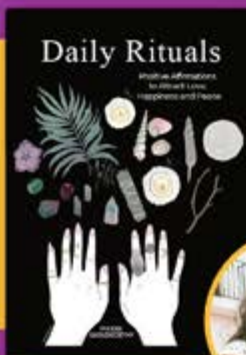
tablescraps
Refresh less. Write more. **.app**

Authorpreneurs in Action



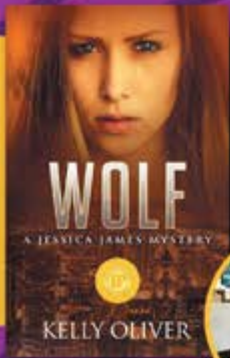
“I love Lulu! They’ve been a fantastic distributor of my paperbacks and an excellent partner as I dive into direct sales. They integrate so smoothly with my personal Shopify store, and their customer support has been top notch.”

Katie Cross, katiecrossbooks.com



“Having my own store has given me the freedom to look at my creativity as a profitable business and lifelong career.”

Phoebe Garnsworthy, phoebegarnsworthy.com



“Lulu has a super handy integration with Shopify. Lulu makes it so easy to sell paperbacks directly to readers.”

Kelly Oliver, kellyoliverbooks.com



“My experience with Lulu Direct has been more convenient and simple than I anticipated or thought possible. I simply publish, take a step back and allow the well-oiled machine to run itself. Most grateful!”

Molly McGivern, theactorsalmanac.com



Sell Smarter, Not Harder.

Sell Books from Your Website Using Lulu Direct



Keep 100%
of your profit



Retain
customer data



Integrate with Shopify,
WooCommerce, Zapier,
& Custom API



Get paid quickly



No monthly fees



Fully automated
white-label fulfillment



Global
print network



B Corp Certified

Dropshipping Multiple Orders for a New Book Launch or Crowdfunding Campaign? Use the Lulu Order Import Tool!

We make dropshipping multiple orders at once easier than ever!

- Upload your book on Lulu for free
- Use the Order Import Tool to upload a file with your customer's order and shipping information
- We'll professionally print the orders and drop ship each one to your fans around the world



Get exclusive Publishing & Marketing tips to help you create and sell your books more effectively!



@luludotcom



lulu.com



EDITORIAL

Publisher | Chelle Honiker

Editor in Chief | Nicole Schroeder

Creative Director | Alice Briggs

Partner Relationship Manager | Elaine Bateman

ADVERTISING & MARKETING

Inquiries

Ads@AtheniaCreative.com

Information

Partner.IndieAuthorMagazine.com

CONTRIBUTORS

Angela Archer, Elaine Bateman, Bradley Charbonneau, Jackie Dana, Heather Clement Davis, Jamie Davis, Laurel Decher, Gill Fernley, Jen B. Green, Marion Hermannsen, Jenn Lessmann, Megan Linski-Fox, Angie Martin, Merri Maywether, Kevin McLaughlin, Jenn Mitchell, Tanya Nellestein, Susan Odev, Eryka Parker, Tiffany Robinson, Robyn Sarty, Joe Solari, David Viergutz

SUBSCRIPTIONS

<https://indieauthormagazine.com/subscribe/>

HOW TO READ

<https://indieauthormagazine.com/how-to-read/>

WHEN WRITING MEANS BUSINESS

IndieAuthorMagazine.com

Athenia Creative | 6820 Apus Dr., Sparks, NV, 89436 USA | 775.298.1925

ISSN 2768-7880 (online)–ISSN 2768-7872 (print)

The publication, authors, and contributors reserve their rights in regards to copyright of their work. No part of this work covered by the copyright may be reproduced or copied in any form or by any means without the written consent of the publisher. All copyrighted work was reproduced with the permission of the owner.

Reasonable care is taken to ensure that *Indie Author Magazine* articles and other information on the website are up to date and as accurate as possible, at the time of publication, but no responsibility can be taken by *Indie Author Magazine* for any errors or omissions contained herein. Furthermore, *Indie Author Magazine* takes no responsibility for any losses, damages, or distress resulting from adherence to any information made available through this publication. The opinions expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of *Indie Author Magazine*.

THE NEW WAY FOR READERS TO FIND AUTHORS SELLING DIRECT

DIRECT2READERS

A unique directory where you can connect directly with your fans and keep all your hard-earned profits.

💡 **Innovative Recommendation Engine:**
Our natural language recommendation engine helps readers discover books based on their preferences. Say goodbye to clunky categories!

📈 **New Market Access:** Gain exposure to a new segment of avid readers, all hungry for fresh indie voices.

💰 **Zero Commissions:** You read it right! We don't take a cut. Your profits are yours to keep.

🚀 **Boost Your Sales:** Benefit from our advanced marketing and influencer channels designed to supercharge your direct sales.



Register Now

Direct2Readers.com



From the EDITOR IN CHIEF

A few months ago, *IAM* publisher Chelle Honiker shared on Facebook a lesson that she'd presented at the Future of Publishing Mastermind: that of the “suck list,” a prioritized list of tasks you don't want to do or that eat up your time. Create the list, she wrote, then search for ways to take them off your plate—delegate them, automate them, or batch them, so you can save mental space for the fun stuff.

This time of year is always one of recalibration. People are adjusting their schedules to make a final push toward their goals for the year or to protect themselves from burnout, as *IAM* staff writer Maureen Bonatch describes in her article this month on practicing mindfulness. Holidays and author conferences loom, the latter especially forcing us to slow down but also lighting a fire in our eyes about the possibilities we have in the future. This month's cover feature, on Author Nation's managing director, Joe Solari, dives into the inspiration behind one of this year's most anticipated author conferences, and in this month's Ten Tips section, Honiker shares how to get the most out of these events ahead of Author Nation's inaugural event in Vegas later this month.

As we all feel the itch to begin counting down to the new year, things can easily become overwhelming. Perhaps it's time to put the concept of the “suck list” into practice. Maybe marketing and advertising, the focus of this month's issue, is on your list. Maybe editing is at the top. I think there's even room to expand the list beyond specific tasks. Is working long hours or on the weekends on your list? Outlining a book when you just want to write?

As we all recenter ourselves for the final push of 2024, consider what's on your “suck list”—and consider how you can address it, so you can focus on the tasks that will fill your well in the rest of the year.

Nicole Schroeder
Editor in Chief
Indie Author Magazine



Nicole Schroeder is a storyteller at heart. As the editor in chief of *Indie Author Magazine*, she brings nearly a decade of journalism and editorial experience to the publication, delighting in any opportunity to tell true stories and help others do the same. She holds a bachelor's degree from the Missouri School of Journalism and minors in English and Spanish. Her previous work includes editorial roles at local publications, and she's helped edit and produce numerous fiction and nonfiction books, including a Holocaust survivor's memoir, alongside independent publishers. Her own creative writing has been published in national literary magazines. When she's not at her writing desk, Nicole is usually in the saddle, cuddling her guinea pigs, or spending time with family. She loves any excuse to talk about Marvel movies and considers National Novel Writing Month its own holiday.

929 PRESS

Empowering Storytellers in a
Digital Landscape

**WE HELP STORYTELLERS BLEND
THEIR ART WITH INNOVATIVE DIGITAL
TOOLS TO CAPTIVATE AUDIENCES
ACROSS ALL PLATFORMS**

- EBook, Print & Audiobook
Design & Formatting
- iOS and Google Play Apps
- Digital & Print Magazine
Design & Distribution
- Website Design & Social
Media Branding

929PRESS.COM



Masters of Publishing

WESTERN COLORADO UNIVERSITY'S PUBLISHING MA PROGRAM, LED BY KEVIN J. ANDERSON, TEACHES STUDENTS THE INS AND OUTS OF THE INDUSTRY

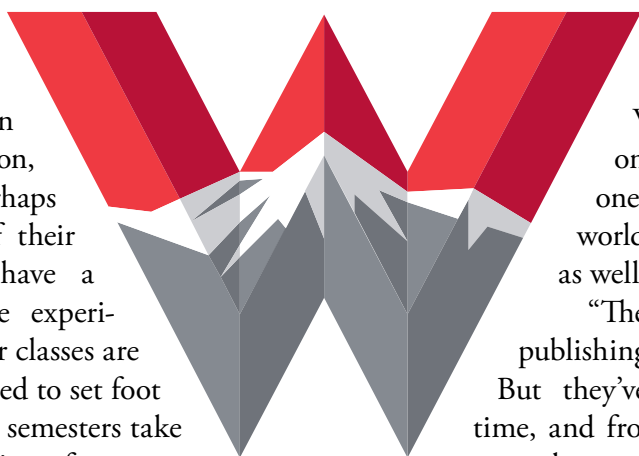
Summer on a college campus is much quieter than any other time of the year. Students have returned home for a few months between semesters or have taken a break from coursework for internships, summer jobs, or just to travel. But for fifteen graduate students each year on the Western Colorado University (Western) campus, in the mountains of Gunnison, Colorado, summer is perhaps the most exciting time of their careers. These students have a somewhat unusual college experience; for one, these summer classes are the only time they're required to set foot on campus. Fall and spring semesters take place entirely online, sometimes from states and even countries away. For another, when they graduate, these students will leave Western with more than a diploma to their name.

Each will also carry with them two books they published independently over the course of their program.

These students are part of the university's publishing concentration within its graduate program in creative writing, an accelerated thirteen-month, low-residency program designed to teach students the ins and outs of the publishing world. Unlike other publishing-focused degrees, however, the coursework at Western does not focus solely on traditional publishing; it's one of the only programs in the world that focuses on indie-publishing as well.

"There are half a dozen other publishing master's degrees out there. But they've been around for a long time, and from what I can see ... they're centered on you getting a job in New York," says program director Kevin J. Anderson. "But that's not what people want anymore."

Anderson is an author himself of more than one hundred eighty novels, including for franchises such as Star Wars, X-Files, and Dune, and co-publisher at WordFire Press. He started the program six years





ago, and to date, fifty-three students have graduated from the course. He says he was inspired to start the program because of how quickly the publishing industry is changing and how much is expected of authors and publishers in order to succeed. “Students are hungry to learn how to do it themselves and get it right, and they need to wear every hat,” he said in an interview with *Publishers Weekly* in 2023.

The program reflects that need for modern publishers to be well rounded. Coursework starts in July and continues through the fall and spring semesters, ending with a capstone course the following summer. The work is a mix of asynchronous readings and guest lectures by bestselling authors, publishing professionals, and representatives from adjacent companies—everyone from author Michael Anderle to representatives from Audible and Kobo.

“I think the best part of this program is that the instructors have experience in both traditional publishing and indie publishing, and they are able to pivot the course materials to react in real time to changes taking place in the industry,” writes Stace Johnson, a current student of the program.

Alongside the curriculum, students put their studies into practice, bringing two books into print by the time the program ends: an anthology curated by each year’s cohort and a reissued classic that they shepherd individually through the publishing process. Johnson says the connections the program fosters among its students is one of his favorite parts of the experience so far. “I already feel like some of the connections I’ve made will last the rest of my life,” Johnson writes. “I’m looking forward to the second week of residency and graduation next year.”

The anthology project begins with the very first class. Each group of students decides on an anthology theme, puts out a call for submissions, and reads through the slush pile to select stories to move past initial selections round. The final selections are made around mid-November in what Anderson calls the “Thunderdome”—“because two stories enter and one story leaves,” he says. Once the winning submissions are chosen, students write rejections for the stories that don’t make the cut, issue contracts for the accepted stories, work together to proofread the manuscripts, format them for print, and market their anthologies using techniques and programs that they’ve learned in their courses. The project is funded by Draft2Digital and published through WordFire Press, with the proceeds from the books helping to fund future projects and provide scholarships to students.

Along with compiling the anthology, students work during the program to publish books on their own, chosen from public domain titles available through Project Gutenberg or scanned from physical copies. “They have to get an old copy of the book so that they [can]





compare line by line, because a lot of times re-issues or updates of the book have changes in the text ... and that version isn't out of copyright," Anderson says. The students proofread the books, typeset them, design a cover, reach out to notable people for a foreword to add to the work, and release the books at a launch event held during their second summer.

Mark Leslie Lefebvre, who graduated from the program in 2024, says the opportunity to collaborate with other authors on both projects is invaluable. "Relationships are so critical across the board ... so you get a really enhanced and very fast-paced introduction to that because you have to work collaboratively with other students. ... That in itself is a beautiful microcosm of the overall industry."

Students also occasionally collaborate with the other graduate creative writing programs Western offers. The university offers five areas of concentration: publishing, genre fiction, nature writing, poetry, and screenwriting. Anderson says the curriculums for each go hand in hand, and some students even return after graduating from one program to choose another concentration.



Anderson believes authors at any stage of their career can benefit from the publishing MA program—and Lefebvre is proof. Lefebvre got his start in the publishing industry in 1992 and has been a guest speaker since Western’s publishing program began. It was in 2022, however, while overhearing the class discussions and lectures, that he decided to apply to the program and become a student the following year. “No matter what courses you take, whether they’re online or in person, I don’t think there’s anything quite like this program,” he says. “I still look at the years of experience I’ve had working in the industry, managing bookstores, working for distributors and online retailers, and working with publishers and being a publisher myself. I still walked away having gained something from the course, having learned something valuable.”

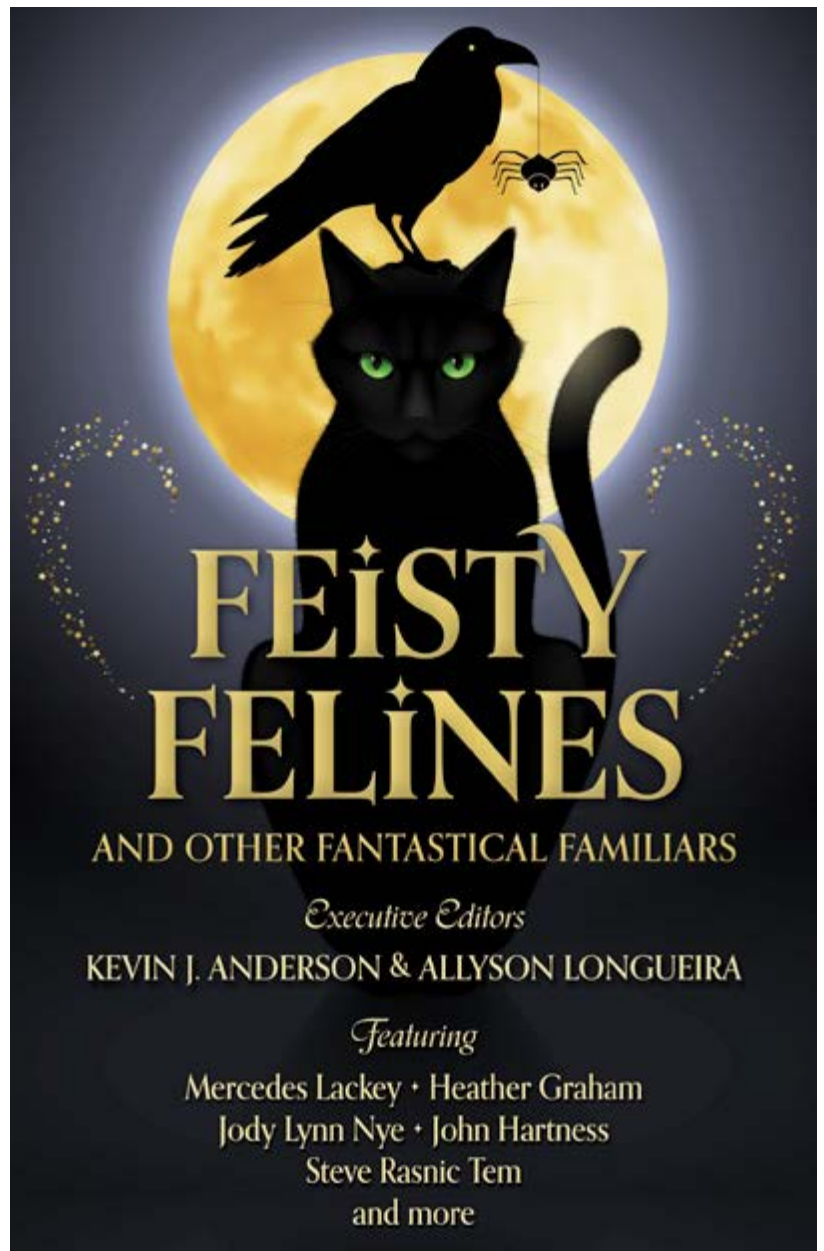
Students of the program, like Lefebvre, have often come from the “trenches” of the publishing industry, Anderson says—some have self-published previously and want to improve their business, others have worked in traditional publishing and want to learn self-pub-

lishing strategies, and still others are professionals wanting to work for one of the Big Five publishers. “A lot of people just want to do better at their own indie author career. Other people want to form a full-on indie press, where they publish other authors,” he says. “I think that it really helps ground you better if you get this formalized start ... and you do hands-on stuff. You see how it works, and you have a cohort of support people that can help you go through it.”

“If a *New York Times* bestselling author like Kevin J. Anderson, who has sold millions of copies of his books and been on the bestselling list numerous times, too numerous to count—if he’s continuing to learn about the industry, I think the rest of us have lots to continue to learn,” Lefebvre says.

The program only has room for around fifteen students each year, and Anderson says slots fill up quickly. Applications for the 2025-2026 academic year opened August 1. Those interested can visit <https://western.edu/program/publishing> or contact Anderson directly at kjanderson@western.edu. ■

Nicole Schroeder



Nicole Schroeder

Nicole Schroeder is a storyteller at heart. As the editor in chief of Indie Author Magazine, she brings nearly a decade of journalism and editorial experience to the publication, delighting in any opportunity to tell true stories and help others do the same. She holds a bachelor's degree from the Missouri School of Journalism and minors in English and Spanish. Her previous work includes editorial roles at local publications, and she's helped edit and produce numerous fiction and nonfiction books, including a Holocaust survivor's memoir, alongside independent publishers. Her own creative writing has been published in national literary magazines. When she's not at her writing desk, Nicole is usually in the saddle, cuddling her guinea pigs, or spending time with family. She loves any excuse to talk about Marvel movies and considers National Novel Writing Month its own holiday.

ALLI EXCLUSIVE

It All 'Ads' Up

“Pay to play” has become a common phrase in today’s digital world. Where we once relied on creativity, engagement, and consistency in our posting on platforms like Facebook in the hopes of capturing readers’ attention, more and more sites now demand money for visibility. This includes major players like Facebook, Amazon, BookBub, and TikTok. In this article, the Alliance of Independent Authors (ALLi) explores how to use paid advertising effectively at different stages of your author business.

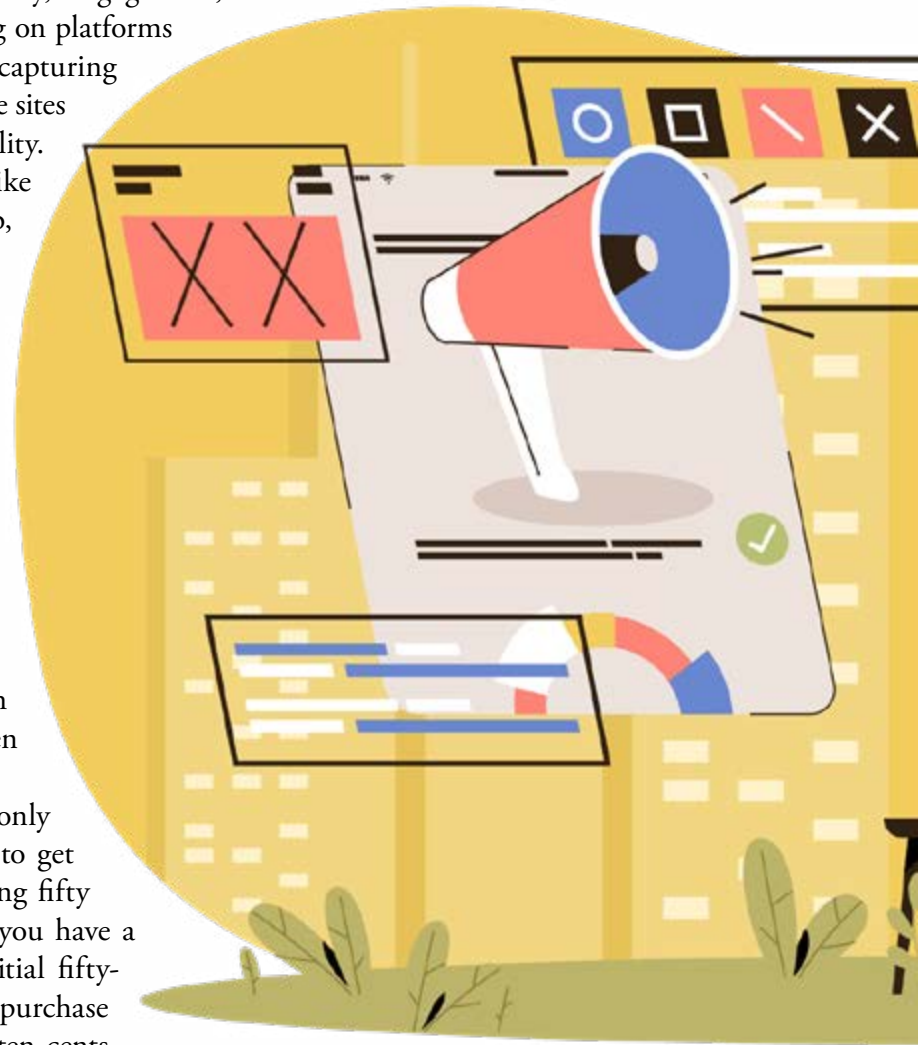
BEGINNING AUTHORS: LAY THE FOUNDATION FOR FUTURE ADS

For authors just starting out with one or two books, paid ads often aren’t cost effective.

For example, if you have only one book and spend fifty cents to get a reader to buy it, you’re spending fifty cents for that sale. However, if you have a series of five books and that initial fifty-cent investment leads a reader to purchase all of them, your cost drops to ten cents per book, significantly increasing your return on investment (ROI).

At this early stage of your author business, focus on elements that will support future paid ads.

- A well-crafted cover catches the browser’s eyes.



- Positive reviews and an engaging blurb can convince a potential reader to take the plunge and buy your book.
- A mailing list allows you to keep in touch with your readers, informing them about new releases and promotions, which can drive sales without the immediate need for paid ads.

Most importantly, write more books, ideally in a series. This approach not only builds your portfolio but also ensures that when you do invest in ads, the potential for return is much greater.

Prepare for later advertising efforts by reviewing free educational resources about advertising, especially those specifically targeting authors. Set aside money for paid courses you will take when you have a larger catalog to advertise.

Building a strong foundation for future paid advertising will pay off in the long run.

EMERGING AUTHORS: EDUCATE YOURSELF AND START SLOWLY

When you're ready to dive into paid ads, take a course, or thoroughly research how ads work on your chosen platform. Understanding the myriad options available can save you from costly trial and error. Engage your author community to learn from those who have successfully navigated this before you.

Begin with a small budget—Facebook ads, for instance, can run for just a few dollars a day—so you can test what works for you. While following expert advice, don't hesitate to make adjustments based on your own results; for example, while static images are commonly recommended for Facebook ads, you might find that videos work better for you.

Starting slowly allows you to gather data on what works and what doesn't without risking large amounts of money. This data is invaluable; it can show you which demographics respond best to your ads, what types of images or copy are most effective, and what times of day your ads perform best. This information can then be used to refine your ads and increase their effectiveness.



As you learn more, you'll be able to make more informed decisions about where to spend your advertising budget. For example, you might find that Facebook ads are great for reaching a wide audience, but Amazon ads convert better because they catch people when they're already in a buying mindset. By experimenting with different platforms and strategies, you can find the combination that works best for you.

Check out these ALLi resources for more information:

- <https://selfpublishingadvice.org/book-advertising-for-indie-authors>
- <https://selfpublishingadvice.org/podcast-amazon-ads>

EXPERIENCED AUTHORS: MAKE THE PLATFORMS WORK FOR YOU

Many authors find success with one platform, like Amazon ads, then ignore others. This can be a mistake. The effectiveness of platforms can change over time, and a previously ignored platform might suddenly become valuable. Once you master one platform, start experimenting with another, even if it means returning to a beginner's learning curve. This strategy will help you either master multiple platforms, enhancing your overall revenue, or find a favorite while providing you with backup options. Continually experiment and build on platforms that offer the best ROI.



As you expand to other platforms, you'll find that each has its own strengths and weaknesses. For example, Facebook ads might be great for generating interest and engagement, while Amazon ads are more effective in driving sales. BookBub ads can be highly effective for reaching voracious readers, but they can also be expensive and competitive. By diversifying your advertising efforts, you can create a more balanced and resilient marketing strategy.

Analyzing your advertising ROI is crucial. This 2019 interview with Reedsy Chief Marketing Officer Ricardo Fayet on ALLi's blog offers resources to help with that, including a downloadable spreadsheet: <https://selfpublishingadvice.org/analysing-advertising-roi>.

Paid ads require learning, time, and money. They can be daunting at first, but with persistence, they can play a significant role in expanding your author business. The key to success is continual learning and adaptation. By starting with a solid foundation, educating yourself, and continually experimenting with new strategies and platforms, you can make paid ads work for you and build a sustainable and profitable advertising strategy that will help you achieve long-term success as an indie author. ■

Matty Dalrymple, ALLi
Campaigns Manager



Matty Dalrymple, ALLi
Campaigns Manager



The Alliance of Independent Authors (ALLi) is a global membership association for self-publishing authors.

A non-profit, our mission is ethics and excellence in self-publishing. Everyone on our team is a working indie author and we offer advice and advocacy for self-publishing authors within the literary, publishing and creative industries around the world. www.allianceindependentauthors.org

Dear Indie Annie,

I know it's something every author deals with, but I'm heartbroken over my first one-star rating. What do I do?

Bad Review Blues

Dear Bad Review Blues,

Oh, honey, grab yourself a refreshing mint julep, and pull up a chaise longue. We're about to dive into the treacherous waters of the one-star review, and your favorite auntie's got some wisdom to impart.

First off, welcome to the club, sweetheart! You've just earned your "I Survived My First Literary Drive-By" badge. Wear it with pride, right next to your "I Finished a Damn Book" medal. Every author worth their salt has been through this rite of passage. It's like losing your writerly virginity—uncomfortable, probably disappointing, but ultimately necessary for growth.

Apologies to the pearl-clutchers for that little analogy, but it's a fitting metaphor. And to continue, before you head off "singing the blues," let's address that broken heart of yours.

A one-star review feels like your book baby just got called ugly at its christening, doesn't it? How very dare they have such a loud and rude opinion! But remember, darling, opin-

ions are like belly buttons: Everybody's got one, and some are more lint-filled than others.

In the modern world, we have transgressed far from the wisdom of our ancestors, who said that if you can't say anything nice, don't say anything at all. Many now believe they are being honest and just speaking their mind.

But honey, no one asked you. Except, of course, we did, because





Got burning questions about the wibbly-wobbly world of indie authoring? Eager to unravel the mysteries of publishing, writing woes, or anything in between? Give your quizzical quills a whirl and shoot your musings over to indieannie@indieauthormagazine.com. Your inky quandaries are my cup of tea!

readers want to know what others thought before they think for themselves.

Having said that, my sweet, don't be alarmed, because for every bad review there will be good ones, too. The Irish poet Brendan Behan once quipped, "There is no such thing as bad publicity except your own obituary." And my sweet child, you ain't dead yet! And this one-star review isn't going to kill you.

Think of that lone star as the literary equivalent of a pimple on prom night. Sure, it feels like the end of the world right now, but in the grand scheme of things, it's just a tiny blemish on your authorial complexion. Your book is still the belle of the ball, even if one grumpy wallflower didn't ask it to dance.

As for moving forward, here's what you do: Channel your inner Elizabeth Bennet, and let that pride and prejudice fuel your fire. Did our girl Lizzy crumble when Lady Catherine de Bourgh threw shade? Hell no! She stood tall, arched an eyebrow, and went on to snag

the brooding Mr. Darcy.

Your job is simply to keep writing—and honey, you'd better. Let that one star be the wind beneath your wings, propelling you to greater heights. Use it like Scarlett O'Hara used those curtains, and transform that negative energy into something fabulous that'll make them all green with envy.

Remember, sweetpea, even the great Bard himself probably got a few thumbs down from the groundlings. Did that stop him from penning *Romeo and Juliet*? Not on your life! So dry those tears, put on your big girl panties, and get back to that keyboard. Your next bestseller isn't going to write itself, and success is the best revenge.

Happy writing,
Indie Annie



10 TIPS FOR ATTENDING AUTHOR CONFERENCES

Ever felt overwhelmed by the sea of faces at an author conference, unsure of where to start? Author conferences offer a wealth of opportunities to connect, learn, and grow, but navigating the throngs of people, packed schedules, and hosts of optional networking opportunities between panels can be daunting. With the right strategy, however, you can turn these events into a launchpad for your writing career.

Ahead of the first Author Nation event in Las Vegas, Nevada, later this month, we're diving into ten practical tips, inspired by seasoned conference-goer Fatima Fayeze and other industry experts, to help you make the most of your next author gathering.



1 DEFINE YOUR CONFERENCE MISSION.

Before you even pack your bags, take time to set clear, achievable goals. Whether it's meeting other authors in your genre, learning about marketing strategies, or connecting with potential collaborators, knowing what you want to accomplish at any event you attend helps you focus your energy. Fayeze encourages setting up pre-conference plans with friends or peers attending the event. This way, you can meet up during the conference and expand your network by connecting with their circles.

Establishing goals not only makes the event more meaningful but also prevents you from feeling overwhelmed by the sheer number of sessions and networking opportunities you'll face. Consider using the SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound) goal framework to ensure your goals are effective. For example, instead of a vague goal like "network with other authors," set a specific goal like "exchange contact information with at least five authors in my genre."

2 MAP OUT YOUR MASTER PLAN.

Preparation is key to a successful conference experience. In the days or weeks leading up to an event, review the schedule in advance, and decide which sessions align with your goals. Fayeze emphasizes the importance of checking the speaker list ahead of time and identifying which talks and panels will be most beneficial to your author career. “Not all sessions will be relevant to where you are,” she notes, “so narrow it down based on your current needs.”

Pro Tip: If you can manage it, staying in the conference hotel can make networking easier—you’ll be a familiar face as you come and go, and you won’t miss any last-minute meetups or events.



3 PACK YOUR PRO TOOLKIT.

What you bring with you can make or break your conference experience. Essentials include business cards, a notebook, chargers, comfortable walking shoes, and a reusable water bottle. What not to bring? Items you usually give away to readers. Remember, these are your peers and not your prospects.

Fayeze suggests preparing business cards with a QR code that links to your contact information. One option is a link-in-bio-style webpage. This ensures your contact information remains evergreen and avoids the potential pitfalls of relying on third-party services like HiHello or other contact apps.

4 SAY HELLO, THEN SAY MORE.

Networking is one of the biggest reasons to attend an author conference, so come prepared to introduce yourself and your work and to spend time with other professionals at the event. Start conversations by asking people which sessions they’re excited about or what they hope to gain from the event. According to Fayeze, questions like “What’s the most helpful thing you’ve learned so far?” can spark deeper discussions, especially later in the event.

Be genuine in your interactions, and don’t forget to share your contact information, whether through a physical business card or a digital alternative. The key to networking isn’t just the initial meeting—it’s the follow-up.

5 BE A SOCIAL (MEDIA) BUTTERFLY.

Social media can be your best friend at a conference. Engaging with event hashtags and posting live updates from sessions helps build connections, even with attendees you might not meet in person.

Fayeze recommends staying active on platforms like X or Instagram, not only during the conference but also afterward, to continue the conversation.

By sharing key takeaways or favorite moments, you’re contributing to the conference community and enhancing your own visibility. Consider using social media to connect with other authors, publishers, and industry professionals. You can search for relevant hashtags or join online groups related to the conference or your writing genre.

6 LET THE CONFERENCE APP BE YOUR COPILOT.

Many conferences now have dedicated apps to help attendees manage their schedules and connect with others. Use the app to track sessions, make notes, and send messages to fellow attendees. Faye highlights the importance of staying organized by keeping track of who you meet and what you discussed—something most apps can also offer.

Apps can also alert you to last-minute changes or opportunities you may have missed, so check them regularly throughout the event. As you're preparing for the conference before you go, also visit the conference website or social media channels to see if organizers specify where you should watch for changes in the schedule or relevant news and updates during the event.

7 HYDRATE, RECHARGE, REPEAT.

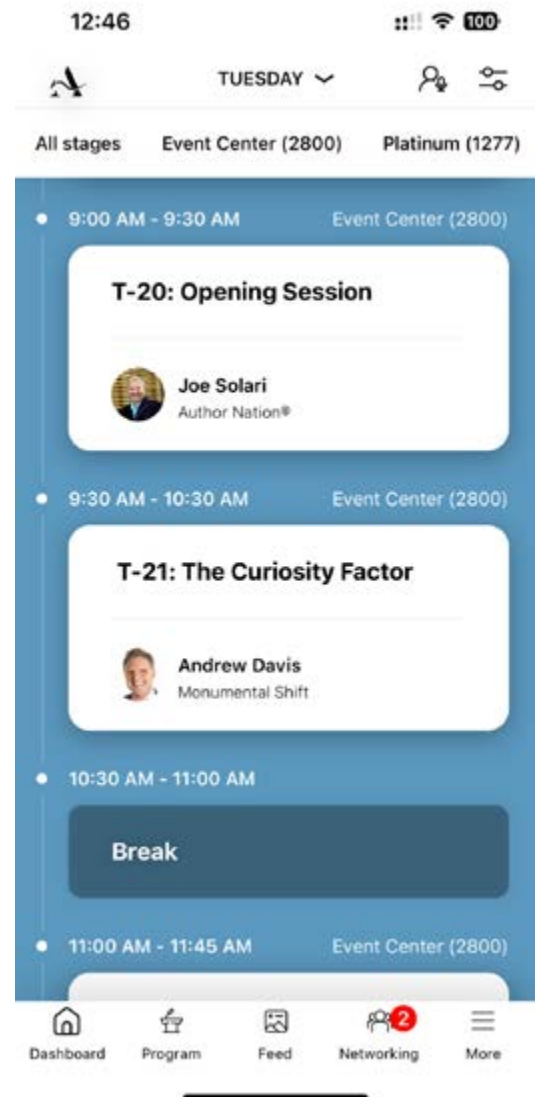
Conferences can be long, and it's easy to burn out. Stay hydrated, take breaks, and give yourself some downtime. Faye suggests introverts or those who need extra space take advantage of quiet moments to recharge. If you're staying at the conference hotel, use your room as a retreat between sessions.

Taking care of yourself ensures you'll be energized for key sessions and networking opportunities rather than dragging through the day.

8 ASK THE QUESTIONS THAT MAKE AN IMPACT.

Asking good questions during panels or workshops not only helps you learn but also makes a memorable impression on speakers and fellow attendees. Faye advises preparing a few questions in advance but also being ready to ask spontaneous ones based on the session's content. Questions like "What was the most surprising challenge you faced during this process?" can open up new insights that presenters may not cover in the presentation.

Asking thoughtful questions can also lead to more in-depth conversations afterward, so be sure to exchange contact information with others in the audience or even with panelists after the session is over.



9

EXPLORE THE VENDOR EXPO LIKE IT'S A TREASURE HUNT.

Author conferences are not only about the formal sessions. The exhibition hall is often full of vendors offering services, software, or other tools that can benefit your author career. Take time to visit these booths and engage with exhibitors. Faye encourages exchanging business cards with those whose services may be valuable and following up later to deepen the connection.

10

CAPTURE THE WISDOM.

Taking notes during sessions ensures you retain key insights, which you can refer to long after the conference. For a more efficient approach, consider taking photos of the slides and using a digital note-taking app like Notion or Evernote to mark them up with additional notes, questions, and action items.

Create a specific task list in Todoist, Notion, or the task app on your mobile device, and keep it open to jot down notes, questions, or items to do when you return from the conference. Block out time in your schedule after you return from the conference to recharge and to review your notes and follow up on any opportunities or connections you made while the information is fresh.

The real magic of an author conference often happens not during the sessions but in the connections and follow-ups that happen afterward. By planning, setting goals, and engaging with others, both in person and online, you'll walk away from the event with valuable connections and insights that can propel your writing career forward. So pack smart, stay energized, and be sure to make the most of every opportunity to learn, network, and grow as an author. ■

Chelle Honiker



Chelle Honiker

Chelle Honiker is an advocate for the empowerment of authorpreneurs, recognizing the importance of authors taking charge of both their craft and careers. In response to this need, she has founded a media and training company dedicated to supporting these creative professionals. As the co-founder and publisher of Indie Author Magazine, IndieAuthorTraining, Indie Author Tools, and Direct2Readers.com, Chelle's team of more than 80 writers, editors, trainers, and support staff provides resources and insights that help authors navigate the complexities of self-publishing. Her role as the programming director for Author Nation, an annual conference in Las Vegas, further exemplifies her commitment to fostering a community where authors can grow and succeed. With a career spanning over two decades in executive operations and leadership, Chelle has honed her skills in managing complex projects and delivering impactful training programs. Her experience as a speaker and TEDx Organizer has taken her to many countries, where she has shared her insights with diverse audiences.



Shaping the Nation

AS MANAGING DIRECTOR OF AUTHOR NATION, JOE SOLARI SAYS INDIE AUTHORS' SUCCESS IS JUST GOOD BUSINESS

Business expert Joe Solari has been a boon to countless indie authors, applying business-first advice to help skyrocket careers long before he was named managing director of Author Nation. His stout guidance can be found on podcasts, in his course on author careers and business, and in published articles. Now, he's head of the organization that, later this month, will host the answer to the 20Books Vegas conference, which held its final event in 2023. Author Nation, like 20Books Vegas, is set to be the largest indie author conference in the world—but it shouldn't be the only lens through which Joe is viewed. His expertise is business, and his venue is the author sphere.

OPEN FOR BUSINESS

Joe, surprisingly, didn't come up in the world of indie authors. He started his career in industrial water treatment, a family business. "If you went back in time to 2006 and asked me what I'd be doing in 2024, I would have said, 'Selling industrial water equipment,'" he says. He sold the business in 2008, but he credits it with getting him into the entrepreneur mindset.



Around that time, Joe went to business school, which opened up his mind to opportunity, and ventured into an analytics start-up company around 2014. There, he raised nearly \$21 million from investors in eighteen months.

Meanwhile, Joe's wife, Suze, had written and self-published her first book.

Her venture into the world of publishing kick-started another time of transformation. When Joe noticed Suze was having trouble selling her books, he logged into her KDP account and saw she'd made nearly \$4,000 on a nonfiction book about jeans and T-shirts. The realization sparked his interest in the author world and in the business side of publishing and selling books. He decided to write his own book, on business—yet when it hit shelves, only twelve people bought it. This, again, only deepened his interest in entrepreneurship and creativity. Around this time, Craig Martelle, one of the founding members of the writing community 20BooksTo50K®, asked him to attend 20Books Vegas.

Lasting a week in November, 20Books Vegas brought nearly two thousand indie authors to Las Vegas and offered hundreds of hours of lessons and presentations designed to take their writing to the next level. What Joe found there was magic: a group of people coming together with the same vision to write good books and sell them as a career. Joe saw what was happening with content creators and fiction writers, and despite believing they were operating in lateral spheres, he realized authors were creating iconic pop culture.

“People at the show would go on to create Marvel-level stuff,” he says.

Joe wanted a part of that, and he made it his purpose to turn his business acumen into actionable advice for authors. At first, he started teaching authors about running a business, and as time went on, he went beyond the basics and crafted an entire business empire around writing and creating. The more he became involved in the publishing community, the more Joe saw the work as not just important but vital. He realized indie authors were content



creators, and they were setting the tone of the industry, getting closer to their fans in a way never done before.

MODELS FOR SUCCESS

Joe saw eliminating friction as the one thing that would help craft a successful indie author business. “I want to get rid of all the friction and get as close to the customer as possible,” he says.

He hopes Author Nation will be the answer to that—and help him continue to craft his legacy within the industry.

When asked about what he hopes to bring to authors, Joe answers, “Inspiration in the face of uncertainty.” He continues, “With collaboration and [by] working together, we can define the future. As a community, we can build a group around the show [Author Nation], where we don’t care what people think because we’re working with the customer.”

Asked about things indie authors need to consider in order to grow, Joe says the answer has been built into Author Nation as a model for success. Author Nation should teach authors about building business systems, he says. The Signing Store, a direct-sales store that allows authors to collect their customers’ information and streamline the delivery of print books to the show, is one example. The business model creates more qualified readers who are willing to spend more money; thus the authors make more money, and the show makes more money.

In order to fundamentally change the industry, he believes you must build with the big picture in mind and for the long haul. As a result, Joe has built several systems into Author Nation from its inception. Suze runs the sponsorship for Author Nation, which helps fund it and contributes to its success. Chelle Honiker, as the head of programming for Author Nation, built out a team to vet and select speakers from nearly four hundred-plus submissions, with a vision to create robust programming and deviate from the usual names and faces speaking to the industry. Chelle Honiker is also the publisher of *IAM*. Joe crafted a professional conduct committee, led by Shannon Humphrey, to foster a safe environment where people can represent their brand and community. And Mandy Stephens heads the Readers and Authors Vegas Event (RAVE), an event for authors to sell their books to readers, which started at 20Books Vegas but will be directly integrated with the show for the first time at Author Nation.

With the new event, Joe also saw opportunities for authors to earn their way to the show based on their merits and creativity by partnering with Story Wars, and to build a community outside of major platforms like Facebook. “The long-term is better than the short term—and having some barriers to entry is a good thing,” he says. “We should be trying to eat our own cooking.”

Joe's experience and influence is evident from the changes made to 20Books Vegas, and even before it has opened its doors for the first time, Author Nation seems to allow the spirit of the original show to live on in a new skin, with a newer, fuller focus.

A SOLID FOUNDATION

Whether the conversation is a groundbreaking author conference with thousands of attendees or a one-on-one business strategy session with an author, Joe's business know-how and love for the industry shines through in spades. "One of my favorite interactions with authors is when they realize it's not about the money. Sure, we achieved our financial goals, but that doesn't necessarily fill the holes. It's about doing what nobody else has done before," he says.

And for both ends of the spectrum, Joe believes the focus should be the same: on the foundation of success for an author and the value proposition of the reader-writer relationship. It's a keystone, and all money is derived from the relationship.

"If we always keep this in mind, you can identify friction and remove it," he says. "That relationship can move, and it can survive in a changing ecosystem. Are your decisions supporting that relationship?"

Joe's vision for Author Nation not only combines his love for good business and his willingness to adapt but also his inquisitive nature about what could be. He believes authors can be movers and shakers in a rapidly growing industry, pivoting as necessary to shape the landscape entirely—just as Author Nation hopes to do. ■

David Viergutz



David Viergutz

David Viergutz is a disabled Army Veteran, Law Enforcement Veteran, husband and proud father. He is an author of stories from every flavor of horror and dark fiction. One day,

David's wife sat him down and gave him the confidence to start putting his imagination on paper. From then on out his creativity has no longer been stifled by self-doubt and he continues to write with a smile on his face in a dark, candle-lit room.

Brush Up Your Graphics with a Platform Made for Authors

BOOK BRUSH OFFERS SIMPLE GRAPHIC CREATION SOFTWARE TAILORED TO AUTHORS' NEEDS

Ready to launch your next book but not sure how to create the picture that's worth your 50,000-plus words? Authors looking to create professional ads and social media images have many options for creating graphics. Canva, Adobe Express, Pixlr, and Photoshop may be some of the best known, but one online design software company was built specifically for authors. Book Brush offers user-friendly tools to provide authors with quality marketing materials that are customized for a book business.

Like Canva, Book Brush provides users a selection of royalty-free stock images from Pixabay, videos, and graphics to design images to be used in ads, social media posts, and elsewhere. What sets it apart is the ability to put your cover onto a 3D book or other mockup quickly and easily. There are two hundred-plus 3D cover templates to choose from, including paperbacks, hardbacks, ereaders, and cover reveal graphics. Book Brush's Custom Creator provides over three thousand book-specific templates, covering every genre, and one thousand fonts. You can also upload your own fonts and images.

Kathleen Sweeney, Book Brush's customer service representative, says, "Users can also select a custom size and create anything they need." The platform's blog posts provide helpful tips and step-by-instructions if you need guidance in creating marketing images, choosing font pairings, or deciding how best to use images at different phases of a book launch.

PRICING

Book Brush has a lot to offer at the free level, but they also have a thirty-day money-back guarantee and no subscription commitments, if you want to try a higher level.

Users of the free version of the platform have access to

- fifteen image downloads,
- 1.5 million-plus photos,
- book-specific stamps,
- two hundred-plus 3D cover templates, and
- more than three thousand book-specific templates.

Book Brush Plus, at \$8.25 per month, extends these features to include unlimited image downloads, as well as

- custom font upload,
- access to animation tools,
- priority support,
- cover creator access,
- and a reader hub page.

Book Brush offers two other paid tiers: the Gold tier, at \$12.25 per month, and the Platinum tier, at \$20.50 per month. Both include the same list of features as Book Brush Plus, but Gold tier members have access to an additional reader hub page, instant mockups, and box set creator tools. The instant mockup tool allows authors to put their book cover design into a realistic setting, whether that's on a 3D book, tablet, or phone. Customizable templates let you put the virtual book into genre- and brand-specific promotional images. Similarly, the box set creator lets you build a realistic image of a box set for ebook marketing.

Platinum tier members receive the same, as well as a third reader hub page, access to Platinum Academy, access to a book trailer creator, and ten background removal credits per month. In the Platinum Academy, marketing assistant and coach Mel Jolly leads quarterly workshops on topics like Kickstarter, direct sales, TikTok, and ads.

CUSTOM DESIGNS AND MARKETING MANAGEMENT

Book Brush also offers custom book cover design. Authors work with a project manager to discuss expectations, their book's genre, their target audience, and trends. After completing a questionnaire, authors then receive drafts via email with a checklist of things to consider before moving forward. The project manager acts as a go-between for you and the designer to deliver any concerns or requests you may have, "which eliminates any guilt you may feel giving your feedback directly to the designer," according to the marketing copy on their website.

A Basic Package (\$497) includes:

- one high-quality ebook cover with up to three revisions (only one major revision allowed),
- professional typography accurate to your genre,
- one matching social media banner (Facebook or Twitter),
- one matching cover reveal teaser image,
- a high-resolution JPG ebook cover file, and
- one transparent title or author name file.

Stock images from Depositphotos are included in the price.

There are optional add-ons to the basic package, which include an audiobook cover for \$50, a matching bookmark design for \$50, and a print paperback wrap for \$75. Authors can request an illustrated cover for an additional \$150.

In 2023, Book Brush added graphic design and social media services. Authors can hire graphic designers through Book Brush's Hourly Concepts for a flat monthly rate or an hourly fee. They have an extensive design menu, including Amazon A+ Content, book trailers, newsletter headers, logo design, and world-building maps. Each has estimated hours listed. Pricing is flexible, with the ability to cancel at any time, and hours purchased do not expire.

- À la carte (\$35 per hour)
- Five-hour plan (\$150 per month)
- Ten-hour plan (\$240 per month)
- Twenty-hour plan (\$399 per month)
- Thirty-hour plan (\$599 per month)

Both the cover design and Hourly Concepts services have portfolios posted.

For authors who prefer to pass their social media marketing to a professional, Book Brush offers social media management at two price points: the Meta Plan for Facebook and Instagram, and the Video Plan for TikTok and YouTube Shorts.

The Meta Plan launched in 2023. It costs \$597 a month and provides you with about twenty-five posts, averaging six posts per week. You get a minimum of one Reel per week. Your dedicated project manager then promises engagement for an hour a week, hashtag management, caption writing, and a monthly report. A monthly strategy call is optional.

The newer Video Plan will run you \$797 per month. This plan gets you fifteen Reels created and posted, video testimonials from your readers, and professional interview/content creation. Engagement on these is the same as the Meta Plan: engagement for an hour a week, hashtag management, caption writing, and a monthly report, plus the optional strategy call.

Both plans require a six-month contract. The bundle price for both services is \$1,297 a month. Clients under these contracts can purchase any of the other subscriptions for Book Brush at 50 percent off, but you may not need your own access to the Custom Creator software if you're satisfied with the posts you receive from the marketing management plans.

INTEGRATION

Although Book Brush does not directly integrate with other author platforms, the Custom Creator contains templates set to the required dimensions and file formats for many of them. If you use Atticus to format your novel, Book Brush has compatible templates for chapter themes and ornamental breaks. Other templates allow you to create graphics for things like Amazon A+ Content, Facebook Ads, and Story-Origin landing pages, as well as general use graphics like newsletter headers, bookmarks, and business cards. If you don't find the template you need, the Custom Creator lets you build graphics to any dimensions you specify.

UPDATES

Book Brush's newest ventures are in author education. Their Knowledge Base FAQ section and YouTube channel are "packed with bite-size

tips for using the Book Brush tools,” Sweeney says. There are over 450 videos and shorts on the YouTube channel at the time of writing.

In the spring, Book Brush will host their third annual Book-MARCon, a three-day private virtual event focused on marketing and other author business concerns. The conference will take place April 4-6, 2025, and will be free to members on a paid plan.

STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS

Book Brush has added several new features in just the past year, bringing it closer than ever to being a one-stop shop for authors’ graphic design needs. Templates for cover reveals, Kindle Vella cover designs, book reviews, giveaways, and ad content are time savers. The DIY tools are user friendly, and if you get stuck, you can choose between using their help resources or hiring a pro to take over through their Hourly Concepts services.

Most of the limitations on Book Brush fall under their free plan, as Canva’s free plan offers unlimited downloads of images and additional services that are limited under Book Brush’s free tier. However, once you move into the paid plans, Book Brush has a lead on Canva Pro, which charges \$15 a month or \$120 a year for individuals and \$10 a month or \$100 per year per person for teams.

The graphics authors use, from book covers to ad images, are the face of their business. Book Brush, with its author-friendly templates and extensive help services, might be the resource you need to create the one that launches (at least) a thousand sales. ■

Jenn Lessmann



Jenn Lessmann

Jenn Lessmann is the author of *Unmagical: a Witchy Mystery* and three stories on Kindle Vella. A former barista, stage manager, and high school English teacher with advanced degrees from impressive colleges, she continues to drink excessive amounts of caffeine, stay up later than is absolutely necessary, and read three or four books at a time. Jenn is currently studying witchcraft and the craft of writing, and giggling internally whenever they intersect. She writes snarky paranormal fantasy for new adults whenever her dog will allow it.

Keeping with Tradition

TO BREAK INTO THE BRICK-AND-MORTAR MARKET, INDIE AUTHORS MUST FOLLOW IN TRADITIONAL PUBLISHERS' FOOTSTEPS

Indie authors often rely heavily on digital marketing and promoting their books on e-retailer platforms. But millions of readers still get their books from libraries and bookstores. In 2023, U.S. bookstore sales hit \$8.3 billion, and Gen Z and millennials are visiting libraries far more than previous generations, according to research by the American Library Association in 2023.

Indie authors who want to break into bookstores and libraries must take a page from traditional publishing—but must work to overcome the built-in advantages that traditional publishers have when putting their books in stores and libraries.

TABLE STAKES: ACT LIKE A TRAD AUTHOR

A significant number of acquisitions managers at both bookstores and libraries have a bias against indie authors. “I read a lot of indie authors,” says Genesis Hansen, director of library and cultural services for the City of Mission Viejo, “and while I love some, many books are poorly done and will never make it into our collection.”

To battle this perception, indie authors must mimic traditional publishers when approaching bookstores and libraries.

Quality

Although it should go without saying that any book indie authors submit should be indistinguishable in quality from traditionally published books, acquisition teams receive thousands of requests to carry books that don't meet minimum quality standards. "I can't stress this enough," says Hansen. "Invest in the quality of your book. Professional editing, cover design, and sales material are essential."

Mark Leslie Lefebvre, director of business development at Draft2Digital, agrees. "Differentiate yourself from the thousands of other submissions. If you have several books in a series, make sure that's clear. You'll stand out from other authors as someone who's written enough books to meet readers' expectations."

Availability

Books must be available in Ingram's catalog in order to be considered by brick-and-mortar retailers. "Most libraries and bookstores will not order from Amazon," Lefebvre says. Hansen agrees and says that her library will only purchase books from Amazon as a last resort.

When setting up distribution on the IngramSpark website, the indie author's dashboard for the Ingram catalog, Lefebvre recommends choosing at least a 53 percent discount and allowing returns. "Bookstores need at least a 40 percent discount to make money," Lefebvre says, "and a 53 percent discount gives Ingram their cut while providing that minimum discount to bookstores."

Although nearly all bookstores and libraries order from Ingram, "don't bother advertising in the Ingram catalog," Hansen says. "Everything is ordered online, and no one sees those ads."

Focus on the Front List

Indie authors rarely do marketing work pre-publication, but for bookstores and libraries, promoting books to bookstores two to three months before release—just like traditional publishers do—can be more successful. "Bookstores and libraries focus on the front list," Lefebvre says. "Promote books that will be released soon or that have been released in the last six months."

Sell Sheets and ARCs

A sell sheet, also called a one sheet, is a single sheet of paper that provides all the relevant information distributors may need about a book in order to decide whether to purchase it, such as print dimensions, page count, ISBNs, and genre or BISAC categories. Sell sheets must include a high-resolution graphic of the cover; a description, which indie authors often call a blurb; and purchasing information. Not all stores or libraries require them anymore, but it's best to have one prepared in case a seller requests it.

Clearly communicate how and where acquisitions teams can order the book on your sell sheet. The title, cover picture, and ISBN must be included in all materials. Also specify that the book is available on Ingram. For libraries, include which library distributors carry the ebook, such as Overdrive, Baker & Taylor, and Hoopla. Authors often include Amazon, Kobo, Apple Books, and other e-retailer icons on their sites; as Lefebvre suggests, "Treat library distributors the same way you treat e-retailer logos on your website, and include their logos too."

Many bookstores and libraries also look for positive, professional reviews in the sell sheet. Hansen's library looks for quotes from review publications like *Kirkus Reviews*, *Library Journal*, or *School Library Journal*—Amazon or Goodreads reviews aren't enough. Quotes from second-tier review sites or authors with bestseller credentials won't be as powerful as *Kirkus Reviews*, but they're better than customer reviews.

Taglines, author photos, and author bios are optional. Comparisons to other similar titles—often called comp titles—can help, too. "Acquisitions people must be able to figure out if your book is in tune with what their visitors and customers already want," Lefebvre says. "Diane Capri's Hunt for Jack Reacher series is a perfect example of a built-in audience: readers of Lee Child's Jack Reacher books."

Including a physical copy of the book, especially an ARC (advance reader copy) if the book isn't released yet, can differentiate indie authors. Local authors can include that information as well. "Defining yourself as a big fish in a small pond can work," Lefebvre says. "A lot of booksellers and librarians want to feature local authors."

Be aware, however, that ARCs cost money and are not always effective. “People love free books,” says Hansen, “but no one can guarantee where those ARCs will end up.”

While having sell sheets and ARCs available is a best practice, many bookstores and libraries are moving away from them. Emily Fluke, author of the Bewitcher’s Beach series, got her books into Barnes & Noble stores throughout California. “I didn’t provide any kind of ARC or sell sheet,” says Fluke. “Instead, I provided my book’s information, and they looked it up themselves to start the approval. This was all done over email.”

Hansen says most books are now submitted online. “We rarely see sell sheets anymore. We have a form on our library website.” Despite Fluke’s experience, Hansen doesn’t believe email is effective. “We get a gazillion emails asking us to read books,” she says. “No one has time to read everything that’s submitted.”

The screenshot shows the Mission Viejo Library website's "Author Submission Form". The page header includes the Mission Viejo logo and navigation links for Home, News, Events, Services & Guides, Document Center, Departments, and Government. The breadcrumb trail reads "HOME > DEPARTMENTS > LIBRARY > ASK US". A left sidebar menu lists various library services, with "Author Submission Form" highlighted in a dark blue box. The main content area features the title "Author Submission Form" and three paragraphs of introductory text explaining the library's selection process and providing instructions for authors. Below the text are three input fields: "Book Title:*", "Author's Name:*", and "Author's Contact Information:*". A "Text" button is visible in the top right corner of the form area.

The Mission Viejo Library in Mission Viejo, California, is moving away from sell sheets and instead relying on an online form to collect requests from authors and publishers to carry their books, says Genesis Hansen, director of library and cultural services.

GAIN YOUR INDIE ADVANTAGES

Although bookstores and libraries often expect indie authors to act like traditionally published authors in some ways, indie authors have some built-in advantages.

Pricing for Libraries

Traditional publishers take pains to make books as expensive for libraries as possible. Their \$20 print book can often cost triple that for libraries, and physical books become damaged or get lost. Ebooks from traditional publishers often cost \$50 or more—and have what Hansen calls “crazy DRM schemes,” where the ebook expires after twenty-five or thirty checkouts.

Indie authors have the advantage here, especially with digital copies, such as ebooks and audiobooks. An author who sets the ebook library price at triple the retail price will often sell the title for \$12 to \$18, \$30 less than a traditionally published ebook, and the ebook or audiobook will not expire. This means libraries can order more indie books and stay within their budgets. “Genre readers are voracious,” Hansen says, “and they’re much more likely to take a chance on an indie author they haven’t heard of.” Less expensive indie books are part of many libraries’ collection development strategies.

The Personal Touch

The most successful indie authors build a relationship with the library, the bookstore, and the people who run acquisitions. Traditional publishers’ marketing departments don’t develop these relationships—not only does the strategy not scale, but it’s also not how the publishers do business.

“Start with your local libraries,” Hansen suggests. “Find out who is in charge of collection development, but any librarian who likes a new author is sure to talk it up with their colleagues.”

Lefebvre agrees that personal relationships are critical for success. “You’ll have a better chance if you’re a customer with a good relationship with the bookstore.” This isn’t just for independent bookstores, says Lefebvre: “Each of the chain bookstore locations has a ton of autonomy. They can make decisions over which authors to carry and what events to host.”

Playing up an author's local angle isn't just for sell sheets. "Our local authors' collection is much more indie-friendly," Hansen says. This advantage extends to other cities or locales where books may be set, giving authors a perfect excuse to contact that city's local libraries or bookstores. "So many books are set in New York," Hansen says. "Libraries are keen to carry books set locally."

Libraries will often host local author events because traditional publishers, as Hansen reports, aren't doing as many author events post-pandemic. The Mission Viejo Library held two local author book fairs in the last year, giving the authors an opportunity to sell their books and do readings. Every author who brought a book for the library had it added to the collection. "The book fairs started because local authors ganged up and convinced the library to do it," Hansen says.

"While traditional publishers have certain advantages," says Lefebvre, "indie authors have different opportunities. It's up to each author to do what works for them to get into bookstores and libraries." ■

Paul Austin Ardoin




Paul Austin Ardoin

Paul Austin Ardoin is the USA TODAY bestselling indie author of *The Fenway Stevenson Mysteries* and *The Woodhead & Becker Mysteries*. He holds a B.A. in creative writing from the University of California, Santa Barbara and an M.B.A. in marketing from the University of Phoenix. His book *Zero to Four Figures: Making \$1,000 a Month with Self-Published Fiction* is scheduled for publication in June 2023.

An Essential Guide to Editorial Book Reviews for Indie Authors

As an indie author, you're constantly balancing your creative process with the demands of running your own marketing. Among the tools available to boost your book's visibility, editorial reviews hold special significance, as they set the tone for your entire marketing campaign. Reviews are one of the most trusted and effective forms of marketing across many industries, and in the literary world, editorial reviews are renowned as one of the most powerful methods to build awareness and credibility.

Editorial reviews are professional evaluations of a book, written by reviewers, editors, or critics with literary expertise. They are often published in newspapers, magazines, literary journals, or reputable websites like *Publishers Weekly* (via BookLife for self-published authors), *Kirkus Reviews*, and *Library Journal*. Unlike customer reviews on Amazon or Goodreads—written by casual readers—editorial reviews come from industry authorities. While influencer or social media reviews and author endorsements can help promote a book, they often lack the critical analysis of editorial reviews.



The key distinction is that editorial reviews signal to the industry and readers that your work has been professionally evaluated. As a result, they play a vital role in a book's promotion and elevate its credibility.

Obtaining editorial reviews should be done strategically and in a timely manner to maximize their impact. Understanding what editorial reviews are, how they differ from other types of reviews, and how to navigate the process helps indie authors leverage them effectively.

WHO CAN SECURE EDITORIAL REVIEWS?

Traditional publishers have established systems to secure editorial reviews through long-standing relationships with major outlets. Small and indie presses sometimes assist their authors, though they may have fewer resources. Hybrid presses vary—some help with submissions while others leave it up to the author. Marketing and PR firms can also offer support for authors who need it. Most importantly, self-published authors can secure their own editorial reviews, but knowing the ins and outs can help ensure success.

BENEFITS FOR INDIE AUTHORS

For indie authors, editorial reviews can make a significant difference in how your book is perceived. Here's why they matter:

- 1. Professional Endorsement:** A review from a respected source lends an air of credibility, helping your book stand out. Bookstore buyers, librarians, and other industry professionals often use reviews, such as those from *Booklist* and *Foreword Reviews*, when evaluating titles to stock on their shelves.
- 2. Marketing Power:** Quotes or “blurbs” from editorial reviews can be featured on back covers; placed in Amazon's editorial review section; used in press releases; shared on social media; and used in backgrounders, one sheets, and other promotional material. Many editorial review platforms have significant name

recognition by readers and others in the industry, so seeing those publications in association with your work may give it a boost.

- 3. Constructive Feedback:** Editorial reviews can offer insights before publication, almost like a professional beta read, allowing you to address any issues in the manuscript.

WHEN TO PURSUE EDITORIAL REVIEWS

Ideally, you should begin pursuing reviews well before your book's release. Six months is recommended, with three months being the minimum. Here's why:

- 1. Submission Queues:** Most platforms require filling out an online submission form. Your book will then enter a queue for consideration. Sites like *Publishers Weekly*, *Kirkus Reviews* and Books That Make You follow this structured system.
- 2. Review Process:** After submission, the reviewer reads your book and writes a detailed critique. This can take weeks or even months, depending on the platform and volume of submissions.
- 3. Publication:** Once the review is completed, platforms notify you and may give you the option to publish the review. This flexibility is useful if you want to revise your manuscript before release.
- 4. Creating Pre-Launch Buzz:** Established authors benefit from the anticipation built before a book's release. First-time authors can also create that early buzz if their debut is outstanding. Remember, many of these platforms and their magazines or publications are read by bookstore buyers, librarians, and readers, too.

Keep in mind, professional review platforms accept advance reader copies (ARCs), which aren't necessarily the final manuscript. Professional reviewers know this and focus on the overall quality, even if minor edits are pending.

HOW TO OBTAIN EDITORIAL REVIEWS

To obtain editorial reviews, follow this general process:

- 1. Make a List:** Research which review sites suit your book's genre and type.

2. **Submit via Online Platforms:** Most editorial review outlets have online submission systems. Sites like *Publishers Weekly*, BookLife and *Kirkus Reviews* require you to fill out forms, while others like Midwest Book Review require physical copies to be mailed in along with printed marketing materials. Indie authors can send an Amazon proof or physical ARC, or wait and send the physical book once printed.
3. **Note Submission Deadlines:** Many platforms, such as *Publishers Weekly* and BookLife, require titles to be submitted months before the release date. Platforms like *Kirkus Reviews* can take several months for a review to be completed. Expedited reviews often cost more, so plan and budget accordingly.
4. **Use Feedback Constructively:** Platforms that allow you to decide whether to publish a review give you the advantage of using feedback to improve your manuscript before re-submitting. Consider whether you plan to edit your book after receiving a review when choosing which platforms to pursue.

When seeking editorial reviews, it's important to understand the specific guidelines and distinctions each platform offers. For example, *Kirkus Reviews* has strict rules about how you can use their reviews. Once you pay for a review, you receive an honest critique—whether positive or negative—and you cannot edit or remove any parts you dislike. Despite this, *Kirkus Reviews* are highly respected within the publishing industry, with bookstore buyers, librarians, and other professionals valuing their integrity.

Some platforms also offer special recognition for outstanding books. *Kirkus Reviews* awards the Kirkus Star, one of the most prestigious honors in the industry, to books that demonstrate exceptional quality. Similarly, Books That Make You offers “Hearted Reviews,” which are reserved for the top 10 percent of submitted manuscripts, recognizing those of extraordinary merit.

MAXIMIZING YOUR EDITORIAL REVIEWS

Once you've secured an editorial review, here's how to make the most of it:

1. **Feature Reviews Prominently:** Use positive quotes on your book's cover, in the front matter, and in product descriptions

on retail sites. Properly attribute the quote to the reviewer and platform according to their guidelines.

2. **Use in Marketing Materials:** Quote reviews in press releases, newsletters, and one sheets. Editorial reviews can enhance your promotional efforts among those in the publishing industry, as well as with consumers, when used strategically.
3. **Promote on Social Media:** Share excerpts of reviews on social media to engage potential readers and show that professionals have vetted your book. Do this for both earned and paid media strategies.
4. **Link to the Full Review:** Wherever possible, link back to the full review. This allows readers to see the complete critique and reinforces trust in the review's authenticity.
5. **Leverage for Awards:** Include editorial reviews in award submissions. A strong review with proper attribution can boost your chances of recognition.

MORE THAN JUST A FEEL-GOOD ACCOLADE

Editorial reviews are more than just accolades; they are one of the first marketing touchpoints that can boost your book's credibility and reach. Whether it's a star from *Kirkus Reviews* or a BookLife Review via *Publishers Weekly*, these reviews serve as trusted signals in the competitive literary landscape.

Many indie authors do rapid releases and offer fast publication schedules. This sets them apart from the often slow-moving traditional publishing route. And therein lies the rub. If you want to utilize editorial reviews, realize you may sacrifice some of the benefits associated with them to please your eager fanbase. However, by leveraging these opportunities strategically, indie authors can position their books for greater visibility and recognition.

EDITORIAL REVIEW PLATFORMS

Interested in exploring literary reviews for your next release? Here are some platforms that offer editorial reviews:

- ***Kirkus Reviews***: Offers paid review services for publishers and options for indie authors. *Kirkus Reviews* is one of the most popular editorial review platforms in the industry.
- ***Publishers Weekly* (via BookLife)**: Indie authors can submit for free via BookLife or opt for a guaranteed paid review through BookLife Reviews.
- ***Foreword Reviews***: A respected platform for indie and small-press books, trusted by librarians and booksellers.
- **Midwest Book Review**: Established in 1976, the Midwest Book Review is an organization committed to promoting literacy, library usage, and small press publishing. It publishes several monthly book review magazines.
- **Books That Make You**: Professionally written reviews are shared on its expansive network through its website, in the monthly Webby Award-winning newsletter, and on social media.
- ***Library Journal***: Particularly valuable for nonfiction and literary works, libraries often use *Library Journal* to guide acquisitions.
- ***Booklist***: Published by the American Library Association, *Booklist* provides professional reviews used by librarians and educators for collection development and purchasing decisions. ■

Desireé Duffy



Desireé Duffy

Desireé Duffy is the founder of Black Château, a marketing and public relations agency; Books That Make You, a Webby Award-winning multi-media brand that promotes books and authors through its website, podcast, and radio show; and The BookFest® Adventure, a biannual online event uniting book lovers worldwide. A passionate advocate for spreading stories, Desireé serves as the executive producer for the Beach-Bound Book Bash, Jingle Books, and the Books That Make You Show. Her memberships and board positions include the International Academy of Digital Arts and Sciences (IADAS) and the Writers and Publishers Network (WPN). She holds degrees in English, communication, art, and marketing. Desireé splits her time between Southern California, Oklahoma, and wherever bookish events and book lovers gather.

How to Format Your Book

You've probably heard the saying, "There's never been a better time to be an author." A big part of that is the sheer number of tools available to meet your every writing need.

Whether it's jotting down notes on the go, plotting, outlining, writing, editing, or formatting, you'll find countless specialized pieces of software designed to make your life easier.

But here's the catch: all these tools can end up scattering your attention—and your writing—across multiple apps and devices.

Imagine this: you take notes on your phone, transfer them to Plottr for outlining, co-write in Google Docs, and then import the draft into Vellum. Next, you upload the EPUB to BookFunnel for beta readers, only to find out they've discovered a massive plot hole in Act II.

To fix it, you need to go back to your Plottr outline, update the manuscript in Google Docs, then... well, you get the picture. What should be a simple revision turns into a tedious task of updating your work across several platforms.

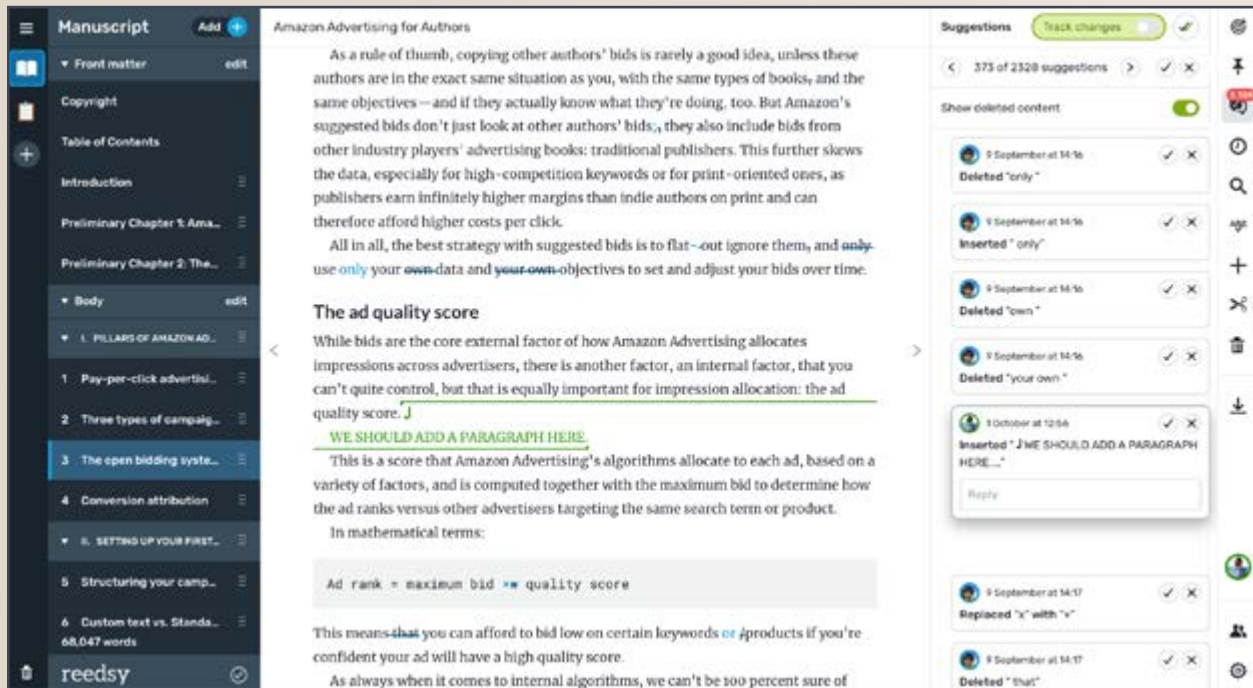
This is where an all-in-one writing app like **Reedsy Studio** comes to the rescue, letting you keep your notes, outline, manuscript, and formatting all in one place.

WRITE ANYWHERE, ON ANY DEVICE (WITH AN INTERNET CONNECTION)

One of Studio's standout features is that it's entirely browser-based. No downloads, no updates—just log in from any device with an internet connection, and you're good to go. It's as convenient as Google Docs. And just like Google Docs, Studio offers...

REAL-TIME COLLABORATION

You can work on your books in real time with any collaborator anywhere in the world. That goes for co-authors, editors, and proofreaders too. You can invite them by email, and they can create their free Reedsy account to access the book. Just remind them to turn on track changes before making any edits!



SET YOUR WRITING GOALS

We all need a little extra motivation sometimes, and Studio helps you stay on track by letting you set daily, weekly, or monthly word count goals. As you write, you can monitor your progress and start to notice your productivity 'hot spots'. If you miss a day, Studio will gently nudge you the next morning, automatically adjusting your target to keep you moving forward.

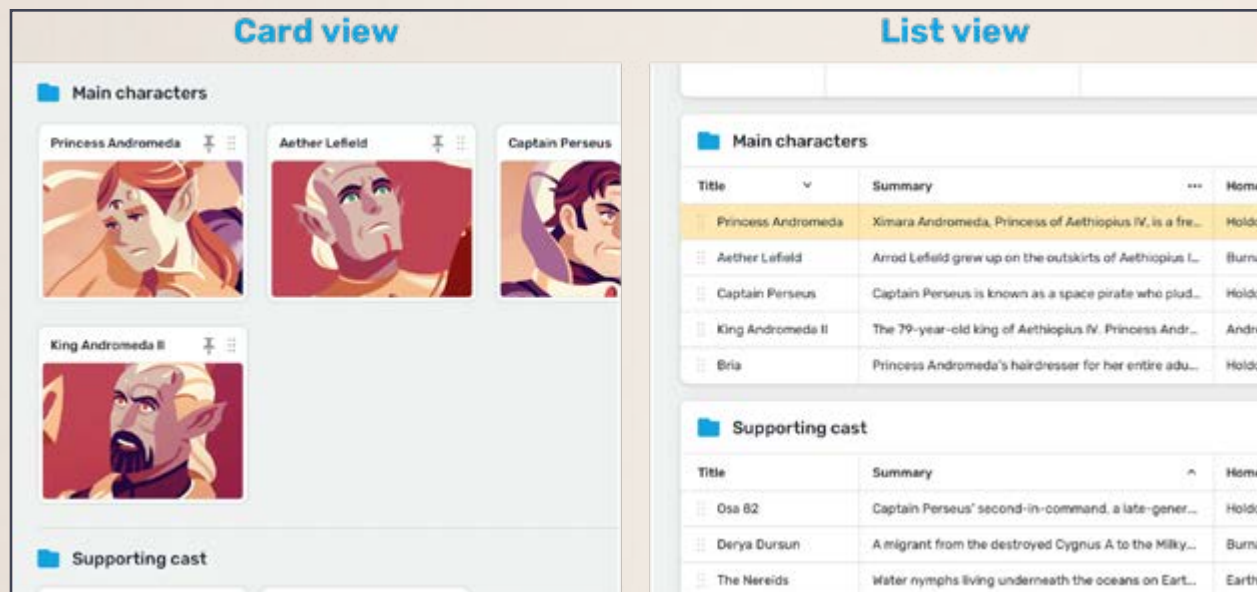
Studio is not just for writing, though. Last year, Reedsy incorporated a whole new section to it: boards.

BOARDS TO OUTLINE YOUR STORY

Located in the app's sidebar, boards are fully customizable canvases where you can organize notes, compile research, and create story plans.

Any manuscript created in Studio will come with a simple Hero's Journey template board, which you can modify to suit your plot. But you can also create boards for your characters, locations, magic systems, and other world-building elements.

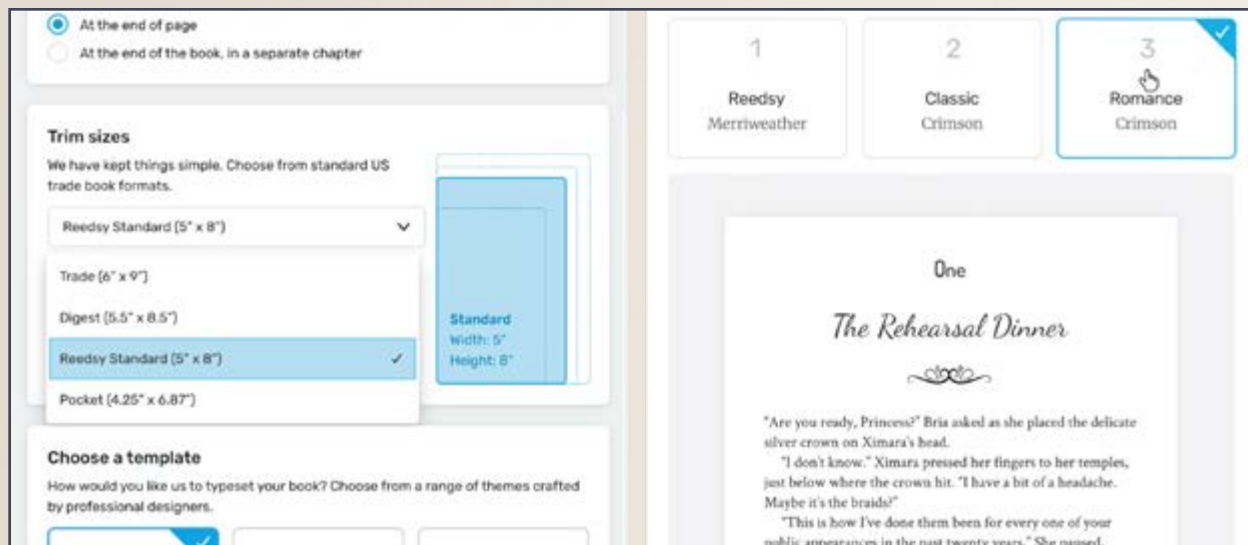
You can view boards as cards or as editable tables that highlight all the key details you need.



Right now, you'll need to build your boards from scratch, which is fun — but can take a bit of time. However, Reedsy will add more editable templates soon to make this process even easier.

EXPORT TO EPUB AND PRINT

Finally, when your manuscript is ready for publication, you can export it with one click to either EPUB (for ebook distribution) or a print-ready PDF. While you won't find as many customization options as on Vellum, you can add drop caps at the start of chapters, select from the most common trim sizes, and choose from a selection of export templates.



Funnily enough, this is the feature that Reedsy Studio started with back in 2016 (it was called the Reedsy Book Editor back then), but as you can see, the tool has evolved quite a bit since then.

It is, however, still 100% free. So, if you want to play around with it yourself, simply sign up for it here: <https://reedsy.com/studio>, create your first book (or import an existing one), and get started! ■

Ricardo Fayet



Ricardo Fayet

Ricardo Fayet is one of the four founders of Reedsy, a marketplace connecting authors to the world's top publishing talent—from editors to cover designers, book marketers, or literary translators. He's the author of several Reedsy Learning courses on marketing and a regular presenter at several prestigious writers' conferences: NINC, RWA Australia, and The Self Publishing Show Live, among others.

He oversees the marketing for all Reedsy products—Marketplace, Book Editor, Learning, Discovery—and is a big SEO and Facebook advertising enthusiast.

In his spare time, he enjoys watching football (or "soccer" as y'all call it over there), and carrying tactical analyses to explain why his favorite team won, as well as referee mistake analyses when his team loses.



Indie Author Training Roundup

If you've checked in at Indie Author Training this month, you may have noticed we've made some changes to the site. We're really excited to share them and hope they'll make it even easier for you to find the tech tools, lessons, and writerly advice you need to make your author business thrive.

In October, our webinars focused on ways to help you reach the next stage in your author career. In a live webinar, co-founder of *The Sell More Books Show* Bryan Cohen did a deep dive with a six-figure author to show how to scale royalties. You can check out the replay here: <https://indieauthortraining.com/webinars/author-coaching-for-profit-and-scaling>.

We have even more webinars coming up, so rush over to <https://indieauthortraining.com/webinars> to see what will help you move the needle in your career.

As part of the streamlining of IAT, our Tech Tools have moved: You'll now find them in the Get Started section at the bottom of the page. This month, we've launched several, including one for Zero Strategy Games. Have you ever considered gamifying your words and your worlds? Zero Strategy Games is keen to work with indie authors and literally bring your stories to the table. Check it out at <https://indieauthortraining.com/category/tech-tools>.

We're all looking for ways to help us get back more time. With this in mind, *IAM* creative director Alice Briggs is teaching you how to clone yourself with custom GPT bots, taking tasks like social media scheduling, writing marketing copy, and organizing your schedule off your hands, so you can get back to writing. Check out the course here: <https://indieauthortraining.com/courses/clone-yourself-with-customgpt-bots>.

This month sees the introduction of something of which we're very proud: Book Club Summaries for Indie Authors. At <https://indieauthortraining.com/course-category/book-club-summaries>, we'll showcase a nonfiction book every month to help you with your mindset, support you in your career, or help you overcome the pain points in your business. Each Book Club Summary has

- an audio deep dive,
- a synopsis,
- a discussion forum, and
- discussion questions for indie authors.

Although the books featured may be of general interest, each element in these courses has been tailored to indie authors. October's book was *The Happiness Advantage* by Shawn Achor, and in November, we'll be chatting about *Atomic Habits* by James Clear. Each summary is its own course and is free for you to enjoy and join in the discussion at any time, once you've set up your Indie Author Training account. Just visit <https://indieauthortraining.com>.

See you there! ■

Karen Guyler



Focus on the Faults

FOUR STEPS TO BUILDING STRONGER NARRATIVES BASED ON YOUR CHARACTER'S FLAWS

My first novel started with a character rather than a story. Although I had attempted to start a novel now and then, I had never gotten very far. Yet this character kept speaking to me. He told me of his fears, of his skills, and of a love he feared to lose. At first, he was in the shadows, but I realized his wedding ring shone as bright as the moon in the darkness. He kept telling me his story and wouldn't leave my mind.

His love introduced herself to me next, and I watched a painful reconciliation between the two characters in my mind's eye. I learned of their history together; of the man's anger and the woman's determination; of a fantasy world they called home that was on the brink of madness as they tried to make sense of their own lives inside it. Their story brought me to my keyboard after a long hiatus from writing. I had to write as their story, told through their flaws, faults, and struggles, unfolded before me.

To the organic writers out there, the process of using the inner flaws of a well-rounded character to build a story, instead of following a specific plot structure, is familiar. Author and *The Creative Penn* host Joanna Penn refers to these darker personality traits as "the Shadow" and says they don't just exist on the page. In her book *Writing the Shadow*, she even suggests authors find their own self-doubts, worries, and challenges and incorporate them into their storytelling to create more authentic stories and stronger characters. "Readers want dark-

ness, even if they don't consciously know it, and so much of what we look for in art is the Shadow side," she said in an October 2023 podcast episode.

Focusing on a character's flaws instead of their ultimate goal can create natural conflict and help your story feel less formulaic while keeping your characters relatable and central to the narrative.

But what to do when the characters are silent and your muse has gone into hiding? For my second novel, which became my debut as an author, I followed a series of steps to allow my characters to form the story around their faults and how they needed to grow.

1. START WITH THE CHARACTER

To draft a book from your character's flaws, you first need to understand your lead characters. Before writing their character sheets, write about their past and background, and consider what might drive the character forward. What are their desires? What do they fear? Next, ponder their backstory. What are their motivations and internal conflicts? Where does the protagonist come from? Why is this important to them? How much conflict can you build into the protagonist without turning readers away?

Sometimes it is hard to allow yourself permission to let your characters show their inside flaws. We wonder if people will believe these flaws are our own and will censure us for it. Be brave. A good character must grow during the story, to learn and improve themselves. You must put your protagonist up in a tree and throw rocks at them. Otherwise, your readers may not take an interest in their plight and continue reading.

There's no strict rulebook for how to develop character sheets, but by centering everything around your character's personal journey, you can develop a more dynamic and engaging arc to drive the story forward.

One way I tap into my characters is to take out a notebook and free-write a sample scene. If I feel stuck about a character, writing them into a scene allows my subconscious to develop the character more in my mind. The free writing I do to develop characters seldom makes it into my book, but it allows my subconsciousness to develop the character in my mind.

2. LET THE CHARACTERS LEAD

Once you know the main character's background and internal conflicts, pick a key point of conflict between them and their antagonist and begin writing. You may not keep this writing in your book—it's more so a character exercise than truly starting a draft—but you should keep it in a secure place where you may access it.

As you write this key first scene, allow the characters to dictate their actions and decisions based on their strengths and weaknesses. Don't worry too much about where the story is going at this stage. Focus on how the characters would react in each situation based on their own beliefs. Once done, pick another key scene where the main character would progress. Place this new scene into its own scene file.

As you write more conflict scenes, label them with what the scene contains, and place them in sequence in your project file alongside other research or outlining documents, like character sheets or setting descriptions. These scenes may provide helpful reference materials as you consider how your character changes over the course of the story, or reveal a larger plot as you trace your character's growth through their conflicts.

3. IDENTIFY KEY MOMENTS OF GROWTH AND CONFLICT

As you write each scene, update your character sheets with any new information you attach to each character, and mark pivotal moments where a character's flaw leads to a significant challenge to their progress. Likewise, note where their strength shines through as they overcome obstacles.

You will find, once your exploration of the scenes concludes, these moments will become major plot points in your story, which will provide the structure to the narrative.

Using your exploratory scenes as a base, outlining can help you create a structure to your story, even if you're someone who prefers a looser, more exploratory writing process. The Snowflake Method, a novel drafting

technique created by author Randy Ingermanson, is a useful tool that allows you to start small and build your story layer by layer, but any method of structuring your book is acceptable to use. Begin with a single sentence that sums up your novel's core idea—often revolving around how your character's flaws will shape their journey. From there, expand that basic idea into a paragraph showing the major plot points. This gives you a sense of direction without locking you into rigid details too early.

From that initial paragraph, continue expanding, breaking down the story into detailed sections. Focus on how your character's motivations push them into conflict and how their flaws either get in their way or propel them forward. You'll also develop subplots, side characters, and scene-level events, or link to the ones you've explored already.

As you write, be open to surprises and turns in the story. Your subconscious mind will develop your characters as you go, and twists will be revealed as you write. This may lead the story in a direction you hadn't thought of at the beginning, but give yourself permission to follow these leads to see what develops. A good story has conflict and characters that grow from both good and bad experiences, and you always have the power as the author to change things if you need the story to move in a different direction.

4. REVISIT AND REFLECT

After completing your rough draft, revisit your narrative with an eye on the character's arcs. Ensure their strengths and flaws have driven the plot in a way that feels natural and cohesive. Be sure you give your characters room to grow from their flaws—if they're meant to—and have agency in the plot and their arcs as they develop rather than letting the story simply happen around them.

Try to stop yourself from doing this before the end of the draft. Otherwise, you risk changing things and not writing the ending.

Writing a narrative that springs from your characters' flaws is a journey of discovery. By starting with the character, you ground your narrative in the strengths and flaws that make them more human and develop characters with stronger backgrounds and a more natural progression in the story.

RESOURCES

For more on building character-based story arcs, explore the following articles: ■

- Story in Literary Fiction's "What Exactly Is a Character-Based Plot?" by William H. Coles (<https://storyinliteraryfiction.com>)
- "4 Ways to Motivate Characters and Plot" by *Writer's Digest* author Nancy Kress (<https://writersdigest.com>)
- "How to Plot a Character Driven Book in 3 Easy Steps" by Robyn DeHart (<https://robyndehart.com>)
- MasterClass's "What Is Conflict in Literature? 6 Different Types of Literary Conflict and How to Create Conflict In Writing" (<https://www.masterclass.com>)

Wendy Van Camp



Wendy Van Camp

Wendy Van Camp is the Poet Laureate for the City of Anaheim, California. Her work is influenced by cutting edge technology, astronomy, and daydreams. A graduate of the Ad Astra Speculative Fiction Workshop, Wendy is a nominated finalist for the Elgin Award, for the Pushcart Prize, and for a Dwarf Stars Award. Her poems, stories, and articles have appeared in: "Starlight Scifaiku Review", "The Junction", "Quantum Visions", and other literary journals. She is the poet and illustrator of "The Planets: a scifaiku poetry collection" and editor of the annual anthology "Eccentric Orbits: An Anthology of Science Fiction Poetry". Find her at <https://wendyvancamp.com>



From the Stacks

BOOK CLUB SUMMARY:

The Happiness Advantage

Shawn Achor

<https://indieauthortraining.com/groups/the-happiness-advantage-shawn-achor>

From beginning to end in the publishing process, being an indie author can often feel overwhelming. But what if the key to success wasn't working harder or stressing more but instead cultivating happiness? In *The Happiness Advantage*, Shawn Achor shows that happiness is a critical factor in unlocking creativity, productivity, and success. Achor's book provides actionable strategies rooted in positive psychology that will help you build a successful indie author career by focusing on your well-being and happiness first.

Taking a look at the book through Indie Author Training's new Book Club Summaries gives you

- an audio deep dive into the material,
- a synopsis geared toward indie authors,
- a discussion forum to connect with other readers, and
- questions to help you apply what you learn to your business.

Visit <https://indieauthortraining.com/course-category/book-club-summaries> to learn more and explore other titles.


TOOL:

Solaris

<https://indieauthortraining.com/solaris>

Even if the thought of math and numbers doesn't make you break out in hives, Solaris is a suite of tools for authors to cut how long you spend data-crunching your Facebook ads and free up your time so you can get back to writing. Created by Malorie Cooper of The Writing Wives, the software





compiles data into easy-to-read charts and graphs, breaking down your ad campaigns at a glance to let you know whether your ads are profitable, how changes in pricing will affect your return on investment, and more.

WEBINAR:

Revolutionize Your Book Marketing with AuthorScale

<https://indieauthortraining.com/webinars/revolutionize-your-book-marketing-with-authorscale>

In this webinar, learn how AuthorScale can help you transform your stories into income-generating slideshows by showcasing the strategies to create content that not only captivates audiences but also drives revenue. The walk-through explores the basics of the platform and offers authors practical tips on leveraging slideshows across various platforms to build a sustainable, full-time income as an author.

PODCAST:

The *Indie Author Magazine* podcast has been refined and focused for bite-size listening, giving you just what you need to know about some of the biggest topics in the industry. Here are the latest episodes you may have missed:

“Master Writing Speed: 10 Game-Changing Tips for Indie Authors” <https://open.spotify.com/episode/0XGBcYv9N5fVbG3yX3UfGR>

“Turning Words into Wins: Discovering the Best Gamified Writing Tools and Methods” <https://open.spotify.com/episode/5A1XUmZHE6AU49TtKR8Mkp>

“Mastering the Blurb: Tips from Indie Author Tony Lee” <https://open.spotify.com/episode/2p5NwpFvdKe7XNAI8VPOBF>

“Understanding Indie Author Finances: Insights from Issue 42 of *Indie Author Magazine*” <https://open.spotify.com/episode/0GQdnW229VlbSUvWn1DBXl>

Mindfulness Practices to Deep-Clean Your Mental Health during the Holidays

The holidays often come with a long to-do list and unrealistic expectations. Attempts to recreate the holiday bliss depicted on television and maybe even in your stories may leave you feeling mentally depleted. And sometimes, one casualty of the holiday chaos is the mental space typically reserved for creativity.

Deep-cleaning your house may be necessary this time of year because of holiday visitors, but deep-cleaning your mind at the same time can make sure you can dive back into writing when you can snag a moment between festivities. Practicing mindfulness can help you take a break from holiday stress and clear your mind, enhancing your creativity.

GIVE YOURSELF A PRESENT BY BEING IN THE PRESENT

Mindfulness is a simple form of meditation that nurtures an awareness of your five senses and helps you engage with the world around you. Various therapeutic interventions use this form of meditation since it has helped some achieve greater mental peace, decrease chronic pain or anxiety, and improve cognitive ability.

You can practice mindfulness as much or as

little as you'd like. Include it in your daily routine, whether walking, wrapping gifts, or cleaning. You can even begin with just one minute of deep breathing a day to see benefits, according to the Cleveland Clinic—no yoga mat required.

MIND YOUR MINDFULNESS

Authors are used to sitting with their thoughts but not necessarily in a way that declutters their brains. Here are a few tips for how to begin practicing mindfulness if you're interested in adding it to your author toolbox:

- Take deep breaths.
- Focus on each breath and the sounds and scents surrounding you.
- Shift your attention to your thoughts and emotions. If your mind wanders or you get distracted, bring your attention back to the moment.
- Don't judge your emotions or unpleasant thoughts. Sit with them and avoid pushing

them away—doing so might have them popping back up like that secondary character trying to take over your story.

- Avoid self-criticism, and acknowledge and accept what you're feeling right now. Treat yourself like a good friend or your favorite character.
- Relax into each breath. Don't dwell on the past or worry about the future. Focus on this moment.
- Continue for one minute, or build up your practice to last as long as you'd like.

Besides helping to decrease stress, mindfulness may enhance your writing. It may help you create more vivid descriptive scenes, enrich your dialogue, or give your characters the space they need to come alive in your mind.

After you've mastered mindfulness for yourself, try the following mindfulness tips to fuel your writing sessions.

- Practice mindfully eating by enjoying the smell and taste of your food. Consider how you would describe this meal in a story.

- As you walk, take in the environment and incorporate the sounds, scents, and colors in your story settings.
- Instead of getting frustrated at long lines, implement mindfulness techniques for a few minutes. If you write humor, consider how you'd pen a humorous twist on your current situation.
- Observe the body language of others as they speak to reduce your dialogue tags. Active listening works best when you minimize distractions.
- Practice mindful breathing while observing others at holiday gatherings. You could collect character traits—but change the names in your story, or you might be dodging some emotional minefields at the next holiday gathering!

Stop multitasking and instead focus on the moment-to-moment awareness of your everyday activities. It may help you enjoy your holiday with less stress and allow your creativity to flourish. ■

Maureen Bonatch



Maureen Bonatch

Maureen Bonatch MSN, RN, is a fiction author and freelance healthcare writer. Her experience as a fiction author helps her create engaging and creative content as she authors numerous healthcare articles and online educational content. Maureen writes cozy paranormal mysteries as M.L. Bonatch and urban fantasy, paranormal romance, and other genres as Maureen Bonatch.


When Maureen's not doing the bidding of a feisty Shih Tzu, she's a mom to twin daughters, exploring the beautiful woods of PA with her hubby and dancing as much as possible. She believes in pairing music with every mood, that laughter is contagious, and caffeine and wine are essential for survival. She is the owner of MaureenBonatch.com and CharmedType.com.


YOUR ONE-STOP RESOURCE

INDIE AUTHOR TOOLS

INDIEAUTHORTOOLS.COM

 **Over 45+ categories of resources, from AI to website builders, all designed to supercharge your self-publishing journey.**

 **Authentic reviews and real-world case studies from authors who've used these tools to bring their creative visions to life.**

 **A community-powered project, crowdsourced by authors who know exactly what you need because they've been there too!**

 **Boost your authorial prowess with our popular weekly newsletter, packed with tips, tricks, and updates on the latest tools.**

PUBLISHERROCKET

FIND
PROFITABLE
KINDLE
KEYWORDS

Book Marketing Research
Made Simple!



writelink.to/pubrocket

CLONE YOURSELF

Custom Chat GPT Bots



Harnessing AI's knowledge base and expand your skills and expertise in vital areas such as:

- Life and Business Coaching
- Mastering Marketing and Newsletter Strategies
- Crafting Captivating Blurbs and Social Posts
- Enhancing Time Management
- Elevating Customer Service
- Writing Compelling Ad, Product, and Landing Page Copy

And that's just the beginning.

INDIEAUTHORTRAINING.COM