

Martha Carr:
*Writing 'Recess
for Adults'*

**PREORDERS
WITHOUT
PANIC**

*Timing,
Promotion, and
Platform Rules*

**10 TIPS FOR
WRITING AT
CONFERENCES**

**WHEN YOU
WRITE BEST**

*Finding Your Ideal
Creation Schedule*

**AMAZON ALLOWS
KDP SELECT
AUTHORS TO
DISTRIBUTE TO
LIBRARIES**

**CAN BOOK
AWARDS
BOOST YOUR
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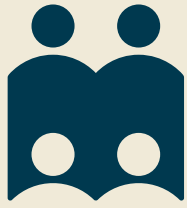
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Beth Duke

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INDIE AUTHOR MAGAZINE

26

**AUTHOR INKLINGS: THE
VANISHING ACT**

44

**HOW WRITING 'RECESS FOR
ADULTS' GREW MARTHA
CARR'S CAREER**

60

**PREORDERS WITHOUT PANIC:
TIMING, PROMOTION, AND
PLATFORM RULES**

**Martha Carr:
Writing 'Recess
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**PREORDERS
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**AMAZON ALLOWS
KDP SELECT
AUTHORS TO
DISTRIBUTE TO
LIBRARIES**

**CAN BOOK
AWARDS
BOOST YOUR
INDIE CAREER?**

INDIE AUTHOR MAGAZINE

14

**ADVERTORIAL: 50,000 WORDS. 30
DAYS. NOVNOV.**

20

**ALLI EXCLUSIVE: CAPTURE MORE
READERS WITH CROSS-PROMOTION**

30

**AMAZON ALLOWS KDP SELECT
AUTHORS TO DISTRIBUTE TO
LIBRARIES**

34

**10 TIPS FOR WRITING AT
CONFERENCES**

42

**FROM THE STACKS: POMODORO
TECHNIQUE, ELEVENREADER, NOTION
AND AI WEBINAR**

52

**CAN BOOK AWARDS BOOST YOUR
INDIE AUTHOR CAREER?**

66

**IAM AUTHOR SHARES HER EXPERIENCE
WITH GATEKEEPER PRESS**

72

**ASK A BOOK COACH: TO DETAIL OR
NOT TO DETAIL**

76

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YOUR IDEAL CREATION SCHEDULE**



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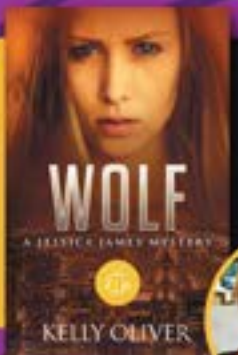
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EDITORIAL

Publisher | Chelle Honiker

Editor in Chief | Nicole Schroeder

Production Coordinator | Grace Snoke

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

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Nicole Schroeder
Editor in Chief

From the EDITOR IN CHIEF

At the beginning of this year, I published a book using a preorder window for the first time. In hindsight, I could've managed it better. Although I'd planned my publication date around my writing schedule, I hadn't built in enough of a buffer to account for the holidays and my own creative burnout. I also didn't allot enough time for promotion, and I didn't have the audience I needed to truly benefit from the extra work I put in.

Don't get me wrong: I'm still proud of the book I published, and I'm happy to have had the experience of putting my book up for preorders. I'm also thankful for the lessons I learned in the process. The truth is that all of us have learned aspects of independent publishing through trial and error. It's safe to say it's a normal part of indie authorship—and of any self-managed business.

It also highlights the beauty of the indie author community.

Despite the challenges I faced in running my preorder campaign, authors around me helped walk me through Kindle Direct Publishing's (KDP's) rules around preorder uploads and delays. We hope Jennifer Mitchell's article in this month's issue can do the same for anyone in a similar dilemma. Those authors saved me from much more drastic errors and encouraged me when I felt stressed. I can say the same of the difficulties and triumphs I've faced throughout my publishing journey, as I hope you can, too—my circle has always been there to give me guidance when I've needed it.

No matter the questions you have or the challenges you face, other authors, organizations such as the Alliance of Independent Authors (ALLi), and publishing services such as Gatekeeper Press—also detailed in this month's issue—are there to offer advice and support. We hope this issue, and every issue, provides some of that advice and support as well.

Perhaps that's the other normal part of indie authorship: that you are almost never going it alone. Even if you choose to do something different with your business, you can bet there will be others—including yours truly—standing behind you and cheering you on. Trial and error may be normal, but it isn't the whole story; it's trial, error, encouragement, and eventually, triumph.

Nicole Schroeder

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50,000 Words. 30 Days. NovNov.



Following in the Footsteps of Its Predecessor, ProWritingAid Launches New Monthlong Writing Challenge

For more than twenty-five years, authors, aspiring authors, and writers from all walks of life participated in National Novel Writing Month (NaNoWriMo), a monthly competition that challenged participants to complete a fifty-thousand-word novel in a month. In 1999, the event started with just twenty-one participants. At its peak, more than four hundred thousand people participated worldwide.

In April 2025, the nonprofit organization closed its doors. But after hearing the demand for something to replace NaNoWriMo, ProWritingAid, one of the leading tools for writers, has stepped up to the plate. NovNov—Novel November—is a writing challenge launching this year with a similar goal in mind: As the company’s website sums it up, “50,000 words, 30 days, 1 novel. Go from blank page to first draft with Novel November.”

“In the wake of NaNoWriMo closing, we’ve had hundreds of different users reach out to us and ask us if we would be interested, or able, to step into this void and provide a suitable alternative,” says Hayley Milliman, ProWritingAid’s director of community. “As we looked at what we have the capacity to do and what we can kind of bring together, we decided this would be a great opportunity to utilize the existing infrastructure to host a challenge that’s big and ambitious but also really safe and supportive and accessible for writers.”

Milliman is no stranger to NaNoWriMo. She participated in the challenge for ten years and remembers the excitement she felt when she won her first challenge. With Novel November, or NovNov, she hopes new authors will have the opportunity to feel the same sense of accomplishment.

Developing NovNov has been a labor of love for Milliman and the rest of ProWritingAid's staff. They've been hosting free training events for the writing community since 2020, including Fantasy Writers Week, Romance Writers Week, and more. During those sessions, the platform brought in authors and experts to offer education and advice to participants.

The staff has now merged the training sessions and the infrastructure NaNoWriMo created to develop NovNov. Milliman sees NovNov as an opportunity to give back and celebrate the writing community that inspires them every single day.



How It Will Work

NovNov will follow a similar structure to NaNoWriMo, encouraging writers to write 50,000 words in November, but ProWritingAid is set to provide additional support features to participants.

Interested authors can sign up for a free account now at the ProWritingAid website. Starting this month, ProWritingAid will

also host more than 150 prep sessions to help authors get ready for NovNov. These sessions will help authors learn how to plot their novels and will include advice from experts in the writing field, including number one *New York Times* best-selling authors Madeline Miller, author of *The Song of Achilles*; Tomi Adeyemi, author of *Children of Blood and Bone*; and Rufi Thorpe, author of *Margot's Got Money Troubles*.

Participants will be able to sit in on the three sessions hosted by each author and ask questions. "We'll act as mentors and guides throughout this experience," Mil-

liman says. "As of October 1, you'll be able to log into the dashboard, commit to your novel, and start attending these sessions."

Beginning November 1, participants will be able to log word counts for the challenge on their accounts. Those with ProWritingAid accounts integrated with their preferred writing app will be able to log words as they type rather than manually updating their word counts on the site. ProWritingAid can integrate with several writing programs, including Scrivener, Google Docs, and Word. Learn more at <https://prowritingaid.com/integrations>.

Similar to NaNoWriMo, as they write, participants will earn badges and achievements and see how their progress stacks up to

The goal is to write fifty thousand words in November. Some people write one novel. Some people jump around. At the end of the day, you're the one putting the word count in.

Hayley Milliman
Director of Community, ProWritingAid

Your Novel November registration is confirmed.

The Novel November dashboard opens October 1, when your 50,000-word journey begins. Until then, explore the Registrant Hub for exercises, writing sprints, and expert tips to get ready.

[Visit the Registrant Hub](#)



other participants. There will be prizes and items to unlock along the way.

“We’re partnering with many different organizations who will be providing free gifts, discounts on products, or other things they will be offering to participants,” Milliman says. “Some will be offered to anyone who participates; others will be for those who have won.”

Starting in December, ProWritingAid will shift the focus to “what to do next,” with a focus on editing content. They will also be developing future challenges for writers throughout the year.

Tracking Word Count

With the NaNoWriMo platform, authors who participated in the challenge had to keep track of their word counts manually. But ProWritingAid has developed a widget for participants of NovNov that can track an author’s word count automatically. The platform’s widget allows users to add their word count for a specific session, and those with ProWritingAid integrated with their writing platform will even be able to unlock achievements directly in the app.

Participants will also be able to edit their

word counts if needed—for example, if they wrote something in their document that didn’t apply to the project.

You are not required to have ProWritingAid or the widget to participate. Similar to NaNoWriMo, participants will be able to log in to the main dashboard and manually add word counts. There will also be a dashboard on the website, where users will be able to view achievements they’ve already unlocked and see upcoming events hosted by the platform.

And though the primary goal is to write a fifty-thousand-word novel in a month, if authors are working on multiple novels in the month, the words will still count.

“As long as it’s fifty thousand words in a month, you still win,” Milliman says. “This is your challenge. The goal is to write fifty thousand words in November. Some people write one novel. Some people jump around. At the end of the day, you’re the one putting the word count in.”

ProWritingAid will also have a way for users to download images showing their progress to share on social media or on their website. Authors will not be required to verify their word count to win; everyone who adds their word counts into the system and achieves fifty thousand words will receive a badge they can share to show they won NovNov.

A Community of Writers for Writers

Of course, ProWritingAid hasn't forgotten about the community-building aspect of NaNoWriMo. NovNov will aim to connect the writing community in the same way as its predecessor.

"We're going to be hosting multiple writing sprints every single day," Milliman says. "We will also have some community features for you to connect with other writers."

Anyone who takes part in NovNov will have access to a free community where all events will take place. Users will have a place to chat and connect with fellow participants in chat spaces hosted within the ProWritingAid community, as well as with

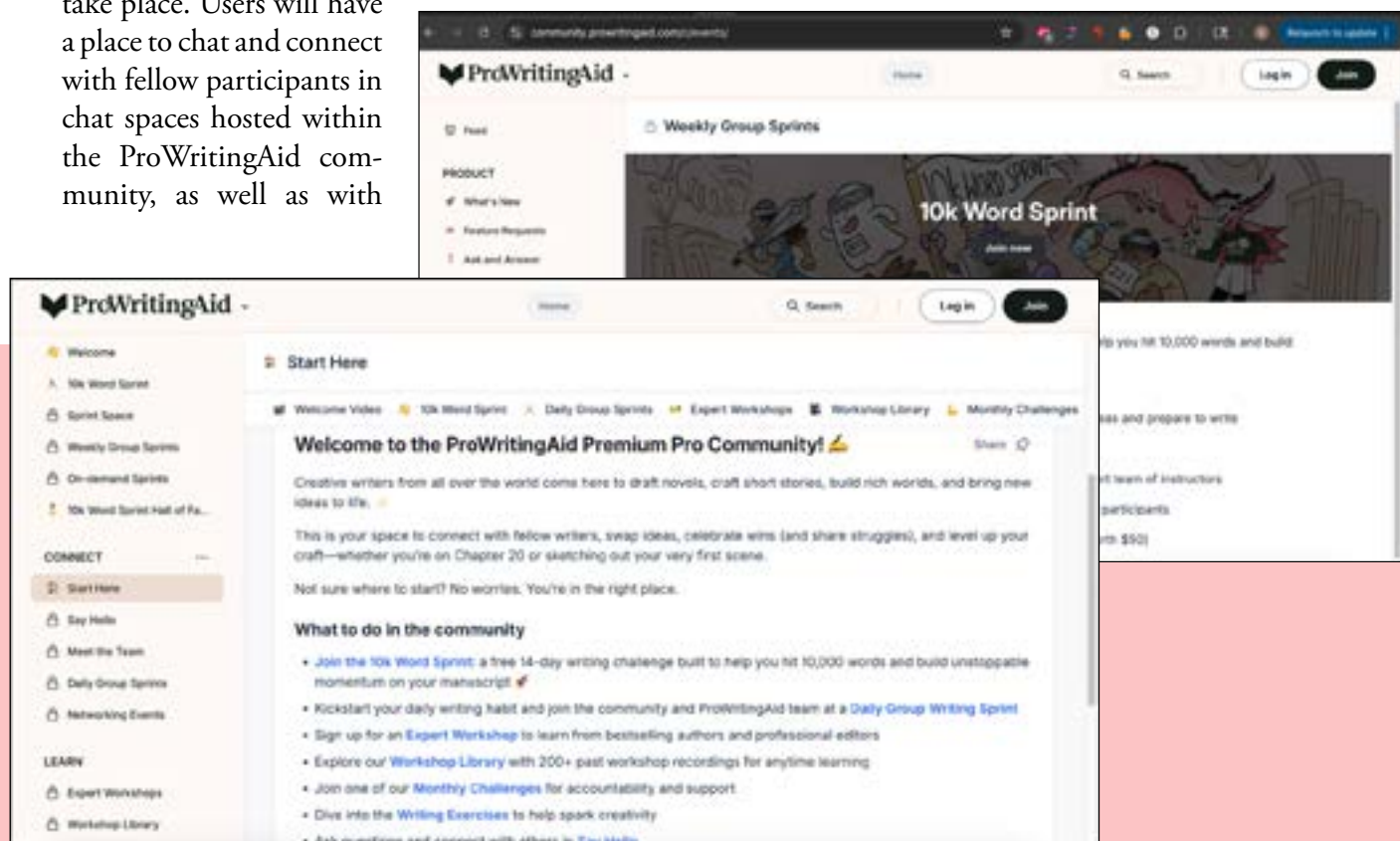
the groups ProWritingAid has partnered with for NovNov. Participants can share details about their projects, check in daily, and join writing circles to chat with other writers in the same genre, affinity groups, and more.

There will also be in-person writing sprints at Author Nation in Las Vegas in November.


"If you haven't participated in any [events] as part of NaNoWriMo or attended any of ProWritingAid's training sessions, you will be surprised how

fun it is," Milliman says. "It's great to be able to talk to writing book coaches, story coaches, editors, and agents we've brought on board."

Networking is also important, acknowledges ProWritingAid staff, and the company plans to host networking events. These events will be an opportunity for writers to connect with each other, with focuses such as sharing writing tips, speed "friend"-ing, talking about books, and genre focuses.



Along with its writing challenge, ProWritingAid and NovNov will host several community-building opportunities throughout the month of November, including free online community chats (left) and writing sprints.



As we looked at what we have the capacity to do ... we decided this would be a great opportunity to utilize the existing infrastructure to host a challenge that's big and ambitious but also really safe and supportive and accessible for writers.

Hayley Milliman
Director of Community, ProWritingAid

Looking to the Future

ProWritingAid isn't just focusing on NovNov this year; the company is planning for the future. They're partnering with other organizations, such as Scrivener and Kickstarter, to develop the writing challenge further, as well as using the challenge as an opportunity to give back.

Similar to NaNoWriMo, which raised funds to support The Young Writers Program and provide resources to incarcerated and low-income Title I schools, ProWritingAid will donate two dollars for every person who wins the challenge to Room to Read, a charity dedicated to bringing literacy and equality to children living in poverty and conflict-stricken communities.

"We hope to have a nice, big donation for Room to Read at the end," Milliman says. "And then, in the future, I hope it gets bigger and better every year."

Milliman hopes to work with more organizations and mentors as ProWritingAid brings more writers on board. And though she is excited for NovNov in November, she hopes the challenge will also be replicated throughout the year. "I'm excited to see how NovNov turns out this year, and I look forward to helping it expand in the future," she says.

Sign-ups for ProWritingAid's NovNov are free and open now. Create an account and announce your project at <https://prowritingaid.link/JoinNovNov>. ■




Grace Snoke

Grace Snoke is a 42-year-old author and personal assistant residing in Lincoln, Nebraska. Having been a corporate journalist for more than a decade and a video game journalist for even longer, writing has been something she has always enjoyed doing. In addition to non-fiction books, she is currently working on a paranormal romance series, and two urban fantasy series under her real name. She has also released more than a dozen illustrated children's books and several non-fiction books. She has been publishing erotica under a pen name since 2017. For more information about her personal assistant business visit: <https://spiderwebzdesign.net>. Her author site is: <https://gracesnoke.com>.

ALLi Exclusive:

Capture More Readers with Cross-Promotion

An illustration of a woman with short dark hair and glasses, wearing a blue sweater and a yellow scarf, sitting and reading a large yellow book. She is positioned in the center-left of the frame. To her left is a tall, thin bookshelf filled with books. In front of her is a small table with a white vase containing green leaves and a stack of books. To her right is a small potted plant with green leaves and yellow flowers. The background is a light blue wall with a large, stylized white archway.

Independent publishing rewards those who work together rather than compete. Cross-promotion with your fellow authors can expand reach and create loyal, multi-author reader ecosystems. The relationships you build with your fellow authors also enable you to tap into their expertise and extend your own; if one of you is a fantastic ad copywriter and one loves graphic design, you have a winning formula for social media ads.

Successful cross-promotion starts by identifying authors whose work offers the same reader promise you deliver—think not just of the broad genre but of the specific blend of tone, subgenre tropes, and reader emotions your books evoke. For nonfiction, consider commonality in underlying themes or instructional approaches. Both require you to be an active member of the communities where these opportunities lie, such as genre-specific writers’ groups and topic-centric conferences.

Before committing to a cross-promotion, vet each prospect’s backlist and brand voice. Promoting an ill-matched author can frustrate your followers and dilute your own positioning; compatibility of content is critical to keep trust intact. Aim for overlap rather than duplication: The best partners share your niche’s DNA yet bring fresh titles, formats, or geographic reach that expand, not cannibalize, your collective audience.

So what types of cross-promotion make the most sense depending on the stage of your author business?

For Beginning Authors: Swap Newsletters and Back Matter

The lowest-barrier form of cross-promotion is a simple exchange: You tell your readers about me, and I’ll tell mine about you. “If you’re trying to move your career forward, probably the thing that will bring you the most success at the least cost is group promotion,” ALLi Advisor Russell Nohelty says. “Most of the other ways to get noticed require significant monetary outlay, while group promotions can, and often do, cost nothing.”

These group promotions can include newsletter mentions, in which you agree with another author to feature each other’s new releases or freebies once a quarter. Look for an author whose reach is about the same or slightly larger than your own; a beginning author is not likely to be an attractive cross-promotion option for someone on the bestseller lists. That said, picking the right cross-promotion partners will mean your lists and your impact will grow exponentially, especially



if you require readers to sign up to your own list to redeem a freebie download.

If you've seen success at growing your audience via mutual newsletter mentions with another author, consider expanding your agreement to a cross-promotion in your respective books. At the end of your ebooks, add text such as "Enjoyed this story? Try [other author]'s books!"

For Emerging Authors: Bundled Books and Group Events

Authors with multiple titles can often afford to contribute a novella or a first-in-series novel to a multi-author bundle—especially when the goal is exposure rather than earnings. Keeping things simple is key to making this effort viable.

- Publish the bundle under the existing imprint of one of the participating authors rather than creating a new imprint for the bundle. This participant will likely then become the cross-promotion project lead, though all participants should be consulted about decisions.





- Consider offering the bundle for free. This eliminates the complexities of splitting royalties. If the bundle is for profit, use a tool like Draft2Digital's royalty-splitting feature for ebooks.
 - Limit how long the bundle is available so that no one is taking on the effort of monitoring the cross-promotion effort over time. This also reduces the chances of needing to accommodate the situation where one participant wants to withdraw from the bundle early.
 - Draft a contract at the start of the cross-promotion project to ensure all contributors retain individual copyrights and have the right to republish their story outside the bundle at a later date. A short-term exclusivity period may be agreed upon, but it should be clearly defined and limited.
 - Consider expanding your cross-promotion beyond the book to in-person or virtual events. Host an event around your topic or genre featuring giveaways and author readings. Asking participants to sign up for the event with their email address enables the participating authors to keep in touch—provided, of course, that this use is clear in the sign-up materials.

For Experienced Authors: Crowdfunding and Merch

At this stage of your author business, the focus of cross-promotion might move from exposure to income earning.

Brainstorm inventive ways to capitalize on the common theme of your cross-promoted works with beyond-the-book offerings that can be used for crowdfunding campaign tier rewards or even as joint merchandise lines.

- For Fantasy, commission an artist for a shared universe map poster or trading cards that feature settings or characters from the participating series.
- For Mystery, Thriller, or Crime Fiction, compile a “case files collection”—a set of items such as faux police reports, redacted witness statements, crime scene sketches, or suspect profiles pulled from each author’s stories, printed as an interactive dossier or bundled in a sealed manila folder.
- For Romance, hire a third party to create romance baskets featuring items such as scented candles, chocolates, or a small-format print collection of love notes from each author’s characters.
- For nonfiction, create a deck of cards with motivational quotes or quick tips from each author’s work.

The key to joint merch is selecting or developing offerings that are visually compelling and tie into the common themes of your series while offering fans something exclusive and collectible.





Set the Terms for Success

Smooth the way to a successful collaboration by agreeing to the roles and responsibilities, as well as the details of aspects like copyright and royalties, upfront.

“Agree the rules beforehand,” says ALLi Editor-in-Chief Roz Morris.

“Might you drop the price if sales seem to be going slowly? Does everyone agree to that? Some writers feel that would undervalue their work or ‘throw it away’; others feel they should grab any opportunity to woo new readers while they’ve got their attention. How much work will everyone do? Agree on any necessary tasks beforehand. Sort this out before you start, then no one feels they’re taking an unequal burden.”

Capture agreement on these aspects in a simple contract to prevent misunderstandings.

Looking for more information? Check out ALLi’s post “The Ultimate Guide to Author Collaboration in Writing and Publishing” at <https://selfpublishingadvice.org/author-collaboration-writing-publishing>. ■



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



Author Inklings

The Vanishing Act:

How to Be Seen in a Sea of Stories

Hello again, my pretties! Tell me, have you ever poured your heart into a book—months or years of writing, revising, proofreading, and tweaking the cover—only to hit “publish” and watch it sink into the digital abyss faster than my willpower is lost at a cake sale?

Welcome to the great indie author magic trick: the vanishing act. One moment, your book is live for the first time. The next, it’s buried beneath a mountain of shiny new releases. Poof. Gone. Even your mum has to squint to find it on Amazon.

The answer to this, my friends, is increasing discoverability. And right now, it’s one of the hottest topics and hardest challenges in the indie author world.

The Crowd Problem

Here’s the sobering truth: More books are being published each year than any reader could possibly consume in a lifetime. In 2023 alone, over 2.6 million self-published titles hit the market. Since then, that number has ballooned further. It’s like trying to whisper at a rock concert.

It means that no matter how brilliant your book is, it won’t be able to sell itself. Readers can’t buy what they can’t find.

Cue the collective indie author panic. I’ve lost count of how many Facebook threads and writing sprints have devolved into hand-wringing over the mysterious algorithm, like it’s a capricious deity we must appease with offerings of ad spend and metadata.

The Myth of the Magic Button

I'll let you in on a secret: there is no single magic button for discoverability. No perfect Facebook ad. No silver-bullet keyword. No ritual dance under the full moon—though I admit, I've tried.

Instead, discoverability is a messy blend of strategy, persistence, and experimentation. The trick is not to beat the algorithm but to outlast the noise.

Lessons from My Own Disappearing Act

Let me confess: My first few books launched into the void with all the fanfare of a damp squib. I refreshed my dashboard a hundred times, praying for sales. Instead, I got the cold comfort of “zero.” My dog gave me that same side-eye he did when I quit my day job.

So I did what any self-respecting author does: I sulked. Then, eventually, I learned. I dusted myself off and realized that if my book wasn't visible, I had to make it visible.

I did the work, and books sold. I was then lucky enough to be picked up by another indie writer's publishing arm. I thought I could sit back and let the money flow in. For a time, that worked, and it worked well. But now I am looking at branching out with a new pen name, which means it's back to basics for your favorite columnist. The truth is that for every indie author, no matter experience level or audience size, there will always be some steady effort required in order to make a book sell.

So what actually works? Through trial, error, and far too many marketing books, here is my summary of the strategies that have helped me and other indie authors beat the disappearing act.

1. **There's Power in the Backlist.** One book is a whisper. Three, five, or ten books? That's a chorus. The best discoverability hack is to keep writing and build a body of work. Every new release breathes life into your old ones.
2. **Refresh, Don't Regress.** If a book has flatlined, give it a makeover: new cover, new blurb, new categories. Readers judge books by their covers, no matter what we've been told. Sometimes, a facelift

is all it takes to get noticed again.

3. **Go Direct to Reader; Take Back Control.** Amazon is powerful, but don't let it be your only stage. Build an email list. Offer a free novella. Experiment with direct sales platforms. When you own the relationship, you don't have to beg an algorithm for attention.
4. **Ads Are a Marathon, Not a Lottery Ticket.** Yes, ads work—but not overnight, and not without testing. They are more like a science experiment than a slot machine. Start small, track results, and tweak. And if you hate ads? Outsource the work, or focus on organic strategies instead.
5. **Community Is Greater than Competition.** Instead of shouting alone, join a choir. Cross-promotions, multi-author box sets, newsletter swaps—they all expand your reach. Readers who love Cozy Mysteries, Fantasy Romances, or space operas rarely stop at one author. They'll happily devour your books, as well as your friends', and vice versa.

The Mental Game

Now, let's pause here, because though all this sounds practical, I know the emotional toll of invisibility is real. It's exhausting to shout into the void. It's demoralizing when your book baby disappears without a ripple.

But hear this: You are not failing. You are competing in the noisiest marketplace in history. Sometimes, the smartest thing you can do is step back, breathe, and remember your why (see my column in the August 2025 issue for more on that).

And please, for the love of your sanity, stop comparing yourself with the indie superstar who “just hit six figures in six months.” Their journey is not yours. For all you know, they're spending more on ads than they're earning, or they have a decade-long backlist feeding their success. Comparison is a creativity killer.

Final Thoughts (or the Bit where I Get Philosophical Again)

Discoverability can feel like trying to juggle flaming swords while blindfolded. But remember: Readers are still out there, hungry for great stories. They're scrolling late at night, desperate for an escape, and your book might be exactly what they need.

Publishing can feel like a mystery you have to solve, but you don't have to do it on your own. Whether you have questions about the indie author world or just want to air your writing woes, send your thoughts to: feedback@indieauthormagazine.com and include "Author Inklings" in the subject line. I'd love to hear from you!



Focus on finding the right readers, in the right places, and building relationships that last beyond a single sale.

Keep experimenting. Keep refreshing. Most importantly, keep writing. Readers are loyal creatures. If you make them laugh, cry, or forget their troubles for a while, they'll follow you anywhere—even into that slightly dodgy newsletter signup form you cobbled together at midnight.

My pretties, don't despair if your book vanishes on launch day. The only real disappearing act is the one where you stop showing up altogether.

And I, for one, am not ready to vanish.

Happy writing,

Susan



Susan Odev

Susan Odev is the co-author of the Mike Atwell Cozy Mystery series and several other successful whodunnits involving vicars, Shakespeare, and suspicious cake. A lifelong list-maker, deadline-dodger, and one-woman writing retreat (complete with dog), she wrote her first best-selling nonfiction book in 2010. She lives in Kent, England, dreams of the Portuguese hills, occasionally tidies her desk, and is always five minutes late for her own ideas. Susan has written for numerous magazines, spoken at international conferences, and contributed to workshops on a range of personal development topics, and yet can still get lost in her own bathroom.

The background image shows a library with tall wooden bookshelves filled with books. A person in a light blue shirt is seen from behind, looking at books on a shelf. Another person is visible in the upper right corner, also looking at books. The text is overlaid on a white rectangular area in the upper left portion of the image.

Three Words Added to KDP Select's Terms of Service Mean Big Changes for KU Authors

Amazon Allows KDP Select Authors to
Distribute Books to Libraries



As of a recent update to Kindle Direct Publishing's (KDP's) requirements for enrollment in the KDP Select program—known to readers and authors as Kindle Unlimited—authors whose books are enrolled in the program may now distribute their books through public libraries, a long-awaited exception in the program's strict exclusivity requirements.

The change is noted in only one line of the KDP Select help page, where three key words, “and public libraries,” have been added: “During the 90-day enrollment period, the Kindle eBook can only be distributed through KDP and public libraries. However, you can continue to distribute print, video, audio, or other formats of your title elsewhere. See the KDP Terms and Conditions for more information.” The company has not shared a press release or formal announcement of the change, and clicking through to the linked terms and conditions does not provide any additional information, as the linked terms date from September 27, 2024. However, best-selling Science Fiction and Fantasy author Kevin McLaughlin explains in a September 3 Facebook post on the change, “Per the KDP terms of service, all their [KDP's] help pages are also included in the TOS [terms of service], which makes this a legally binding change to the TOS.”

Although rumors of the change surfaced at least a week before the change was announced, many authors expressed concern about potentially breaking their exclusivity agreements to begin distributing to libraries. However, self-publishing expert Dale L. Roberts says in a Substack post about the change that he reached out to the KDP team in August and received the following response via email: “I can confirm that authors can distribute their Kindle eBook to public libraries during their KDP Select enrollment period. Authors do not need to contact Customer Support to confirm this is allowed.”



Why Does This Matter?

For authors who sell their books through KDP Select, this change offers an opportunity to expand their reach, gain credibility, and develop new income streams. Placing your book in a library reaches a whole new audience beyond Amazon customers. It may take time to build visibility within the library system, but having your book selected for circulation by a librarian lends some weighty social proof, leading to more reads and more reviews.

How Does It Work?

Although KDP's Help Center could not provide a complete list of approved library services, an agent confirmed that Overdrive, Hoopla, BorrowBox, Odi-lo, cloudLibrary, Baker & Taylor, and Palace Marketplace—all listed as library services by Draft2Digital—would be acceptable to use for authors enrolled in KDP Select. Additionally, the agent wrote, "You may use services to do this during your KDP Select enrollment period as long as distribution is limited to public libraries." Although authors can send their books to these distributors and aggregators through several publishing platforms, Draft2Digital and PublishDrive may be safer options, Roberts notes in a YouTube video, as

others, like IngramSpark, do not allow you to opt out of retailers and focus on libraries.

Draft2Digital recommends setting library prices approximately two to three times higher than your regular ebook price. Draft2Digital's publishing page explains: "Library services provide a catalog of available ebooks to library staff. Each library chooses which of those books to make available to their patrons. The library may either purchase the book through a 'Cost Per Checkout' model or 'One Copy/One User.'" The cost per checkout model charges a small fee—roughly one-tenth the purchase price—every time a reader borrows the book, which allows the library to check out mul-

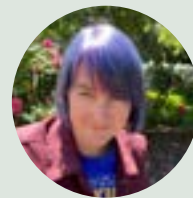
Pro Tip:

For more information on distributing to libraries through Draft2Digital, Write Publish Sell, an author business blog by Alexa Bigwarfe, provides a video tutorial on the process.

tiple copies of the book at once. With the one copy/one user model, libraries pay full price to purchase a single copy, which must be returned to the library before it can be checked out again.

The risk to the library is significantly less with a cost per checkout model, since they only pay when users request the book rather than buying copies outright, as they would with the one copy/one user model. Because of this, cost per checkout tends to provide more discoverability than one copy/one user.

The exception for libraries in KDP Select's exclusivity terms is a potential game changer for authors who want to maintain the benefits of KU's audience and promotions while testing out the advantages of a wider release. And though Amazon has yet to publicly announce the change, its authors are understandably sharing the news widely, too. ■



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.

The background of the image shows a person wearing a blue sweater, sitting and writing on a laptop. The person's hands are visible on the keyboard, and their legs are in the foreground. The image is slightly blurred, focusing attention on the text overlay.

10 Tips for

Writing at Conferences



I often write at conferences and conventions to balance my creative life with my role as a panelist. These events are full of energy and filled with sessions, workshops, and conversations that can spark new ideas. However, they can be overwhelming if I don't set aside moments to slow down. Putting words together helps me to relax after all the networking and socializing, and it provides a means to understand the experience while I'm in it.

Over time, I've learned that even during a busy convention schedule, it's possible to keep the words flowing. All it takes is a little planning and the willingness to make the most of the minor breaks in your day. Read on for ten tips and strategies you can try to maintain your daily word count at the next event you attend.

01

Set a Daily Minimum Goal.

Conferences are busy, and it's easy for writing to slip by the wayside. Setting a small daily goal helps you stay connected to your work. Pick a number that seems realistic, like two hundred or three hundred words. That's just a page in your notebook or a short scene on your laptop.

The goal shouldn't be to match your usual word count. Instead, focus on building momentum and reminding yourself that writing still belongs in your day. Meeting that small target can give you a sense of success even when your schedule is packed. By the end of the event, those brief sessions will add up to real progress without adding stress.

02

Use Writing Sprints.

Conference schedules are full, but there are always small gaps in the day. The time spent waiting for a panel to start, sitting between meals, or taking a short break can all become writing opportunities. Try using these moments for fifteen- or twenty-minute, low-pressure writing sprints, where you write as quickly as you can without stopping to edit.

You don't need to produce polished pages, and even a few sentences can spark an idea or move your project forward. These quick bursts also keep your creativity sharp, which makes it easier to return to your work once you're back home.

03

Write in Transit.

Travel time is built-in writing time if you plan for it. Long flights, train rides, or even a short bus trip to the convention center can give you uninterrupted minutes to focus. Instead of scrolling on your phone or zoning out, pull out your notebook or open a document, and add a few paragraphs.

These sessions don't need to be long to matter. A page written on the plane or a few lines drafted in a rideshare can build into something useful by the end of the trip. Transit becomes less of a chore and more of a chance to sneak in words before the day's events begin. Plus, it keeps your mindset focused on your writing and your business outside of the conference, which can make the event a more enriching experience as a whole.

04

Carry a Compact Writing Kit.

Every writer has a preferred way of capturing ideas. Some like the sensation of pen and paper, whether it's a small spiral notebook or a favorite fountain pen that makes writing feel special. Others prefer digital tools such as a tablet or a lightweight laptop that can hold longer drafts. Even your phone can work if you pair it with a portable keyboard, which makes typing faster and more comfortable.

Consider not only the tools you use in your daily writing life but also those you prefer for taking notes at a conference for speed and portability. The key is choosing tools that make you want to write. If you enjoy the process, you'll be more likely to pull them out during the day.

Pro Tip:

I carry a small writing kit with me wherever I go. For poetry, I keep a notebook and a fountain pen tucked into my bag so I can jot down lines whenever inspiration strikes. For prose, I rely on my laptop, which stays in the quiet of my hotel room. This way I have two different spaces for my creativity: one that's quick and mobile and one that's focused and private.

05

Find Writing Havens.

Even a quick break can become productive if you can find a quiet spot. Conferences are full of noise and movement, so look for out-of-the-way spaces throughout the day where you can return later for some focused writing time.

A change of scenery helps your brain shift into creative mode. Your chosen spot doesn't need to be silent; just by keeping away from the bustle, you can concentrate on words without distraction. And if you can't find a space that isn't distracting, there's always the quiet of your hotel room to help tune out the noise and tune back into your story.

Pro Tip:

For those attending Author Nation in Las Vegas next month, consider hotel business centers, tucked-away lobbies, nearby coffee shops, or even a quiet corner off the Strip as potential writing havens.

06

Limit Social Media During the Event.

It's tempting to check social media between panels, but scrolling often eats into the time you could spend writing and pulls your thoughts away from your work. Try saving posts, photos, and updates for downtime at night or between travels.

When you redirect scrolling time into writing time, it can help you make genuine progress on your projects. Even ten minutes spent jotting ideas or drafting paragraphs can seem more productive than another scroll through your feed.

When your attention isn't split, both your networking and your writing can benefit. Treat these platforms as tools, not distractions, and you'll leave the conference with more connections and more words on the page.

07

Pair Writing with Meals or Coffee Breaks.

Meals and coffee breaks don't have to be just for eating or socializing. Bring your notebook or laptop along, especially if you're dining solo, and turn these moments into writing time.

Using mealtime to work on your work in progress helps you maintain momentum without taking away from panels or social events. It's a simple way to weave creative work into the natural pauses in your day.

08

Use Voice-to-Text Apps.

Voice-to-text apps can be a lifesaver when you can't sit down with a notebook or laptop. Dictate ideas, dialogue, or descriptions while walking between panels, waiting in line, or even on the shuttle. Later, you can review your recordings and turn them into polished paragraphs. Using your voice allows you to generate raw material quickly, especially on busy days when traditional writing time is limited. By speaking your ideas aloud, you can keep your creativity moving even when your hands are full or your schedule is tight.

Keep a Running 'Conference Journal.'

A conference journal is a simple way to turn your experience at an event into words on the page. Record thoughts from panels, interesting conversations, or moments that spark inspiration. Even quick notes and ideas count toward your word count and creative output. Later, these entries can grow into poems, essays, or story details. Plus, by reflecting on your day, you help process new ideas and remember connections you might otherwise forget.

By letting your word count include story notes and ideas, you keep moving toward your writing goals at the conference while creating content you can shape into your draft at home.

Pro Tip:

Before your conference, set up a dedicated notebook with a simple system to keep everything organized.

- Leave the first few pages for an index, then divide the rest into three sections: lecture notes, story-related writing, and a daily log for contacts and tasks.
- Start each page with the date and a quick header so you can find material later, and jot word counts at the bottom to track progress.
- Use tabs or page markers if needed, but keep your system flexible so the notebook bends to your needs. It helps to pre-number all your pages before you leave, so you will always have a page number to refer to as you create your index during the event.

10

Batch Networking and Writing.

Balancing social time and writing can be tricky, but scheduling blocks for each helps. Set aside specific periods of time for panels, meet-and-greets, or meals with other attendees, and reserve separate blocks for writing.

This approach lets you be present at every activity. When it's time to network, you can engage without guilt. When it's time to write, you can focus without distractions. Both blocks of time will be stronger because of your focus.

Batching also protects your energy. When you switch between socializing and writing, it can be draining, but dedicated blocks of time will create a rhythm that supports both your creative work and your connections. Give each activity its own space, and you will leave the conference with meaningful interactions and fresh words on the page.

Pro Tip:

If you crave connection while still keeping your word count in motion, consider joining a writing sprint with other attendees. These focused bursts can turn drafting into a shared experience, giving you both additional words and new friends. Check around; most writing conferences have a room or designated location where writers can join sprints.

The 2025 Author Nation conference next month will include group writing sprints hosted by ProWritingAid and NovNov. Attendees can visit <https://eventee.com/event/31348> for more information on when and where the sprints will take place.

Final Thoughts

Writing at conferences is possible with intention, planning, and flexibility. Bring a writing kit, set small daily goals, and carve out micro-moments of focus to allow creativity to flourish even amid the busiest of schedules. Don't forget to balance social interaction with private writing time to help stay present in conversations while still making progress on your projects.

At the same time, remember that conferences are demanding by nature. Not hitting your usual writing goals during this time is fine. You're still being productive by networking and growing in other areas of your writing career. Those gains are just as valuable as new words on the page.

By approaching your conference days with a plan, you leave not only with new connections but also with fresh words on the page. Writing doesn't have to take a back seat. It can be part of the experience, adding another layer of inspiration to take home and build upon. ■



Wendy Van Camp

Wendy Van Camp writes science fiction, fantasy, historical regency, along with poetry and non-fiction essays. Her poetry and essays have appeared in Indie Author Magazine, Star*Line, Scifaikuest, and Worlds of IF. Her books include The Curate's Brother and her speculative poetry collection The Planets. She has edited four issues of the sci-fi poetry anthology series Eccentric Orbits, was inaugural editor and creator of two issues of Anaheim Poetry Review, and was a guest editor for issue #46 of SFPA's Eye to the Telescope. Wendy was named Anaheim Poet Laureate (2022-2024), has worked as a television producer and director, and currently splits her time between her woman-owned small press, an editorial and writing coach business and being Co-Chair of the SFWA Poetry Committee. She dabbles in her studio between her writing desk and a painting easel in Anaheim, CA. You can learn more at wendyvancamp.com.



From the Stacks

Book Club Summary

The Pomodoro Technique

Francesco Cirillo

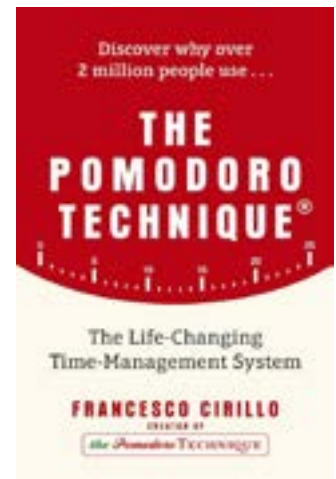
<https://indieauthortraining.com/courses/the-pomodoro-technique-francesco-cirillo>

You've probably heard of the Pomodoro technique, but few understand just how much more than a timer it can be. With careful, practiced use, the strategy can help you establish a simple and effective writing routine, prevent burnout, organize writing projects, make larger projects more manageable, and more. Beyond its use as a productivity tool, the Pomodoro technique can become a proven system for managing distractions that is applicable to every aspect of an author's career. Let creator Francesco Cirillo's guide to the system, and this month's Book Club Summary, show you how to use it best.

Take a look at this book through Indie Author Training's Book Club Summaries to find

- 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.



Product Tour

ElevenReader

<https://indie-author-training-product-tours.heysummit.com/talks/elevenreader>

In this month's Product Tour, watch Madeleine Shue from ElevenLabs showcase a new feature on the platform called ElevenReader. With ElevenReader, you can turn your stories into high-quality audio-books in minutes and begin earning from a worldwide audience, with full control over pricing, publishing, and payouts.

Webinar

“Organize your author life with Notion and AI”

<https://webinars.indieauthortraining.com/talks/leveraging-ai-with-notion-databases>

This webinar teaches you how to use AI to learn and implement Notion databases, streamline workflows, build simple but powerful systems, and organize your digital business within the platform. You'll also have access to a workbook to help you implement these ideas.



Podcast

<https://open.spotify.com/show/1MjZYaA5iClRL2JMtEiY12>

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 episodes you may have missed:

“The Indie Author’s Toolkit for Translating and Selling Books Globally”

<https://open.spotify.com/episode/1FhYOpfrBiyd1VaSWpKDpS>

How can you best connect with potential readers when you don't speak the same language as the audience you're trying to reach? Expanding on David Viergutz's 2024 feature on marketing translated novels, this episode explores practical strategies you can use on your own works, including building email lists and connecting with authors established in foreign markets you're targeting.

“Writing Disabled Characters Authentically: Insights and Pitfalls for Indie Authors”

<https://open.spotify.com/episode/3B7CPjelhhgJrt1YcwBpwz>

Disability representation matters—when that representation is accurate, respectful, and informed by the community it's characterizing. Revisit Megan Linski-Fox's October 2022 article on disability, and learn how to write disabled characters more authentically while avoiding harmful stereotypes.

“The Art and Science of Writing Book Blurbs That Actually Sell Your Story”

<https://open.spotify.com/episode/1MBb4W7Iz9lDd0Oh8zYmqf>

Blurbs are part story summary, part sales pitch, all packaged in a handful of words. It's no wonder they can be a challenge to write—and to get right. In this breakdown, learn key tips and strategies to make yours shine. ■

Karen Guyler



Always being the new girl at nine schools on two continents was no fun at all so books became the only constant in Karen Guyler's life, even if they didn't help her get out of sports days. Now settled in Milton Keynes, England, Britain's best kept secret, she juggles reading with writing twisty thrilling stories, her children, husband and two grand-puppies - a much nicer mix! She also teaches Creative Writing for Adult Education with lots of laughter in amongst the word wrangling and discovery.

The House the Troll Built

How Writing 'Recess for Adults'
Grew Martha Carr's Fan Base
and Career



Artistic paintings and art prints from Martha Carr's well-known series decorate her office and walls within the House the Troll Built. The house, located in a quiet Austin, Texas, suburb, earned its name thanks to the sidekick from her first Urban Fantasy series. That character, a comically vulgar troll, became such a fan-favorite character that book sales allowed her to purchase and build her dream house.

"That swearing troll paid for my house without ever knowing he did it," Martha says.

Having worked as Martha's assistant for seven years, it's hard for me to imagine the beginning of the author empire she manages today. But at sixty-six years old, she looks back fondly on how she started a giant Urban Fantasy universe, *The Oriceran Universe*, with Michael Anderle eight years ago. The co-authors have hilariously different versions of how it happened.

"Michael hosted a meetup in Austin in 2017 where he was talking about how he had made six figures writing and publishing books as a fiction author," Martha says. "Many indie authors at that time thought it would be impossible as fiction writers. But I figured I could attend and maybe get some marketing tips out of it."

She came out of it with more than that. She stayed after the event with her then teenage son, Louie, to talk with Anderle. She wanted to learn more about what he did and how he did it, and she asked for his number to continue the discussion.

"After a few calls, Michael had an idea. And this is where our stories differ," she says. "He claims that he asked me if I would like to write an Urban Fantasy series. I swear he asked me if I wanted to create a universe to write in, so I said, 'Sure.'" Martha laughs. "When I started creating a universe, he didn't stop me."



The magical garden in the backyard of The House the Troll Built.

Finding Her Voice

Martha, like many authors, has always had a story to tell.

Growing up in an “interesting” household in Virginia, in an era where women weren’t supposed to have strong opinions, she found that keeping quiet was not for her. When she moved out on her own and began working in Washington, DC, she wrote a long-form article on finding her voice and submitted it to *The Washington Post*. They printed it.

“I grew up with *The Washington Post*, so I just submitted it to them. I didn’t realize it wasn’t a local paper but rather a national paper,”

Martha says. “That started my writing career. I would pitch articles to them again and again. Eventually, I became a stringer, and then they started giving me assignments. I learned a lot about writing from that job.”

Readers would leave comments on articles and write in to her; she, in turn, responded. She finally had a voice, and she could say in writing what she couldn’t find the right words to say out loud. And she was hooked.

She went on to write a national column on politics and, through syndication, was published in four hundred newspapers throughout the United States.

“At one time, I had around four million readers a month,” Martha says. “And I kept writing.”

Stepping into Publishing

Following the advice of family members who wanted her to find a respectable job and settle down, Martha eventually became a stockbroker, where she met her future husband. They got married, but it soon became clear that their relationship would not work. Against advice from her family, she parted ways with her ex-husband, and at thirty-one, Martha was a newly divorced, single mother with an infant son. But at night, she found she still had to write.

“I started writing a Thriller called *Wired*, which is about a woman who was a victim who survived a serial killer,” Martha says. “I submitted the manuscript to many publishers, received many rejections, but then it was accepted and published, and it blew up.”

It became a bestseller, and she went on to traditionally publish another fiction novel and a nonfiction book while continuing to work her

day job.

Martha, however, was unhappy with how things happen in the traditionally published world. The publishing house gave Martha three months—ninety days—to prove her books would be successful. Most of the advertising had to be done before each book was released, and if the cover or the blurb was wrong, she didn't have a chance to change it and try again.

She didn't like the lack of control over her cover design and blurbs, nor the pressure placed on her in a short time frame. She also didn't like that she got paid only twice a year. "You get paid, and then it's six months before you get another check, and then it's 15 percent of sales if you're lucky," she says. She adds that's not true for famous, best-selling authors because they get a bigger slice of the pie. However, she says, "with self-publishing, you can be paid monthly."

When she finally made the switch to independent publishing, there was a learning curve to understand how it worked, but she says the ability to control everything made it worth the time spent. Now, if she finds a cover isn't working or a blurb needs to be tweaked, it can be done in short order.

Her first self-published

books were a Thriller series based on real-life events in Richmond, Virginia; then she turned her sights to Urban Fantasy and began publishing with Michael Anderle and LMBPN Publishing. The first book in The Leira Chronicles, *Waking Magic*, was released in July 2017 and marked the beginning of the much larger Oriceran Universe. Soon, she and Michael brought on authors A.L. Knorr, Sarah Noffke, and Flint Maxwell to write series in the universe. Today, it includes more than 250 novels, written by Martha, Anderle, and other collaborators, including TR Cameron and Charles Tillman.

Those first books also marked a change in her career. Late in 2019, two years after launching her indie author business, Martha left her day job. Although she initially worried—"I wanted to know the books wouldn't dry up and I'd have nothing," she says—today, she doesn't regret the decision. Martha has a good idea of what works and what doesn't in

her genres and keeps an eye on what is changing in the industry so she can make business decisions based on those changes. She also believes her concept of "writing recess for adults," or writing books that balance humor, action-adventure, and philosophy on life, drives her success.

Of course, building her fan base has been instrumental as well.

"When I started, I didn't have a lot of readers or fans. However, I was running a lot at that time, and people were always giving me weird runner socks with things like hamburgers or dogs on them," Martha says. "So I started posting pictures of my feet with the crazy socks on, and people responded to it."

The experience taught her she just had to talk, be authentic, and not be afraid to share about herself online. She host-

Kindle Unlimited is great, and most of my books are part of it. But it's a good idea to spread things out if you can; that way if something happens ... you have a backup plan that you can continue to expand upon.

Martha Carr

ed fan meetups in whatever city she was visiting, buying lunch or dinner for anyone who showed. And when COVID meant in-person meetups were no longer possible, she took them online.

“I decided to do a Zoom lunch every Friday and order a pizza for five fans that was delivered to their house before the meeting. Fans would get together and socialize. Other authors would join us and sometimes guest-host when I can’t be there,” Martha says. “It was only supposed to be two weeks. Then a month. But COVID kept going, and the fans loved it so much, it now happens the first Friday of every month.”

The fans love the interaction with Martha, other authors, and fellow fans. They talk about what’s going on in their lives, share books they’ve read, and talk about anything else that comes up. And she makes sure to return the favor. Martha considers her fans “frands”—fans who became friends. She engages with them every chance she gets and responds to every message she receives from them, whether via email, Discord, or Facebook.

Building a Team, Expanding Her Business

With more than three hundred books published since making the shift to self-publishing in 2017, Martha is comfortable taking chances to expand her business. She sees it as a necessity.

In 2018, realizing she couldn’t do it all and didn’t have to, she hired her first assistant, who helped manage newsletters, market books, handle administration tasks, and more, so she could spend more time writing. Then, in 2019, she hired

me as her current assistant. In addition, her son, Louie, and Jynafer Yanez handle marketing.

In 2023, she created Martha Roo as a pen name for books she was self-publishing. It marked a change in her business strategy. Despite having a massive backlist as Martha Carr, she hoped her new pen name would attract readers who wouldn’t get lost in her backlist and forget about her new series—though she knows there will be plenty of



The good dog, Lois Lane, who is completely deaf, is a constant companion while Martha works on her worlds.



Martha taking a walk by Town Lake in Austin, Texas.

whale readers who will read those books, too, and that's okay, she says.

She kicked off the new pen name with two Kickstarter campaigns to promote her Queen of the Flightless Dragons series, as well as launched a Shopify store, where she sells mugs, shirts, and high-quality print versions of her books, including a signed, special edition hardcover. It also allows her, when she wants, to sell ebooks direct.

"Kindle Unlimited is great, and most of my

books are part of it," she says. "But it's a good idea to spread things out if you can; that way if something happens to Amazon or Kindle Unlimited, you have a backup plan that you can continue to expand upon."

Roo is not her only pen name; there's also Harry Parker, her pen name for her Thriller books, which she created after learning that Thrillers do better with a male name attached to them. "The pen name also helps the Amazon and Facebook algorithms to target the right audiences," she says.

In conjunction with the new series, she's creating a subscription letter service she will launch with Kickstarter a month after the first book in her next Crime Thriller series releases. Every month, backers will receive a letter from the killer and from the detective, along with evidence and clues that will help them identify the murderer over the course of a year.

Advice for Authors

Martha is no stranger to giving nor receiving advice. She believes finding a group of like-minded authors whom you can bounce ideas off and share successes with is important. When she finds something that works for her, she shares it with fellow authors, and vice versa.

"Sign up for other authors' newsletters," she



Martha speaking on a YA panel at DragonCon in 2024.



Martha speaking on the high-powered female authors at the 20Books Vegas conference in 2022.

suggests. “See what they are doing and what works for them. Learn from what they are doing, and emulate it.”

She’s also no stranger to the challenges life throws at you. Martha has faced cancer five times in her life, and though she is now in remission, she’s also found that anytime something dire has come along, like a new cancer diagnosis, writing has helped her relieve the stress and work through it.

“I got into writing not for the money but because I really, really, really had something to say, and that just hasn’t stopped yet,” she says. “No matter

It’s important to remember writing a few pages each day still adds up to a book. ... As long as you are doing what you love, it will go somewhere.

Martha Carr

what comes up, if you’re in this because you want to be a writer, and you hope you make money at it, because that would be awfully nice, you’re not going to stop because something dark has happened. You’re going to write more, and you’re going to work out whatever darkness comes your way in that story.”

Martha admits that when she was in chemo with the fifth round of cancer, she got angry, but she realized she had to work through the anger too.

“I learned to roll with it, but I also learned my

limits and to ask for help. I learned to accept help,” Martha says. “For others facing life’s challenges, it’s important to remember writing a few pages each day still adds up to a book. There’s no contest where it has to be a certain amount written or that a small amount doesn’t add up. As long as you are doing what you love, it will go somewhere.”

Martha has no plans to retire anytime soon—slowing down, maybe, but she still has writing to do.

Her final piece of advice for all authors? “If you’re in the middle of your career thinking, ‘I wish it was this,’ try not to miss what it actually is. You’re gonna look back later and be grateful for all the experiences you’ve had. It all adds up. I can say I’ve tried a little bit of everything, and I’m really grateful for it and wondering what comes next.” ■



Grace Snoke



Grace Snoke is a 42-year-old author and personal assistant residing in Lincoln, Nebraska. Having been a corporate journalist for more than a decade and a video game journalist for even longer, writing has been something she has always enjoyed doing. In addition to non-fiction books, she is currently working on a paranormal romance series, and two urban fantasy series under her real name. She has also released more than a dozen illustrated children’s books and several non-fiction books. She has been publishing erotica under a pen name since 2017. For more information about her personal assistant business visit: <https://spiderwebzdesign.net>. Her author site is: <https://gracesnoke.com>.

And the Winner Is ...

Book Awards Contests Can
Boost Indie Authors' Careers
When Used Strategically



Writing a book is hard, but book marketing can feel like a second career. As indie authors, we know that visibility isn't optional; in fact, it's the lifeline that brings books to readers, and to the reviewers, booksellers, and libraries that can entice more of them. In traditional publishing, awards often serve as glittering badges of credibility, boosting a book's profile and an author's reach. But what about in the indie world, where resources, recognition, and readership can look different?

Do book awards contests truly move the needle for self-published writers, or do they simply serve as milestones to celebrate along the journey? By examining how awards function across both traditional and indie publishing, and by weighing their benefits and limitations, you can decide whether they deserve a place in your marketing plan.



Awards in the Traditional versus Indie Publishing Worlds



Traditional publishing has leaned on awards to raise a book's recognition for decades. Prestigious prizes like the National Book Award, the Booker Prize, or genre-specific honors often result in national media coverage, prominent bookstore placement, and long-term credibility for the author. Publishers frequently handle contest submissions and fees and invest heavily because of the substantial payoff.

For indie authors, the impact is more nuanced. While mainstream awards are rarely accessible to self-published writers, a variety of contests specifically welcome indie submissions. These range from broad, “indie-friendly” competitions to niche, genre-based awards. But the question remains whether winning a book award helps directly grow your audience and sell more books.



For many indies, contests can provide a range of benefits for those who win them.

- **Credibility and Prestige:** Adding “award-winning author” to your bio or cover instantly signals legitimacy to potential readers, media, and booksellers. Many authors feel awards serve as validation that outside professionals have vetted a book.
- **Marketing Power:** Award seals, certificates, or badges can be displayed on your book cover and in product descriptions, press releases, social media, ads, and newsletters. Some writers use these hyperlinked seals in newsletters or on social platforms and report that the recognition has led to more invitations for guest appearances, podcast interviews, or media features.
- **Personal Validation:** Recognition from a contest can be a confidence boost that keeps you motivated. Authors often describe awards as effective icebreakers during in-person encounters, helping them introduce their book's quality to new readers naturally.
- **Networking and Visibility:** Some awards are judged by industry professionals or attract the attention of librarians, publishers, or agents, creating exposure and future collaborative opportunities.

Limitations to Keep in Mind

Awards contests aren't a silver bullet to growing readership. Before committing to awards contests, authors should also weigh the potential drawbacks they carry.

- **Entry Fees and Expenses:** Many contests charge between \$60 and \$150 per entry, and additional categories can quickly increase costs.
- **Variable Prestige:** Not all contests carry equal weight. Some are well respected within the indie community, but others may lack recognition outside their own websites.
- **Limited Impact on Sales:** Winning doesn't always translate directly to a sales bump. The benefit often comes from how well you promote your win.
- **"Pay-to-Play" Concerns:** Certain contests accept all paid entries and distribute a large number of awards, diminishing the distinction of the honor.
- **Uncertain Outcomes:** Most of the potential benefits of awards contests apply only if you place or win, which is never guaranteed after investing the time, money, and energy to enter.



An Indie Author's Perspective

Author JJ Winston has experienced both the opportunities and challenges of awards firsthand. Her story illustrates how recognition from an awards contest win can be leveraged beyond the medal itself. Winston, author of *The Anniversary* series, whose work explores the intersection of fiction and mental health, has received multiple honors. They include the Eric Hoffer Award, the Montaigne Medal, the Independent Author Network Book of the Year Award, and the BookFest Award.

Winston believes book awards have been both a personal milestone and a marketing tool. "Indie book awards are worthwhile," Winston says, "as long as you don't overspend, research the legitimacy of the contests, and create a budget. You can turn those awards into sales by marketing yourself by saying, 'Others thought this is a good book, too.'"

Winston continues, "I've used award seals on my author newsletter, and I've noticed an increase in guest invitations to podcasts as a result of my book awards." Although awards haven't single-handedly driven her sales, she says they have opened doors and helped her connect with new audiences.

What to Consider Before Submitting

Before entering a contest, ask yourself:

- Who organizes the award, and is it reputable?
- How do past winners feel about their experience?
- Has the award received media coverage?
- If I win, how will I use this accolade in my marketing?

It's also worth being intentional about which books you submit. Authors often have multiple titles but limited budgets, so consider

- **Relevance:** Does the contest have a category that aligns well with your book's genre, style, or theme?
- **Strength:** Which of your books has the strongest reviews, sales record, or reader feedback? That title may stand the best chance of impressing judges.
- **Timing:** Newly released books can benefit more from the publicity of a win, but backlist titles may gain fresh attention if promoted effectively.
- **Strategy:** Think about where each potential award fits into your broader marketing plan, whether that's to launch a book, to reintroduce an older title, or to expand into new markets. Understanding how your book can benefit from visibility will help determine whether the investment is worthwhile.

When trying to determine whether an award contest is reputable, the Alliance of Independent Authors (ALLi) offers a rating guide, which reviews and scores dozens of indie-friendly contests for transparency, value, and credibility. Find the database at <https://selfpublishingadvice.org/author-awards-contests-rated-reviewed>. Being intentional with submissions ensures contests serve your larger author goals rather than becoming a vanity exercise.



Indie-Friendly Book Awards to Consider

Below is a curated list of contests that are non-genre-specific, transparent with their fees and timelines, and recognized within the indie author community.



Readers' Favorite International Book Award Contest

- **Website:** readersfavorite.com
- **Entry Fee:** \$99 to \$119 for first category; \$65 for each additional category.
- **Deadline:** Final deadline is June 1; winners announced September 1.
- **Categories/Requirements:** Open to published and unpublished books across 150-plus genres; no strict length or publication date limits.
- **Winners Receive:** Gold, Silver, Bronze, or Honorable Mention medals; award seals for covers; possible review opportunities; promotional exposure through Readers' Favorite. Cash grand prize of \$125,000.

Indies Today Awards Contest

- **Website:** indiestoday.com
- **Entry Fee:** Varies by year; in 2025: \$59 for contest only and \$129 for Editorial Review and Contest entry.
- **Deadline:** Runs annually from January 1 to December 31; submissions close at year-end.
- **Categories/Requirements:** Multiple categories including "Best Book of the Year." Eligible books must be published within the contest's stated time frame.
- **Winners Receive:** Badges for covers and marketing, exposure on Indies Today's platform, and community recognition among indie peers.



Next Generation Indie Book Awards

- **Website:** indiebookawards.com
- **Entry Fee:** \$75 per category.
- **Deadline:** February annually; current contest deadline: February 13, 2026.
- **Categories/Requirements:** Eighty-plus categories, with options for fiction, non-fiction, design, and overall book of the year.
- **Winners Receive:** Medals, cash prizes for top winners, a finalist medal, and exposure to agents, publishers, and media outlets. Winners and finalists may attend an awards reception.

Foreword INDIES Book of the Year Awards



- **Website:** forewordreviews.com/awards
- **Entry Fee:** \$109 to \$119 for first entry, depending on timing.
- **Deadline:** January 31 annually.
- **Categories/Requirements:** Dozens of categories for fiction and nonfiction; open to indie presses, university presses, and self-publishers.
- **Winners Receive:** Gold, Silver, and Bronze medals; cash prizes; marketing through *Foreword Reviews*, which reaches librarians, booksellers, and industry professionals. Finalists and winners also receive a marketing toolkit.

IPPY Awards (Independent Publisher Book Awards)



- **Website:** ippyawards.com
- **Entry Fee:** \$79 to \$99 per category, depending on timing.
- **Deadline:** Typically the end of March annually; current contest deadline: March 26, 2026.
- **Categories/Requirements:** Eighty-plus categories; open to all English-language books from independent publishers and authors. Books must have been published within two years.
- **Winners Receive:** Medals, seals, and personalized certificates; medalists are eligible to attend an award ceremony.



Eric Hoffer Book Award

- **Website:** hofferaward.com
- **Entry Fee:** \$60 to \$75 per entry, depending on timing.
- **Deadline:** Accepts registrations all year. January 21 is the annual cutoff for the current award year.
- **Categories/Requirements:** Multiple fiction and nonfiction categories, plus “Grand Prize” for overall best.
- **Winners Receive:** \$5,000 annual grand prize, medals, inclusion in the *US Review of Books* Hoffer Award coverage, and a listing on their website.

IBPA Book Award

- **Website:** ibpabookaward.org
- **Entry Fee:** \$99 for members and additional entries; \$234 for non-members (includes membership).
- **Deadline:** Two entry periods—July 1 to September 30, and October 1 to December 15 (final deadline).
- **Categories/Requirements:** Sixty-plus categories. Open to independent, hybrid, author, university, and association presses with current-year copyright dates.
- **Winners Receive:** Gold and Silver Benjamin Franklin awards, seals for marketing, and recognition as part of one of the industry’s most respected indie book award programs.



IBPA
BOOK AWARD

**Celebrating Publisher
Excellence Since 1985**

(formerly the IBPA Benjamin Franklin Award)

Final Thoughts

For indie authors, awards contests aren't a guaranteed path to increased sales or mainstream recognition, but they can be a powerful tool when used strategically. Whether you're seeking credibility, marketing assets, or personal validation, the key is to enter contests intentionally—with a clear plan for how you'll use any accolades you earn.

As award-winning authors often remind us, success with contests comes down to three things: researching the legitimacy of each oppor-

tunity, setting a budget that aligns with your profitability plan, and knowing how you'll leverage the recognition if you win. Even if one award doesn't go your way, each contest has different judges with diverse tastes, so persistence is part of the process.

Just as with editorial reviews, awards are less about the medal itself and more about how you leverage that recognition to elevate your author brand—and, of course, how you celebrate your accomplishments along the way. ■



Eryka Parker

Eryka Parker is a book coach, an award-winning developmental editor, and writing instructor. As a women's contemporary author under the pen name Zariah L. Banks, she creates emotional intimacy novels that prove that everyone deserves to feel seen, appreciated, and loved. She lives in Northeast Ohio with her husband and two children and is currently working on her third novel.



Preorders Without Panic

Timing, Promotion, and Platform Rules to Know for the Perfect Preorder Run

The idea of making an upcoming book available for preorder often sparkles with the promise of early sales, rankings boosts, and that shiny “coming soon” tag. But preparing for a preorder campaign effectively can just as easily become a stress test. Looming deadlines, confusing platform quirks, and penalties for missing file upload deadlines can weigh on authors ahead of their book’s scheduled release and hinder their preorder campaign’s success. Thankfully, with some pre-planning and strategic thinking, it doesn’t have to be that way.

Like many parts of the publishing process, there isn’t a single best approach to preorders, but there are some tried and tested practices around when to set them up, when to skip them, and how to design a preorder strategy that works for your author business.

What a Preorder Does (and Doesn't Do)

Select publishing and distribution platforms allow authors to make ebooks available for preorder, including Amazon's Kindle Direct Publishing (KDP). Readers can then purchase a book before release day, with the promise that they'll receive a copy in their ebook library as soon as the book is published. For authors, this means setting up a link that allows readers to purchase their book prior to its publication. It also means committing to deadlines for uploading your manuscript ahead of its final release date.

Pro Tip:

Although Amazon doesn't allow preorders for print books, the company's Scheduled Release date feature allows authors to schedule a release date from five to ninety days in advance. This doesn't offer the same marketing and sales benefits as the ebook preorder options offered by KDP, but authors can coordinate it with a digital preorder campaign. Authors wishing to offer print book preorders for distribution to Amazon or other retailers can do so through IngramSpark.

Preorder sales data is recorded alongside regular sales upon a book's release date, meaning a high number of preorders for a book can contribute heavily to its rankings. However, authors need to be cautious when setting up preorders; some platforms have penalties associated with missing deadlines or delaying book releases that can negatively affect your ability to make future books available for preorder.

Preorders cannot make you an overnight success or guarantee that your book is going to land on a bestseller list. They also aren't a stand-alone launch strategy—but as a small part of your overall marketing strategy, they can help interested readers find your new book and increase the chance your upcoming title will launch strongly on release day.



When to Use a Preorder

Determining whether a preorder window will raise your book's sales or ranking depends on a few factors, such as your established reader base, whether your book is part of a series or a stand-alone, and the impact of a preorder on your production cadence.

For authors with an established audience, announcing preorders in a newsletter or series back matter can be a great way to boost sales, stay connected with readers between launches, and introduce fans to new books or series.

For stand-alone books or for less established authors whose backlist or fan base may be small, preorders can still work, though they will require more of a concerted effort to advertise.

Jane Friedman writes in her blog post "A Beginner's Guide to Amazon Pre-orders," "There's a certain amount of momentum that a book captures organically when it first appears on Amazon. It sits in the 'new release' section of Amazon, which can be a great spot to attract additional interest. However, if your book is on pre-order and then hits the Amazon system on launch day with little to no buzz, no reviews, and no activity, it'll quickly plummet due to low sales."

Friedman continues, “In order to avoid your book tanking on Amazon, you need to plan a solid promotional campaign for the day it launches. You can start to drive some interest to the book by letting your friends, family, and followers know it’s coming. If you have anything you can give readers access to that might generate a strong motivation for them to pre-order, then do so.”

Preorders also work well when you have a clear timeline. If you’re disciplined about hitting your target dates for writing a draft, completing edits, finalizing cover design, and completing formatting, then adding a preorder to your release schedule can be a real boon for your sales.

A preorder link allows you to directly invite readers to buy your book before it’s published. They’re a great way to drive sales through things like cover reveals, ARC teams, and newsletter incentives that keep readers engaged between releases and help you time launches around seasonal promotions or collaborations.

When Not to Use a Preorder

As beneficial as preorders can be, there are times when the juice just isn’t worth the squeeze. Preorders won’t solve discoverability issues for new authors. Having great launch-week buzz may be a better strategy than preorders until you’ve built a following. Additionally, preorders may not make sense if you don’t have the time or desire to develop a solid marketing plan around the preorder.

The ability to set and hit deadlines is perhaps the most important factor in deciding whether preorders are right for you. If you struggle with setting or meeting deadlines, preorders can add additional pressure to an already stressful process. Many platforms, including Amazon, impose penalties for not uploading your finished manuscript on time or for pushing back your launch date. Infractions like these can prevent you from being able to do future preorders—in the case of Amazon, for one year after your missed publication date.

Preorder Pitfalls to Avoid

If you decide to create a preorder window for an upcoming title, be mindful of a few common missteps with preorder campaigns and how you can avoid them.

- Announcing your preorder too soon can cause more issues than benefits. Be cautious about setting a preorder before you have a finished draft, polished cover, and solid blurb—on some sites, you’ll need your title and blurb to create your project anyway.
- Do not miss your deadlines. Although this may sound repetitive, it bears repeating because it can and, sadly, does happen often, even to experienced authors.
- Avoid overhyping without delivery. Don’t fall into the trap of overpromising and underdelivering, or readers will cancel their preorders and move on.
- Respect your audience. A yearlong preorder window with no updates is just a long, awkward silence—not to mention a turnoff that readers will remember. Along with the deadlines required of your publishing platform, be sure to share information and updates regularly with your audience via social media and your newsletter.
- Don’t view preorders as mandatory. Preorders are a tool, not the only way to publish. Skip them if they stress you out or don’t serve your author business goals.

Platform Preorder Rules at a Glance

Amazon KDP

- **Preorder window:** Up to one year before release date.
- **Upload:** Placeholder file allowed; final files due three days before release.
- **Date changes:** One delay allowed (up to thirty days); a second delay or cancellation will bar you from creating preorders for one year.
- **Sales:** Number of preorders tracked until release day; sales data recorded on release day

Apple Books

- **Preorder window:** Up to one year before release date.
- **Upload:** Metadata within preorder window; files up to two days before release date.
- **Date changes:** Flexible.
- **Sales:** Recorded as they come in.

Kobo

- **Preorder window:** Up to one year before release date. Kobo encourages long preorder windows for visibility.
- **Upload:** Placeholder file allowed; final files due three days before.
- **Date changes:** No restrictions, though publication may be canceled if final files aren't uploaded within three-day window.
- **Sales:** Recorded as they come in.

Note: According to the Kobo Writing Life website, all books available in the Kobo store automatically provide a preview for the first 5 percent of a file, including those available for preorder. If using a placeholder file, contact Kobo's support team to disable the preview feature—then contact them again to restore the preview once your final files are in place.

Google Play

- **Preorder window:** Up to two years before release date
- **Upload:** Final files due three days before release date, or upon creation if release date is within the next seven days.
- **Date changes:** Flexible, though preorders cannot be created within three days of release date.
- **Sales:** Number of preorders tracked until release day; all sales data recorded on release day.

Pro Tip:

According to the Alliance of Independent Authors (ALLi) AskALLi team in *The Ultimate Guide to Pre-orders for Indie Authors*, “On Amazon, a pre-order counts only on the day of the order itself,” meaning the longer your preorder lasts, “the harder it is to sustain a high ranking on that book. This is because the sales are distributed across a longer period rather than being concentrated in one hit.”

Stores such as Kobo, Apple, and Google Play count the sale on the day of the preorder, but they also “give you a ranking boost on the launch day,” according to the AskALLi team. The team recommends trying to run a preorder when you have a set of activities, advertisements, or other marketing strategies in place to keep momentum going.

Are You Ready for a Preorder?

Answering a few quick questions can help you determine whether you're ready to create a preorder.

- Do I have an audience to notify?
- Is my manuscript on track for my deadline?
- Are my cover and blurb finalized?
- Do I know each platform's rules?
- Do I have a promotional calendar for organizing and tracking newsletter swaps and announcements, social media posts, ads, and author takeovers?

If you answered “no” to more than one of these questions, consider holding off on a preorder campaign until you're confident you'll be able to leverage your preorder without causing yourself unnecessary stress or encountering penalties from your chosen sales platforms.



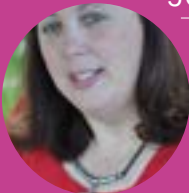
How to Promote a Preorder

Once you've created your preorder, it's time to get the word out. Consider adding a link in the back matter of your current book or offering preorder buyers a bonus novella or deleted scene from the book.

Advance reader teams are another great way to leverage your preorder runway. Send ARC team readers a copy of your manuscript during your preorder period with a review deadline tied to release week, and you'll be able to start posting reviews as soon as you release.

Countdown content like weekly teasers or character snippets can also be used during your preorder window to boost sales prior to release.

When planning your next release, it may help to remember that preorders are a strategic tool, not a requirement. When done right, they can boost rankings, keep readers hooked, and add polish to your launch, so use them when your book, and your business, are ready. ■



Jenn Mitchell

Jenn Mitchell writes Urban Fantasy and Weird West, as well as culinary cozy mysteries under the pen name, J Lee Mitchell. She writes, cooks, and gardens in the heart of South Central Pennsylvania's Amish Country. When she's not doing these things, she dreams of training llama riding ninjas. She enjoys traveling, quilting, hoarding cookbooks, Sanntangling, and spending time with the World's most patient and loving significant other.

No More Gatekeeping the Indie Publishing Route

IAM Author Shares Her Experience with Gatekeeper Press After Going It Alone, and How It Made A Difference



When I published my first nonfiction book, *Picture Perfect: An Insider's Guide to Writing Picture Books*, I thought self-publishing through Amazon's Kindle Direct Publishing (KDP) platform would be straightforward. After all, I had the manuscript, the know-how to upload files, and the drive to get the book into the world. What I didn't anticipate was just how steep the learning curve would be.

I spent hours teaching myself formatting, cover design basics, and the ins and outs of metadata. Although the book came out fine in the end, the time-to-effort ratio didn't make sense. For every hour I spent troubleshooting, I was losing an hour I could have used doing the work I actually love—writing and coaching other authors.

Around the same time, I experimented with Draft2Digital, a popular distribution platform. While their interface was easy to use, my attempts at DIY formatting didn't feel professional enough, and I felt overwhelmed by all the options available to me. To be honest, the experience left me wishing someone could just step in and steer the ship.

That's why when I was ready to publish my next book, I partnered with Gatekeeper Press. They sponsored my book, *Write, Teach, Spark*, to use it as a real-world example of their services. In exchange for the sponsorship, they offer a free sample of the book on their website to anyone considering working with them.

Gatekeeper Press positions itself as a

true independent publisher. Unlike hybrid publishers, Gatekeeper Press doesn't take rights or royalties. Authors retain full ownership and pay for only the services they need—whether that be editing, design, formatting, distribution, or marketing support. The publishing service provider acts as a middle ground for writers who want more than a do-it-yourself platform like KDP or Draft2Digital but aren't looking to give away creative or financial control of their titles.

Getting Started

In December 2024, we started work on the book. It began with a thirty-minute video call with Rob Price, the founder of Gatekeeper Press. When we spoke, he didn't try to oversell me. As an editor, I knew I didn't need developmental editing. My manuscript was clean, my layout simple, and I only needed one interior graphic. Instead of a one-size-fits-all package, Gatekeeper Press let me pick what I needed: design, formatting, and later, marketing support.

The offer to customize a package to your project rather than pick from predetermined

options is rooted in Price's own experience as a self-published author. He's lived through the frustrations of self-publishing and built his company to fill those gaps. Today, the philosophy that sets the company apart from other publishing services remains: that you pay just for the services you need. That said, it's not the only route authors can take; Gatekeeper Press's website details three packages for authors—the Children's Book package, the Signature package for traditional novels, and the Poetry/Novella package—with set pricing and discounts for Gatekeeper+ members.

Publishing with Gatekeeper Press felt collaborative. They knew when to listen and when to advise, and the end result reflected both my voice and their expertise.

Inside the Process

Once I signed on, I was given access to Gatekeeper Press's author dashboard—a customized project management system. Every milestone for the project was laid out on a timeline: cover design, formatting, distribution setup, and more. I could upload files, review proofs, and message my team through the dashboard, and notifications came instantly, which kept me engaged and reassured me that my project was progressing.

Not everything went smoothly at first. I struggled to articulate what I wanted for the cover. I had a vague vision, but I couldn't explain beyond that. After a few rounds of designs that didn't feel right, my project manager swapped in a new designer, who jumped on a video chat with me. That conversation unlocked the design and a brand-defining color palette, which I still use today.

My project manager also changed mid-process. Ordinarily, that could have been disruptive. In practice, the new manager picked up right where the other left off.

When it came to formatting, my manuscript was turned around in a single day, with only a minor adjustment needed. The designer also suggested subtle tweaks that elevated the overall layout—things I wouldn't have thought of on my own.

Holding the first proof in my hands was validating. After the isolation of doing everything myself on KDP, this time I felt supported by a team invested in making my book the best version of itself.

When it came time to launch my book, Gatekeeper Press handled everything. When I had published through KDP, I hadn't bought an ISBN, so my book could only be sold through Amazon. I chose my own keywords and categories, but it always felt like guesswork.

Gatekeeper Press researched and selected ef-





fective categories based on my book's genre and target audience and distributed *Write, Teach, Spark* across all major platforms. The book was published on April 25, 2025, and in its first week, it hit the number-one spot in its business writing category on Amazon.

Marketing Beyond the Launch

Post-publication, Gatekeeper Press also offers à la carte marketing options for its authors. I added a press release and a book trailer for my project, and both exceeded my expectations.

Gatekeeper Press's press release generated interview requests, alumni magazine features, local newspaper coverage, and a monthly column in *The Santa Monica Star*. That one document has continued to open doors for speaking engagements and podcast appearances since the book was published.

The trailer brought me to tears. Professionally produced and visually compelling, it gave my book—and by extension my brand—the polish of something bigger than a single project. I still use it on my website and in presentations, and it continues to deliver value long after launch.

Gatekeeper Press's marketing services are a newer addition to the company's list of offerings, but a spokesperson for the company confirms they are available to authors, even if the author didn't publish the book using Gatekeeper Press's services. Along with press releases and book trailers, available marketing services include author website creation, Amazon and Barnes & Noble Bestseller marketing campaigns, and *Publishers Weekly* ad creation, according to the Gatekeeper Press website.

The Author's Perspective

Publishing with Gatekeeper Press felt collaborative. They knew when to listen and when to advise, and the end result reflected both my voice and their expertise.

That ongoing support has continued past publication. When I recently shared a reel about the companion workbook—a self-published add-on project that had an epic formatting fail in its first proof—a Gatekeeper Press team member reached out right away. They assumed the formatting hiccups were theirs and wanted to make sure I knew updates or corrections could be made at any time. I reassured them it wasn't the company's project, but the fact that they noticed and cared enough to check in made me feel like I wasn't just another client in the queue.

Is It Right for You?

As a book coach, I've referred both picture book authors and nonfiction writers to Gatekeeper Press, and the feedback has been consistently positive. Whether authors bring their own cover designers or interior illustrators or use Gatekeeper Press's creators, the results look professional. Authors are also given full transparency and control over the use of AI design in their projects, with the option to opt out of using AI-assisted design in their final work, confirms a spokesperson for the company.

That's not to say Gatekeeper Press is the only option. Some authors thrive on the full DIY route. Others are drawn to hybrid publishers, who promise more hand-holding but often retain rights and royalties in exchange. My advice to clients is always the same: Take the free calls. Learn what each model offers, and make an informed decision.

For me, Gatekeeper Press struck the right balance: independence with support, and expertise without ego.

Pricing for Gatekeeper Press's services varies based on the options or package selected, but more information can be found at <https://gatekeeperpress.com/pricing>. Authors who are interested can learn more about Gatekeeper Press and its services at <https://gatekeeperpress.com/online-consultation>.





Final Takeaway

Publishing is never one-size-fits-all. But for authors who want to retain control while avoiding the pitfalls of going it entirely alone, Gatekeeper Press is a strong option. My journey taught me that expertise matters, in writing as well as in the way a book is brought to life and shared with readers. ■



Cara J. Stevens

Cara J. Stevens is an author, editor and book coach. She's written more than 85 books for young readers. She has two grown-ish children and lives in Los Angeles with her husband and a small, fluffy dog named Oliver. Her book *Write, Teach, Spark: A Step-by-Step Guide to Writing a Book that Matters* is due out in March, 2025. Learn more at www.writeteachspark.com.




Ask a Book Coach: To Detail or Not to Detail

Every writer knows their story world intimately—who their characters are, what they look like, where they live, and the events that have shaped their past. We use story bibles, outlines, or plotting software to help ourselves to make note of it all as we're drafting. But the real challenge can be determining when and how to tell your readers what they need to know. What does your main character look like—and how do you introduce this in the book? What about the events from their childhood that shape the decisions they make in the present day? Book coach Rona Gofstein explains how to share the details that matter most to your story without bogging down your reader—and how you they can be used to say even more about your characters than what you put on the page.

Did you ever finish a book and realize that you couldn't "see" the characters or where they were? Or maybe you've had the opposite experience—the pace seemed too slow, or you skipped through pages because you were tired of all the descriptions and wanted to get to the action. As a coach, I've seen writers struggling to decide how and when to give this important information to readers. Learning to balance details while moving the story forward is an important skill and at the heart of this month's question: How much detail should I give the reader, and how can I give it to them without it feeling like an info dump?

It's not easy knowing when, where, or how to insert details into your book. Fortunately, you have the perfect device to get started: your characters. By using your characters to show the reader the people and places around them, you reveal not only what the characters see but also who they are and what is important to



Have questions about book coaches, craft, or balancing your writing career with everything else? Send them to feedback@indieauthormagazine.com with the subject "Asking a Book Coach" for a chance to be featured.

them. Who the character is, and what they've been through before the start of the story, influences what they notice. What they love or what they hate is reflected in what they respond to.

If a bibliophile walks into someone's home, they won't care whether the couch and carpet match well. They are going to notice the bookshelves—or the lack of them. Someone who came from little notices abundance and may be envious or admiring. Someone who's often left out notices how everyone acts, so they can fit in, adjusting what they wear and what they say.

Let's look at this in context. In the opening of *The Hunger Games*, Reaping Day makes Katniss more aware of her District and what it does and doesn't have, so it's natural for her to tell us what she sees. And when she arrives at the Capitol, we are as overwhelmed as she is by the riches that surround her. Her initial dislike of Peeta and her meeting the other tributes gives us a way to see them as well.

So what details can you show us that bring us closer to your characters?

If your main character is mad at someone she's supposed to hate but notices his charming smile or the way his T-shirt is tight over his muscles, you've shown us the beginnings of unwanted or unexpected attraction, in addition to giving us a description of your male main character. If he arrives at her home and he focuses on her collection of hand-painted Dungeons & Dragons figures, he might realize he has something more in common with her than he thought, and we learn about what she likes to do in her free time.

If characters have lived in a city all their lives,

a night sky filled with stars is a new occurrence and worthy of stopping and standing still. But they might also jump at every sound in the silence. Both these descriptions and your characters' reactions to them tell readers key information to move the story forward.

Another thing to consider when deciding "to detail or not to detail" is your book's length combined with readers' expectations. If you're writing a fifteen-thousand-word insta-love, then you need to keep the details to a minimum. You have more important things to tell the reader in the space given, and they want to get to the heat—fast. However, if you're writing Epic Fantasy? This is an opportunity to give lots of details, and your reader will be there for them all: the setting, the clothing, the magic, and the different beings who live in this world. In this genre, you can make your descriptions big and vivid.

When you've finished your book and are revising, I recommend watch-

ing for two things. First, where can you use descriptive detail to give a scene or character more depth? Second, where can it be removed? If you've told the reader the color of a character's eyes and hair, there's no need to repeat it every time they appear. Add detail, however, when the point-of-view character notices something new—hazel eyes that become greener when someone is angry, long wavy blond hair fanned out over a pillow, or papers strewn across a normally neat office. These tell us about changes, and change moves a story forward and keeps a reader involved.

A detail is a moment in your book where you've told the reader, "Look at this." You've stopped the action to show them something. Make it worthwhile. Within the parameters of your genre and length, use your characters to show readers the details that reveal the most, and you are more likely to have them absorbing what you want them to see—and continuing to turn pages. ■



Rona Gofstein

Rona Gofstein is a published romance author, developmental editor, and an Author Accelerator certified fiction book coach who loves working with writers who need support to make their book writing dreams a reality. She describes her style as intensive feedback combined with compassionate enthusiasm because she knows that on this journey, writers need clarity, support and encouragement. She has spoken on writing craft and business across the country and is the past president of the New Hampshire RWA chapter and Broad Universe. A Jersey girl at heart, she lives in Massachusetts and is always up for getting coffee, finding a great new pair of shoes, or deciding where to go out for dinner.

A top-down view of a wooden desk. In the upper left, a portion of a silver laptop is visible. Several colorful sticky notes (blue, orange, yellow) are scattered on the desk. In the lower right, a white calendar or planner is partially visible, showing the word 'WEEK' and some lines for writing.

When Do You Write Best?

Examining Your Current Schedule to Find Your 'Right' Time to Write

Are you a morning person? A night owl? Somewhere in between? There is a long-standing conversation in the writing community about the best time to write and be creative. Thankfully, it's becoming more widely accepted that every person is complex and their situation unique, so there is no single best time for all writers. Phrased another way: There is no magic bullet for creation that works for every writer in every situation.

Some like to suggest following the routines and practices of your favorite famous authors—and though you can consider their methods when trying to find a creation schedule that works for you, focus on taking inspiration from them rather than trying to adapt to them entirely. Those authors may share the routines that revolutionized their writing, but the routine alone lacks the context of that author's situation. Does your situation exactly match that of the writer whose routine you are examining? More often than not, the answer is no.



So how do you find your ideal creation schedule? Consider when, where, and how you are most productive currently, and build a routine around that knowledge, starting with these five steps.

1. Write down all your responsibilities, commitments, and tasks required by the people depending on you.
2. Sketch out your weekly and daily routines as they currently stand.
3. Identify when you have the most physical energy and when you have the most creative energy. Do those times align with each other? If you find a time at which they overlap, that may point to an ideal writing window.
4. See where you can tweak your current routines to accommodate writing during your highest creative energy periods during the day.
5. Sketch out a few new sample routines to test over the coming weeks.

Don't make changes all at once; instead, try James Clear's 1 percent rule to make small shifts that have a lasting impact. Clear, the author of *Atomic Habits*, explains on his website that the rule

is an example of compounding: If you get 1 percent better every day for a year, you won't just be 365 percent better; you'll be thirty-seven times better.

Pro Tip:

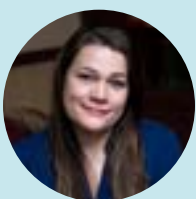
Read more about Clear's 1 percent rule and the math behind it at <https://jamesclear.com/continuous-improvement>.

Clear's rule works because it's easier to make small changes to habits and routines; large, drastic changes can be so mentally jarring and demand so much energy that they are unsustainable.

With writing, a 1 percent shift can look like writing while waiting for coffee to brew, writing on your phone while waiting in the school pickup line, or writing for ten minutes before bed. With small adjustments, you'll see compounding and consistent progress toward finding your ideal creation schedule.

Remember: It's human nature to resist change, so any adjustments you make may not feel right at first. Stick with any routine experiment for at least one week before trying out another one. Finally, give each experiment your complete effort; even if the adjustment is a challenge, making your life easier and getting your stories completed and out to the world is worth the work. ■





Audrey Hughey

Audrey Hughey designs planners, writes fiction, and works diligently to help her fellow authors. Although she currently writes horror and thrillers, she's as eclectic in her writing tastes as in her reading. When she's not submerged in the worlds of fiction and nonfiction, she's caring for her family, enjoying nature, or finding more ways to bring a little more light into the world.



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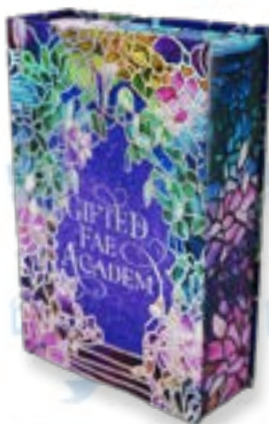
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The screenshot displays the reedsystudio interface, which is designed for writers to manage their manuscripts. The interface is divided into several sections:

- Manuscript Sidebar:** Located on the left, it includes a 'Manuscript' header with an 'Add +' button. Below it are sections for 'Front matter' (with an 'edit' link), 'Copyright', 'Table of Contents', and 'Body' (with an 'edit' link). The 'Body' section shows a list of chapters, with '1 Chapter 1' selected. There are also 'Back matter' and 'Drag chapters here' options.
- Manuscript Editor:** The central area shows the title 'Rocket Bride' and the chapter title 'The Rehearsal D'. The text of the chapter is displayed, with a highlighted sentence: "Are you ready, Princess?" Briar placed the delicate silver crown on her head. "I don't know." Ximara pressed her fingers to her temples, just below where the crown sat. "Maybe it's the braids?"
- Goals & Insights Panel:** Located on the right, it shows a 'Today' summary with a word count of +1000 and a goal of +1123. Below this is a calendar view for the week of October 23rd to 27th. The 'Manuscript goal' section shows a progress bar at 30% (12,079 words) and a target of 40,000 words by November 30th. A note indicates the user needs to write 1,117 words/day to finish on time.
- Main Characters Panel:** At the bottom, there is a section titled 'Main characters' featuring three character cards: 'Princess Andromeda', 'Aether Lefield', and 'Captain Perseus'. Each card has a small illustration of the character.

The interface also includes a bottom bar with the 'reedsy' logo and a word count of 12,340 words.

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