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**Alternatives to Popular
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**Getting Diabetic
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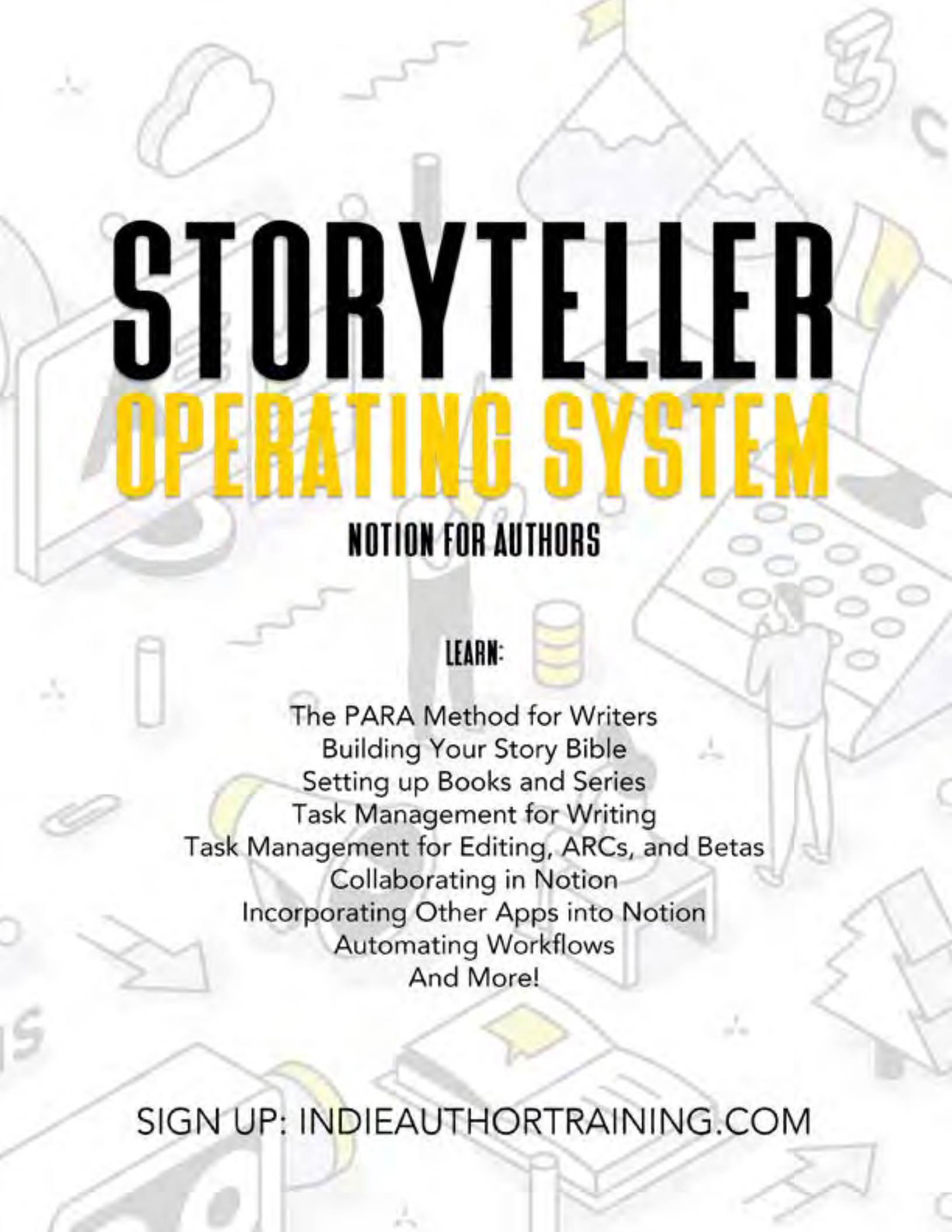
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Own Trail in Publishing,
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INDIE AUTHOR MAGAZINE

Perfecting Your Tech Stack

Issue 46



STORYTELLER OPERATING SYSTEM

NOTION FOR AUTHORS

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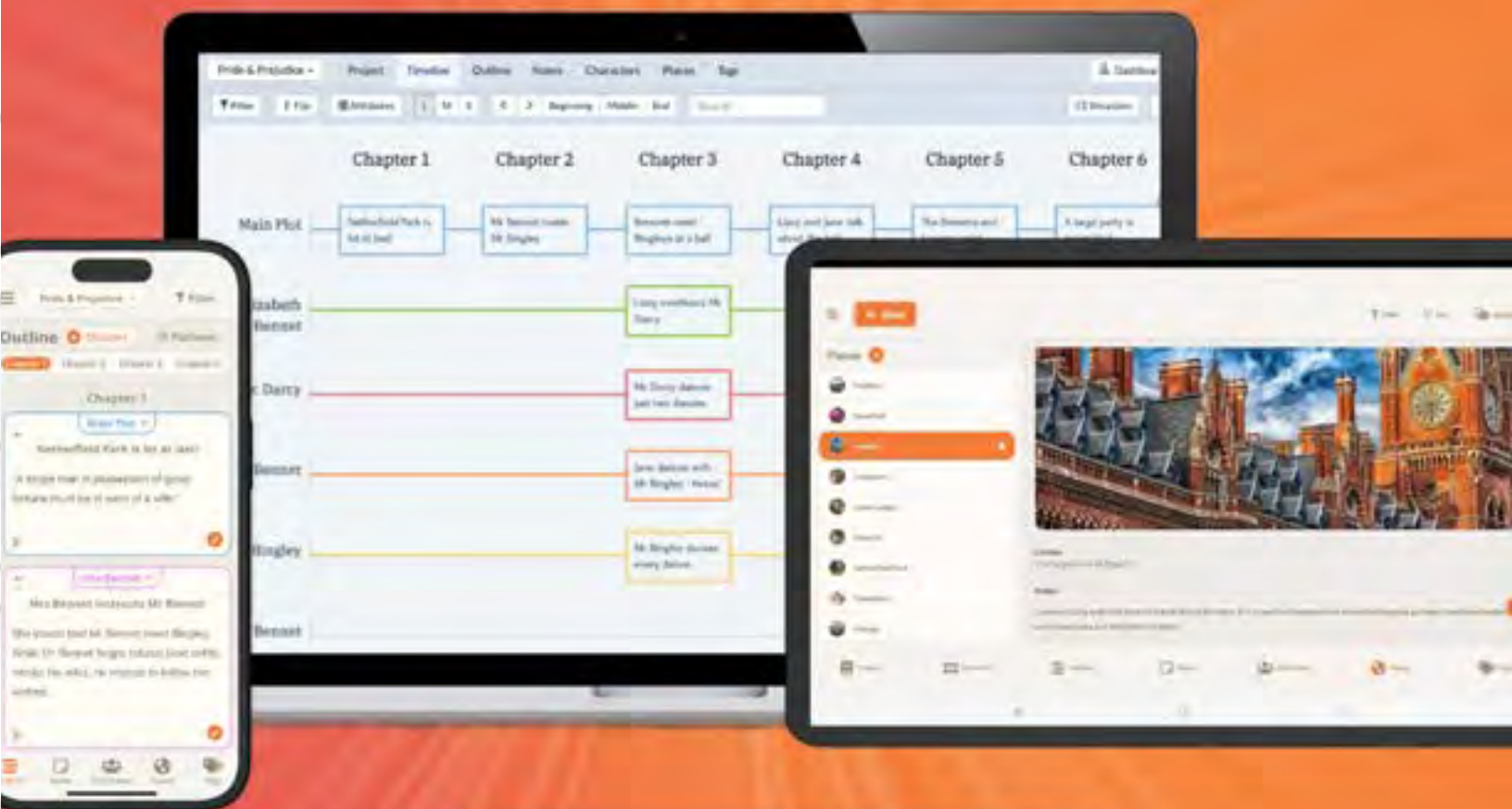
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Beth Duke

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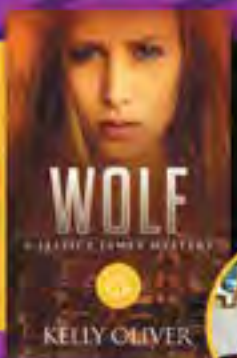
Katie Cross, katiecrossbooks.com



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



Phoebe Garnsworthy, phoebegarnsworthy.com



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



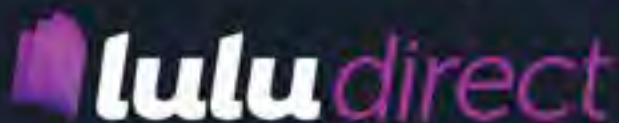
Kelly Oliver, kellyoliverbooks.com



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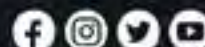
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From The EDITOR IN CHIEF

I'm not ashamed to admit that I'm not a tech-savvy person. I wouldn't go so far as to call myself a Luddite, but figuring out a new program has usually sparked more grumbling than excitement. Give me a paper-back, a physical planner, and a nice pen any day—I'll let Chelle Honiker figure out the new platforms.

But going through the process of publishing my second novel, I've realized just how integral technology is to our indie publishing world. I used Scrivener to write the manuscript and organize it, Adobe Photoshop to lay out the cover, Google Drive to coordinate with my artists and beta readers, and Atticus to format everything. StoryOrigin helped me distribute the story to ARC readers, and I organized my street team using my newsletter, hosted through MailerLite.

There are plenty of ways to write our stories without technology, but publishing them and distributing them to readers would be impossible without the help of tech tools and programs like those featured in this month's *IAM* articles and in every issue in our Technology section. Just as unique as

each of our businesses is the combination of tools that helps us build them. In this month's pages, you'll find descriptions of the *IAM* exec team's favorite publishing software, as well as a list of alternative tools for some of the most popular platforms within the industry. You'll also read how authors who have experience with certain tools can incorporate their knowledge into their business in other ways, through course creation and author education.

Like our businesses, our tech stacks are also ever evolving. As Indie Annie explains to one concerned author this month, if one platform isn't a good fit, don't be afraid to try something new. I promise, from one tentative techy to another, it's not as scary as it sounds! And as you take on new projects or explore new ways to make your current publishing setup simpler, here's hoping *IAM*—this month and every month—can help you find the perfect tool for the job.

Nicole Schroeder
Editor in Chief
Indie Author Magazine



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

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ALLI EXCLUSIVE

Tech Tools That Will Take Your Author Business to the Next Level

Having the right tools in your tech toolkit is crucial to managing every aspect of your author business. Whether you're just starting out or are a full-time authorpreneur, refining your tech stack can streamline your workflow and enhance your productivity.

Tech tools—document editors, spreadsheet software, notes apps, and the like—are a part of all our lives, even outside of our work as writers. Many of those will serve you well as an author-publisher too. As your business expands, you'll want to add the right tools at the right time to pave the way to success. In this article, the Alliance of Independent Authors (ALLi) will break down the essentials for building and perfecting your tech stack, tailored to your level of experience.



BEGINNING AUTHORS: BUILDING THE FOUNDATION

As a beginning author, your primary focus is on refining your craft. At this stage, your tech stack can be basic, but it will form the foundation of your publishing efforts. It's important to assess your options carefully to make sure the foundation is solid.

WRITING

Your most important tool as a beginning author is your writing software. You probably already have a viable tool available to you: a document editor like Microsoft Word, Apple Pages, or Google Docs. These will all allow you to capture your thoughts on electronic paper, but it's valuable to consider more specialized writing tools. Scrivener, which I use, offers robust features for organizing your manuscript, research, and notes in one place, but this power comes with complexity and a steep learning curve. Atticus, a web-based app, is easier to use and also enables you to generate the files you will need to upload to the various distribution platforms.

To assess which might be right for you, speak with others in your writing community, scan the web for recent reviews and overview videos, and whenever possible, make use of a free plan or a trial period to see if the tool meets your needs before making a long-term investment in it.

EDITING AND PROOFREADING

The editing and proofreading tools built into tools like Word, Pages, and Docs are getting better every day. As with every tool in your toolkit, tap into all the functionality that is available to you. For more editorial firepower, consider specialized tools like Grammarly, often recommended for nonfiction, and ProWritingAid, often recommended for fiction.

AI tools can also help you improve the quality of your writing. In my final polishing edit, I often prompt ChatGPT with questions like, "In this sentence, what are 3 alternatives to the word <X>?" The results often jog loose that perfect word that was hovering just outside my mental grasp.

Making full use of all the editing and proofreading tools that are available to you before giving your work to a professional editor will ensure you make the best use of that editor's skills and time.

PRODUCTION AND DISTRIBUTION

If you have chosen writing software that doesn't have an easy-to-use, built-in means of generating the EPUB and PDF files you will need to upload your book to production and distribution platforms, it pays to get a tool specifically optimized for this purpose. Many Mac users use Vellum, which is focused solely on this function. On the other

hand, one of the selling points of the Atticus writing app is that it has this functionality built in.

MARKETING AND PROMOTION

One of the few recommendations to authors that has remained consistent over time is the need to build an email list and to use a tool specifically designed for this purpose. Using your personal email account not only conveys an unprofessional image but also risks running afoul of email regulations. There are a number of good options; search online for recent reviews from authors and look for comparisons of features and functions to choose the one that's right for you.

EMERGING AUTHORS: IMPROVING YOUR EFFICIENCY

As an emerging author, you're looking to refine your processes and expand your reach. Your tech stack should evolve to support these goals, incorporating tools that help you manage the growing complexity of your author business.

WRITING

The efficiency of your writing process becomes more important at this stage. You might consider additional tools such as Plottr, which can help speed the development of your story and also offers time-saving features, such as the ability to capture information about storylines, characters,

and settings for reference—especially valuable if you're writing a series.

FINANCIAL TRACKING

As your publishing business grows, tracking your financial performance becomes more complicated, especially if you are distributing your books via multiple retailers. Having a tool that will gather this data and help you assess it is vital. ScribeCount, with its visual depictions of sales and royalties across platforms, time frames, geographies, and more, gives authors insight into their author business that many would struggle to get with a sophisticated spreadsheet.

MARKETING AND SOCIAL MEDIA MANAGEMENT

Promoting your books and connecting with new readers is vital, but you won't want the work to eat into your writing time more than is absolutely necessary, and tools are available to help.

Want to share advance reader copies with your street team or sign up for a newsletter swap? Explore tools like BookFunnel and StoryOrigin. These tools are worth the cost if for no other reason than they relieve you of having to provide customer support to readers trying to get your EPUB file onto their e-readers.

Eager to have a presence on multiple social media platforms? Consider tools like Buffer or Hootsuite to schedule posts across multiple platforms, saving you time and ensuring a consistent online presence.





EXPERIENCED AUTHORS: FINE-TUNING YOUR TOOLKIT

As an experienced author, you've established a successful author brand and likely have a substantial backlist. You will be fine-tuning your tech stack to maximize efficiency, revenue, and long-term growth.

TASK MANAGEMENT

Since you may coordinate work across a team, consider tools like Trello or Asana. I use Trello's robust free version not only to organize my own work but also to coordinate with colleagues like my business manager, podcast producer, and co-authors.

FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT AND TAX TOOLS

As your author business grows, so does the complexity of your finances. Add finance tools to your toolkit to manage this data and capitalize on the insights they can provide. Weigh the benefits of ubiquity against

alignment with your own financial know-how. In my author business, since I knew I would sub out this work, I chose QuickBooks because it's easy to find finance pros with expertise with this tool. If I would've wanted to take on this work myself, I would have explored more basic and less expensive options.

Perfecting your tech stack is an ongoing process that evolves as you grow as an author. As you explore what works for you, visit ALLi's publicly available blog, which has a whole category devoted to tools and tech, at <https://selfpublishingadvice.org/category/ai-tools-tech>. ALLi's SelfPubConnect also provides authors with a community to discuss their options and find support for the ones they're using. By strategically refining your tech stack at each stage of your business, you can ensure your work as an author-publisher is of the highest quality and greatest efficiency, paving the way to success. ■

Matty Dalrymple,
ALLi Campaigns Manager



Matty Dalrymple,
ALLi Campaigns Manager



The Alliance of Independent Authors (ALLi) is a global membership association for self-publishing authors. A non-profit, our mission is ethics and excellence in self-publishing. Everyone on our team is a working indie author and we offer advice and advocacy for self-publishing authors within the literary, publishing and creative industries around the world. www.allianceindependentauthors.org

Dear Indie Annie

I am not a software whizz by any means. I just heard of a new platform that is obviously better for my business than the one I'm using, but I know it'll take me years to learn it. (Okay, not years, but it'll feel like it with as much gray hair as it'll give me.) How can I decide whether to stay set in my ways or take the time to learn something new?

Tech Troglodyte

Dear Troggy,

I hope you don't mind me calling you that. I felt the need to insert a little levity into our conversation. I can see you're in a "panikos" over this new writing platform business. Now, I know change can be scarier than an army of ancient Greeks in a Trojan Horse, but listen up, my dear—Indie Annie's got some loving advice that'll sort you right out.

First things first, my darling one, you must stop clinging to that old software like it's the Golden Fleece. The times, they are a-changing, and if you don't hop on that technological bandwagon post-haste, you'll be left in the literary dust. And we can't very well have that, now can we?

I understand, sweetie, how the mere thought of learning something new is enough to send you back to dial-up. But mark my words, my tech-phobic friend—that new platform could be the key to unlocking your productivity. Just picture it: more efficient work-

flows, better reader engagement, those royalty checks rolling in like the tide ... Now, doesn't that feel sweeter than eating baklava during a Santorini sunset?

I know you're hesitant, my dear Troggy. Goodness knows technology and I have never quite seen eye to eye. I still recall the day I first tried to operate that newfangled fax machine and ended up embroiled in an international incident that involved the Russian Embassy and a missing consignment of dolphin-friendly tuna. But I digress. You mustn't fret, poppet. The only difference between a digital dynamo and a technological terror is a spot of good, old-fashioned elbow grease.

So here's what you're going to do: You're going to take a deep breath, square those shoulders, and dive headfirst into learning that platform. I don't care if you take weeks, months, or even years; you just keep at it. And don't you dare



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

let those gray hairs or late nights browsing tutorials get you down. Think of it as a chance to channel your inner Pythagoras. A little intellectual challenge never hurt anyone. And you may surprise yourself.

Now, I know what you're thinking: "But Indie Annie, what if I make an absolute hash of it?" Heavens to Medusa, my sweet, that's what the "undo" button is for! Besides, half the fun of learning something new is the occasional hiccup. Just think of it as your very own literary plot twist. Go on, embrace those "oops" moments! They'll turn into "eureka!" epiphanies quicker than you can say "Archimedes."

The way I see it, you've got two choices, sugar. Option A: You can keep clinging to that old software like it's your favorite teddy bear, watching the competition zoom past you in the digital lane. Or option B: You can take a deep breath, put

on your best pair of metaphorical pearls, and become the tech-savvy wordsmith you were always meant to be.

And remember, Athens wasn't built in a day, so be patient with yourself, and take it one step at a time. Your readers—and your royalty statements—will be singing your praises louder than the muses on Mount Olympus.

Happy writing,
Indie Annie



10 Tips for

BACKING UP YOUR WORK

As an indie author, your words are your business. Yet every week brings new tales of writers losing manuscripts to crashed hard drives or watching years of subscriber lists vanish into the digital void. One author lost three years of work when both her laptop and external drive failed simultaneously during a power surge. Another watched helplessly as a hacker deleted their author website, taking their entire blog archive with it.

Whether you're crafting your first novel or managing multiple series, protecting your work isn't just good practice—it's essential to your author career. It's also essential to do it correctly, however, so your files are safe and retrievable when you need them. Here are *IAM*'s ten tips to making sure your writing stays secure so that your story doesn't become a cautionary tale of its own.

1

CHOOSE YOUR PRIMARY GUARDIAN.

Think of your primary backup as your manuscript's first line of defense. Cloud services like Google Drive, offering 15 GB of storage for free; Dropbox, which offers 2 GB free; or OneDrive, which offers 5 GB free, offer your work a secure home in the digital realm while keeping it at your fingertips. Each platform brings something unique to the table—Google Drive shines for collaboration and automatic version history, Dropbox plays nicely with Scrivener and maintains deleted files for thirty days, and OneDrive meshes seamlessly with Microsoft's ecosystem while offering built-in ransomware protection.

Pro Tip: Set up automatic syncing between your main writing folder and your chosen cloud service. For Windows, right-click your writing folder, select your cloud service's sync option, and let technology do the heavy lifting while you focus on crafting your next chapter.

2

DOUBLE (OR TRIPLE) YOUR PROTECTION.

Cloud storage might seem magical, but even magic can fail. Think of a secondary backup—like an external hard drive or USB stick—as your safety net. A 2 TB external drive, which typically costs around \$60, can store years of manuscripts, research, and marketing materials. For ultimate peace of mind, keep an offsite backup that's safe from physical threats like fire or theft. Many authors pair a local hard drive with a 128 GB USB stick for \$20 that is stored in a secure location, like a safe-deposit box or a trusted family member's home.

Also harness built-in tools like Apple's Time Machine or Windows File History for scheduled local backups. Set weekly backups to run during your downtime—Sunday nights work well for many authors—to ensure you're never far from a recent copy.

3

EMBRACE AUTOMATION.

For the tech-savvy wordsmith, automation tools like Zapier, free for one hundred tasks per month, or Make.com, free for one thousand operations a month, can transform your backup routine from a chore into a well-oiled machine. Create workflows that automatically shuffle your words to additional storage locations—imagine your Google Drive drafts appearing in Dropbox without you needing to lift a finger. You can even set your Scrivener projects to perform automated backups of your work every time you save.

Configure alerts through Zapier or Make.com to notify you via email or text if a backup fails, so you can troubleshoot without breaking your creative flow. Test your automation monthly to ensure everything is running smoothly.

4

FORTIFY YOUR DIGITAL HOME.

If you've built an author website—especially one hosting a blog, shop, or custom content—backup plugins are your best friends. Tools like UpdraftPlus for WordPress, which has a free version available, can automatically safeguard your site to offsite storage, ensuring your platform survives even if disaster strikes. The premium version for \$70 per year adds incremental backups and multisite support.

Pro Tip: Schedule digital housekeeping tasks for 3 a.m. local time, when your site traffic typically dips and the internet gremlins sleep. Keep at least three months of weekly backups for your website—you never know when you'll need to restore an old blog post.

5

CONSIDER PROFESSIONAL PROTECTION.

Sometimes the smartest move is letting the experts handle the technical maze. Professional security and backup services like Carbonite, for \$6 a month, or IDrive, for \$79.50 a year for 5 TB, can shield everything from your manuscripts to your website. These services often include features like continuous backup and mobile access to your files.

Pro Tip: Look for services that include automated threat detection and ransomware protection. Many services also offer discounts for annual subscriptions, if you're looking to keep costs down.

6

GUARD YOUR READER CONNECTION.

Your mailing list is pure gold, with potentially years of careful relationship building with readers behind it. Most platforms, including Mailchimp, Substack, and ConvertKit, let you export subscriber data in CSV format. Make it a habit to download and secure these precious connections regularly, including custom fields, segments, and engagement data. Set a monthly reminder for the first Monday to export your list, or better yet, automate it through Zapier. Store copies in at least two locations, and always encrypt files containing reader information.

7

SPREAD YOUR SAFETY NET WIDE.

Think of your backups like investment portfolios; diversification is key. Spreading your work across your computer or multiple devices, external storage, and cloud services means you're covered even if one location goes dark. Consider geographic diversity too—cloud services often store data in multiple regions, which you have the freedom to select.

Pro Tip: Try to follow the 3-2-1 rule for backing up your work: three copies, with two different media types and one offsite location. For a novel manuscript, this might mean keeping one copy on your computer, one on an external drive, and one in the cloud.

8

KEEP YOUR STORY'S HISTORY.

Every draft tells a story of its own, and saving versions of your manuscript tracks your story's evolution as much as it secures it in case of emergency. Plus, sometimes those “deleted” scenes find new life in unexpected places.

Major cloud platforms keep automatic version histories: Google Docs saves every edit for thirty days, and Dropbox's version history varies by plan. Check the support pages of your platform to see how your program records old files. Then, use version control features like Google Docs's history or Scrivener's snapshots to keep your drafts organized without cluttering your workspace. Label major versions clearly, like “FirstDraft_Complete” or “PostBetaRevision.” Your backups can also provide a historical record of how your story evolves in case you need to revisit an idea or reference an old version of a scene.

9

LOCK DOWN YOUR SECRETS.

For unpublished manuscripts or sensitive reader data, consider adding an extra layer of security. Encrypting your files before backup ensures your work stays private, even if your storage gets compromised. AES-256 military-grade encryption is the current standard for secure storage. Tools like Boxcryptor, free for personal use, or VeraCrypt, a free open-source service, can add that extra lock to your cloud storage, or use built-in password protection features in your preferred platform. Keep your encryption passwords in a secure password manager.

10

TEST YOUR SAFETY NET.

A backup is only as good as its restore function. Every quarter, try recovering a few files from each of your backup locations. Think of it as a fire drill for your digital assets—better to find problems during practice than during an emergency. Create a test document and run through your entire recovery process.

Pro Tip: Bundle these checks with other routine tasks like quarterly subscriber exports or website updates. Make it part of your regular author business maintenance. Document your backup and recovery procedures in case someone else needs to help you recover files.

By building a robust backup routine and letting automation handle the heavy lifting, you're free to focus on what matters most—crafting stories that captivate your readers. Rest assured that your words, your website, and your reader connections will stay safe, come what may. ■

Chelle Honiker



Chelle Honiker

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

A Small-Town Girl with a Wide Net

**WESTERN ROMANCE AUTHOR,
WIDE FOR THE WIN PRESIDENT ERIN
WRIGHT BLAZES HER OWN TRAIL IN
PUBLISHING, HELPING COUNTLESS
AUTHORS DO THE SAME**

Once upon a time, Erin Wright was that kid reading Romance novels by flashlight under the covers when she was supposed to be sleeping. Today, she's a *USA TODAY* bestselling author, well known to Western Romance readers as the author of multiple series set in Idaho's Long Valley. But she's probably best known within the indie author community, for her role as president of Wide for the Win, an organization and online community of authors who publish their books across platforms instead of exclusively through Kindle Unlimited (KU).

This month, Erin shared her journey from reader to writer to author advisor with *IAM*, as well as the real-world adventure her books have inspired for 2025.



EARLY LIFE AND INSPIRATION

Having spent her early years as a military kid, Erin moved around a lot growing up. It wasn't until her teens that her family set down roots in the small Idaho town where her father had grown up. She describes it as "a town with more cows than people," and says she struggled to adjust to the tiny town with a population of 211, where she was one of fourteen kids in her class, and the only one who hadn't been there since kindergarten.

Needless to say, she wasn't always happy there. What did make her happy, though, were her books. She loved reading Romance novels and writing and always wanted to be an author, but she says she never considered it a viable career path since traditional publishing involved acquiring an agent, selling your book to a publishing house, and jumping through many more hoops to see the book in print. Although writing remained a passion, Erin set it aside as she got older to pursue other careers.

So what did she do instead? According to her website, almost every job under the sun, including library director, barista, teacher, and website designer. At one point, she was even a ranch hand helping brand cattle. Although her many jobs have taken Erin and her husband around

the world, she eventually settled once again into a small Idaho town, much like the one where she'd spent her teens.

This time around, the transition was less difficult. Since their move, Erin and her husband have settled into small-town life, and she's even woven the people and the area into her writing.

WRITING CAREER AND THEMES

Erin's colorful careers drifted away from the literary world for a time, but it wasn't for long; eventually, she found her way back to the books she'd loved as a teen—this time, with a peek at the other side of the publishing world. Around 2015, having put aside the idea of writing professionally, Erin says she stumbled onto an author forum by accident one evening. To her surprise, she discovered that all the authors there were self-publishing their books. It was her first exposure to the indie author community. She says, "I wasn't cool enough to be one of these indie authors, so I offered to start reading and editing for them instead."

While becoming more immersed in the world of self-publishing, Erin picked up work as a proofreader, a ghostwriter, and a personal assistant. Outside of the book world, she also continued teaching and



pursuing her teaching certification. During this time, a motorcycle gang trilogy she'd penned as a ghostwriter took off. The trilogy was the spark that ignited her fire to try writing for herself—well, along with the encouragement of her husband,



who told her, as she recounts, “Erin, I love you, but you’re dumber than a box of rocks. Why are you going to school? ... Why don’t you write and make lots of money?”

In 2018, when Erin finally decided to give writing a serious try,

she, like many authors, chose to write what she knew. And what she knew was rural Idaho and Romance. Thus, her multi-series Long Valley Western Romances came to life. Long Valley is less than two hours from Erin’s current home, and she describes it as being full of farmers, ranchers, cowboys, loggers, and miners. But it’s also home to ritzy people from Boise vacationing around the lake and at the ski resorts there. Essentially, it’s rife with culture clashes and has tons of fodder for her books. As she says with a chuckle, it also gives her a reason to vacation, as far as the IRS is concerned, in one of her favorite places—she goes there annually for a solo writing retreat.

GOING WIDE FOR THE WIN

To date, Erin has four series and more than thirty Western Romance titles by which her readers know her. But among authors, Erin is better known as a proud advocate of wide publishing and a president of the author group Wide for the Win.

Wide for the Win arose from Erin’s deep love of libraries, after she discovered that being exclusive to KU meant her books could not be placed there. At the time, she didn’t know anything about going wide with her books, and many in the indie author community had yet to do so. Never one to be deterred from a challenge, especially if it involves

learning, Erin set about to gain as much knowledge as possible, from as many sources as possible, regarding the process of publishing beyond Amazon.

Along the way, Erin shared bits and pieces of what she was learning within forums and author groups, and soon she found herself the go-to resource for other authors wanting to learn more about taking their books out of KU and going wide—“Widelings,” as they became known. It was a process she was still figuring out herself, so as more people came to her for advice, she searched for books on the subject, and she found that the few that did exist were mostly out of date or didn’t cover the topic in much depth.

What was an author to do, Erin figured, but write her own and share everything she’d learned?

Of course, that was much easier said than done. Fast forward six hundred pages and a lot of frustration later, and Erin says, “I just couldn’t see how I was going to be able to write this book.” She posted an apology on the Wide for the Win Facebook Group sharing her struggle, and that’s when she says author Mark Leslie Lefebvre stepped in and saved her. His book *Wide For The Win: Strategies to Sell Globally via Multiple Platforms and Forge Your Own Path to Success* published in March 2021 with a foreword by Erin, and details insights and advice

from authors and publishing representatives about how to succeed at publishing books on multiple platforms. Lefebvre would become the communications and outreach director for Wide for the Win.

Today, in her role as president of Wide for the Win, Erin offers advice to countless authors on marketing and business strategies tailored to wide authors, and she provides one-on-one consulting and courses for authors looking for more specific advice. The strategy has grown more popular since Erin began experimenting with it. The Facebook group that started in 2019 has grown to eighteen thousand members strong, and on Circle, Wide for the Win's primary platform since 2023, the group is quickly closing in on two thousand members.

Authors who want to learn more about Wide for the Win or want to become a Wideling themselves can do so by visiting the group's website, <https://www.wideforthewin.com>.

LOOKING AHEAD

Erin's eyes, like the rest of ours, are turned toward the future of publishing. When asked to describe where she thought the industry might be headed, the subject of AI inevitably came up. In her words, "AI is just a tool, and it's much like any other tool one would use and not something to be afraid of ... It doesn't mean that the hard part of writing the book doesn't need to be done." She feels that each author needs to make their own decision as to whether it's a tool they want to use, she says.

As for where Erin herself is headed, the answer is everywhere. In the coming year, she's excited to kick off a new project she's called "driveway surfing." Moving around a lot as a child and traveling for a year in an RV with her husband prior to the pandemic gave Erin a sense of wanderlust that, recently, has been pulling at her to get out and see the world again. Unfortunately, her husband's job running the local newspaper no longer lends itself to





travel. Although she'd prefer to see the country with her favorite travel partner, she says, "Going it alone presents the perfect opportunity for me to combine my love of travel, libraries, bookstores, and connecting with readers and other authors."

As a result, Erin has customized a six-foot-by-twelve-foot cargo trailer that she can pull behind her Ford Escape—appropriately, and hilariously, named Houdini. She'll be attending author conferences, signing events, and surfing her way across the US and Canada. She's created a form to collect information from driveway owners and prospective hosts, letting people offer a parking place and set the boundaries of what they're comfortable with in terms of Erin's visit. The form covers everything from "Please don't knock on my door" to "Feel free to use my shower." One cannot help but wonder if a book or two might materialize from this adventure.

Erin's many careers are storied in and of themselves, but her passion for learning and her willingness to adapt to changing trends in publishing have allowed her to thrive as an independent author. Over the years, she not only has won over readers with her storytelling but has also made a name for herself as a trailblazer in independent publishing—a trail that, thanks to Erin and *Wide for the Win*, countless indie authors now follow, too. ■

Jenn Mitchell



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.

Learning to Teach, Teaching to Learn

HOW COURSE CREATION CAN BE A BOON FOR YOUR BUSINESS AND FOR OTHERS' TOO

One of the most important things anyone who's mastered a craft can do is pass that knowledge and experience on to others. To educate, inform, and inspire those coming after us is a high calling, so it's no surprise that as authors grow in skill, many of us choose to explore education to pay it forward.

In fact, passing on the things we know to newer writers is something of a tradition within the writing community. The more writing has grown into a profession, the more authors have worked at teaching new writers the trade. Over the past hundred years, this has grown into an industry in its own right. There are many ways to pass along knowledge to others, and today, we can choose which tools we want to use to do so.

SHARED KNOWLEDGE

One of the simplest methods of teaching, and the most common for authors, is to write a book on the topic.

Because we're already writers, this comes naturally to most of us, and we already have the tools at our disposal to put the book into the world.

Other authors may make the leap from writing a nonfiction book to making small online appearances. Becoming a guest on podcasts, for example, matches up well with writing a book, since writer-oriented podcasts are often especially interested in hosting guests who've recently released an informative book about writing.

Online webinars and conferences are another way to do online teaching in a low-demand way. These are something you can do once or regularly, but it's at your pace. You have total control over the amount of work and stress you take on. I speak regularly at conferences, but I get to pick which I want to attend, and whether I want to speak or attend for fun.

All that changes for authors who opt to run regular classes. Whether they're online only, in person, or some combination of both, organized courses require



BUSINESS OR PLEASURE?

One of the first things you'll want to look at when deciding to teach is whether this is something you aim to do professionally—to make a good income from it—or something you intend to do as a hobby or sideline.

Either of these can work very well. There are superb teachers worth every cent of what they charge who make a good living from their classes. And there are excellent teachers who opt to give information for free or token payments, because for them, the teaching is more important than the financial reward.

Neither of these groups is wrong, so your job is to figure out which of these two paths best aligns with your goals. Some teachers will find the burden of knowing that paying the rent relies on getting as many people into their classes as possible painful, while others thrive under those conditions. It's worth a little soul-searching before you figure out what sort of teaching will work best for you.

a significant step in terms of complexity, required knowledge, and commitment.

Authors Kristine Kathryn Rusch and Dean Wesley Smith teach a combination of online and offline classes about a dizzying array of topics, from the craft of writing to the business of publishing. Although they're probably better known for their online courses, they've also taught in-person workshops, where dozens of people from around the world come for a week to learn from masters.

When asked about teaching courses both online and offline, Rusch says, "Teaching is a big time commitment, so make sure you do it because you love it. Dean and I love helping writers and always have."

Most authors who teach prefer online courses. In-person options are less common, but there are still plenty of examples of in-person teaching within the author sphere. Kevin J. Anderson teaches an entire master's program at Western Colo-

rado University. His course is one of few in the world that focuses on both traditional and indie publishing, and to date, he's had several classes graduate with an MA in publishing at the end of the thirteen-month curriculum.

"All my career I have been taught and mentored by masters who were way ahead of me in their craft," Anderson says. "It's only fitting that I should pay it forward and help lift up other authors."





THE WORLD IS YOUR CLASSROOM

For those teaching online, one of the first questions a budding teacher must ask themselves is whether they want to host classes on their own website or as part of a larger course-hosting platform. In a lot of ways, this is easy to compare to selling ebooks on retailers versus directly on your own website, complete with all the pluses and minuses thereof. And like with the direct sales debate, the answer for which is best for your business is one you must answer based on factors like time, cost, and your target audience.

Udemy and Skillshare, for example, are easy places for one to launch their first course. They are well-known sites that millions of people use regularly, but the competition for eyeballs is fierce. When you advertise a class on Udemy, anyone who follows your link is only one click away from a competing class.

Indie Author Training, *IAM's* sister site, offers a smaller marketplace of courses tailored to indie authors, and allows creators to set their own prices and course structures, walking the line between larger, more saturated teaching platforms and fully self-hosted sites. Those interested in becoming an instructor can learn more and register at <https://indieauthortraining.com/become-an-instructor>.

For self-hosted education sites, Teachable is a seemingly obvious

choice. It's well known, recognized, and trusted by millions of people, and it dominates online writing classrooms. However, some authors choose to teach from Shopify, Squarespace, Wix, Fourthwall, Podia, Thinkific, and a host of other sales platforms. Explore a few options, test each, then pick. Be decisive; the content you will share is the important part. If you someday want to move to another teaching platform, you can bring the content with you. Don't be Hamlet. Take action!

In-person efforts tend to be more complicated, but the connections formed by gathering in the real world can be worth it. First, you'll want to decide if this is a one-time thing or a regularly scheduled event. For the former, any venue can work: Hotels often have conference space they'll rent, Staples stores will rent their meeting rooms, and even churches might rent out their meeting space. There are plenty of options for this sort of thing; which work best will depend on the size of your group and your budget.



Ongoing meetups can be great, too. The site Meetup is a good place to advertise such things and get other people to join you. Your location could mean finding a nearby coffee shop or public park, or perhaps borrowing space from a local school or college. If you're charging for these sessions—though regular meetups are sometimes just done without charge—there are more options, as you can rent a space.

LESSON PLANNING

The other decision one needs to make early in the process is what, precisely, you intend to teach. I again lean into the confluence of passion and business. Pick an area of writing you're deeply passionate about, as that will help carry you through the days when you really don't want to teach. But also pick something where you have the chops and experience to make it work.

How do we know what to teach? It can be difficult! Impostor

syndrome will often have us second-guessing our skills. My advice is to put out some feelers in the form of helpful content. There are online groups where we can post informative essays about the craft and business of writing. Try launching an essay or two related to your topic, and see what the response looks like. If loads of people are liking and commenting about how helpful the post is, you've probably got a winner.

Having a unique selling proposition is as important as passion,

says Elizabeth Anne West, CEO of the Future Fiction Academy (FFA). "What makes your course offering unique?" she asks. For her courses, that selling point is in-person classes and the ability to interact directly with West as an instructor. "So few do it [host live classes] and it really sets us apart in the field. This way authors can ask their questions and it's easier to build a sense of community."

By running live classes most days a week, every week, West's FFA fulfills student needs in a unique and powerful way. Of course, she's built a team to share the stress of ongoing live classes. "Being the person whose name everyone associates [a course with] is a tall order," she says. "Consider partnering early on with others teaching nearby lanes to what you want to teach. You can swap off times of teaching, combine resources for marketing, and grow faster."

Inspiring others can be a powerful tool in making a course







work. Sarra Cannon, who teaches the HB90 class about time management and task organization, has helped thousands of authors learn how to better manage their time and boost their productivity in sustainable ways. Her classes are deeply inspirational, and her message that you can do this comes through in all her teaching. This can be a powerful asset to an author/teacher. Potential students can go anywhere to learn, but as mentioned above, having a unique selling proposition is powerful, and being upbeat, hopeful, and energized can help dramatically with class marketing.

TAKE NOTE

One obstacle many face when they consider running a course is whether they have enough knowledge on the subject. The answer is simple: If you are already, right now, where

some novice writer wants to be, then you already have something worth teaching. It'll be something different for each of us, but every author I've met who has published a decent number of books has learned things worth passing along.

Teaching your own course isn't for everyone. Some people will feel fulfilled by the work while others will hate the experience. That's okay, because there are many ways to teach beyond running your own school. If in doubt, volunteer for a small speaking engagement or guest-star on a podcast or webinar to see if engaging with other authors about your publishing process is something you enjoy. For those who believe running their own course is a path they'd like to follow, it can be a powerful enhancement to a career and a brilliant chance to change the lives of others in positive ways. ■

Kevin McLaughlin

Kevin McLaughlin

Kevin McLaughlin is the USA Today bestselling author of 83 books. He writes mostly science fiction and fantasy, and is also the author of *The Coffee Break Novelist* and *You Must Write*. He's enjoyed reading and writing serials for decades.

Don't Like This? Try That!

ALTERNATIVES TO POPULAR PUBLISHING PROGRAMS THAT MAY BE WORTH THE SWITCH

Ask a room full of indie authors what programs they use to complete a variety of tasks, and you'll get a variety of answers. Tech tools abound for indie authors, and each author's suite is as unique as their business. Although there are plenty of popular names in the mix, from Scrivener to Vellum to Canva, there is no right or wrong answer when it comes to what program to use—so if you are looking for alternatives to popular programs, we have some for you to consider.

FORMATTING SOFTWARE

Many authors have heard others praise Vellum for its easy-to-use, simplified platform for formatting books, but even more who would like to use it can't afford it. Vellum is limited to Mac only and has a steep price of \$199.99 just to get started formatting ebooks. At \$249.99 for both ebooks and paperbacks, it's no wonder some authors are looking for alternatives. Luckily, there are several options to consider.

Atticus

If you are looking for a program that can be used from any computer you own, or any place you have access to a web browser, Atticus is the solution. Very similar to Vellum, Atticus is set up with a simple set of formatting options for authors to choose from when formatting their manuscript for various file types. And the platform is not just limited to computer use; you can use it on tablets and smartphones too.

Pros: Atticus has a lifetime charge of \$147. You don't have to purchase it for every device you own; if the device has a browser or a way to install software, you can access your account there without paying for an additional license. Atticus has more features than Vellum, including the ability to do footnotes, version control, and callout boxes.

Cons: There are aspects of the program still under development, so Atticus may not have everything you are looking for yet. The formatting options offered also aren't fully customizable, so some limits exist regarding what you can do with the design of your book's pages.

For more information, visit <https://www.atticus.io>.

Draft2Digital

If you already use Draft2Digital to publish your books to other retailers besides Amazon, you might consider Draft2Digital's tool for formatting your manuscript. It's a free service, and the process walks you through formatting your novel in the same place you'll eventually need to upload it—so everything is guaranteed to be compatible.

Pros: It's easy to sign up for Draft2Digital and follow the steps for formatting your ebook. The platform also has a variety of templates you can use when formatting your book to find the style you like.

Cons: If you want to make changes to your book after it's been formatted, you'll have to upload the text from Word and format again. This isn't as friendly of an option as Atticus or Vellum offers, especially if you update your back matter in previously published books regularly. Customization tools also aren't easy to use. Finally, Draft2Digital's site is cloud based, so you can't download the formatter and use it when you're offline.

For more information, visit <https://www.draft2digital.com/> steps.

Reedsy Studio

If you are looking for a different free alternative to Vellum, check out the Reedsy Editor. It's free for all users and features an easy-to-use interface that even the least tech-savvy person could use.

Pros: Reedsy's Studio is a simple tool that can help you complete most of the formatting needed for a novel or a nonfiction book. It can also be used as a word processor in which to write your book. Additionally, the platform can work from any device—computer, tablet, or phone—as long as you have internet access.

Cons: Reedsy is cloud based, so you won't be able to download it and use it offline. You are required to have a free Reedsy account to use the editor. It also doesn't have the level of customization available in Vellum or Atticus.

For more information, see <https://reedsy.com/studio/write-a-book>.

WRITING SOFTWARE

For those who don't use Microsoft Word or a similar program, Scrivener is often the word processor of choice for authors. The platform works well for those who write out of order or like the ability to move sections or chapters around when needed. But some authors find Scrivener difficult to learn and don't enjoy having to watch videos or comb through the expansive tutorial to learn how to take advantage of the program.

If you are one of those authors who finds Scrivener isn't for you, here are some alternatives to consider.

Atticus

Although Atticus is predominantly a formatting tool, the company has actually marketed the app as a writing tool developed by authors for authors. Parts of the app are still under development, including collaboration and editing features, but Atticus is ready to use as a word-processing program right out of the box.

Pros: Like Scrivener, Atticus allows you the ability to drag and drop chapters and scenes to reorganize them. It shares several other features with other writing platforms as well. It has cloud-based storage and auto-save and works on all major operating systems.

Cons: Atticus has a one-time fee of \$147, and there are aspects of the program still under development, so it may not have everything you are looking for yet, though developers are still pushing out updates to the software regularly.

Learn more at <https://www.atticus.io>.

Storyist

If you have a Mac and are looking for a program that has many of the same features as Scrivener but also offers additional formatting options, Storyist might be the solution for you. Alongside its typical writing setup, Storyist is also a screenwriting program, formatting text automatically. Like Scrivener, Storyist allows users to make notes on index cards and consult them when you're writing, and it helps you track your plot, characters, and settings as you write.

Pros: The biggest advantage to Storyist is that it's affordable, ranging in price from free to \$59. It is also designed to save to the cloud, so you can access your files from anywhere. It comes with manuscript and screenplay templates to use out of the box, and there are other formatting options you can download for use as well.

Cons: It only works on Apple devices, and while it's free for iPhone and iPad, the Mac version of the program costs \$59. It also does not offer a distraction-free or focus mode for writing, nor does it offer full-screen mode.

Learn more about the app at <https://storyist.com>.

Write! App

If you're looking for an affordable app that provides distraction-free writing on your computer or laptop, Write! App might be an option to consider.

Pros: Write! App is super affordable with the max cost of \$24.95, but a student discount can knock this down to \$9.95 for life.

This app supports thirty-five languages, allowing for basic spell-checks in those languages, and unlike several other programs mentioned in this article, Write! App allows for easy collaboration with editors or fellow writers.

Cons: Write! App is not available for mobile devices. Unlike many of the apps within this article, Write! App does not offer many file types for exporting your book. It is limited to PDF, plain text, and Markdown text. File types like RTF, Word, and others aren't available. Similarly, it doesn't have version history, though it does sync to the cloud.

For more information, visit <https://writeapp.co>.

Ulysses

If you like writing on the go and use an iPhone, Ulysses Mobile could be an option for you. This app comes complete with formatting styles frequently used in books, spelling and grammar checking, and metric-tracking abilities, including goals, keywords, outlines, and more. If you prefer to type on your Mac, the platform has a computer-based option too, with a different version of the app, which can be downloaded.

Pros: If you like to publish blog posts, this app allows you to post them straight from the application, which makes updating your blog while you're on the go easier. It also allows you to format your book as an EPUB in addition to other common formats, such as DOCX and PDF. If you want to switch between writing on your Mac and your phone or iPad, just save your manuscript to the cloud in order to access your files.

Cons: Unlike Scrivener and other writing apps, which require a one-time purchase, Ulysses is available via subscription only, at \$5.99 a month or \$49.99 a year. It is also only available on Mac or iOS—not much of a downside if you already use those devices but a potential deal-breaker if you only use a PC or switch between PC and Mac. It was also hard to verify whether you have to pay for each version if you wanted it on more than one device, though it is possible, as the mobile app and computer platform are listed as two different products.

For more information, visit <https://ulysses.app>.

Runner-Up: Google Docs

Google Docs is a versatile and free application anyone can write in as long as you have a Gmail account. It has text-to-speech natively built into it, and it integrates with any number of editing programs, including but not limited to Grammarly and ProWritingAid. Since you can use it from any device, there is little to no time needed for syncing between devices when writing is done in online mode. It is also one of the easiest programs to learn how to use.

Pros: Google Docs is available for almost all devices. This includes your Kindle Fire if you want to side-load Google Play onto the device and put Google Docs on it from there. It also has no cost, and you can back up your content to other cloud services or even your computer if you are worried about losing content. It also allows you to collaborate with your co-writer or an editor.

Cons: To get the most out of it, you need to be online. You can save a version of your document to work on offline, but you have to remember to sync it online if you are switching between devices. And in my experience, when a document gets bigger than 70,000 words, it lags and can take longer to load when opening.

EDITING SOFTWARE

Even though nothing competes with the improvements human editors make to manuscripts, many authors choose to do a few rounds of self-edits on their manuscript before handing it over for a final polish. ProWritingAid is one of the most highly rated editing programs out there, and many authors swear by it. However, at \$10 per month for a premium account, if you're looking for an alternative to the platform that's more affordable or that prioritizes other editing tools, consider the options below.

Grammarly

If you are looking for a program that is great at spotting spelling errors and minor grammatical errors, consider the free or premium version of Grammarly. Grammarly is a web-based platform that also offers an extension for your web browser to allow you to check your writing in your browser as you type. With the premium version, you can upload Word documents for the program to analyze.

The free version of Grammarly only provides spellcheck and minor grammar errors whereas the premium version checks punctuation, context, and sentence structure, as well as offering genre-specific writing style checks and plagiarism detection. For the sake of this article, we'll look at the premium version.

Pros: In recent years, Grammarly has updated to allow for real-time grammar correcting, which can make editing your writing faster. It offers explanations on why it suggests changes to the writing, and the explanations are easy to understand. It is also easy to add words to the dictionary and to change languages if you write in other languages. Finally, it's generally a user-friendly platform that's easy to navigate. If you aren't technologically savvy, this might be an important consideration.

Cons: The premium version of Grammarly adds up over time. Like ProWritingAid, the app does not offer a lifetime purchase but instead charges you monthly, quarterly, or yearly. If paid monthly, the app runs \$29.95 a month. If paid annually, the cost breaks down to \$11.66 a month. But compared to the lifetime deals other programs offer, this one will add up to the cost of those lifetime deals within a few years.

Additionally, as with other programs, you need an understanding of spelling and grammar to know whether the changes offered are the correct ones. These programs may not catch if you used the wrong word but spelled it correctly.

For more information, visit <https://app.grammarly.com>.

AutoCrit

AutoCrit provides detailed reports on your writing, including genre-specific feedback and pacing issues, and is light on the spelling and grammar feedback offered by ProWritingAid and other competitors.

Pros: Unlike other editing programs, which focus on line edits and copyedits, AutoCrit works similarly to a developmental editor. It looks for story structure, plot holes, and the direction of the story. It can tell you if you are meeting what readers of the genre look for and whether there are any pacing issues in the manuscript. It can also help you improve your dialogue, eliminate excessive repetition, and improve readability. AutoCrit is also decent at analyzing and improving nonfiction books. The app can compare your manuscript to other nonfiction books and provide reports specific to the topic.

Cons: The biggest con with this program is that it doesn't integrate with other programs. You have to upload your manuscript to their system for it to work. There is also no program to install on your computer, so AutoCrit requires an online connection to use the tool. Although AutoCrit provides editing in the form of spelling and grammar checks, they are not as advanced as other applications. It is great at checking for tense consistency, passive voice, adverbs, and unnecessary filler words, but the grammar checker isn't as robust as other apps mentioned in this article. Another disadvantage is the cost. If you do not purchase it during one of their half-off lifetime purchase sales, AutoCrit will cost \$698.

For more information, visit <https://www.autocrit.com>.

Hemingway Editor/App

If you're looking for a way to improve not only the spelling and grammar of your manuscript but also your writing style, the Hemingway Editor and Hemingway App are free and low-cost ways, respectively, to do so.

Pros: The Hemingway Editor is free to use and doesn't require a login. However, if you want to use Hemingway offline, you have to purchase the Hemingway App for a lifetime price of \$19.99. Both the editor and the app have a simple, easy-to-use interface that prevents distractions while showing you issues that need to be addressed. Hemingway clearly highlights problems in different colors. Sentences that are long are in yellow. Very long sentences are in red. Passive voice is in green. Other colors represent other issues, and each category can be addressed individually on the right side of the editor. Much like ProWritingAid, Hemingway helps you improve the readability of your novel while teaching you about the errors you make so that you can learn from your mistakes. It also explains why changes are needed. The app allows you to publish to WordPress and other sites directly from the app. It also allows you to export a PDF that contains colored highlighted sections, in case you want to print out your manuscript and make changes manually before putting them into your original version.

Cons: Although Hemingway provides great feedback, you may want to take its stylistic changes with a grain of salt. It can make writing sparse and confined to the style it determines, and that may not work well with your writing style or genre. Similar to other editing programs, you need to determine whether literary rules the app says you've broken were intentional choices and whether you want to keep them.

If you aren't sure Hemingway is right for you, your genre, or your writing style, consider trying the free version first to help you decide whether to get the app. Try it at <https://hemingwayapp.com>.

SOCIAL MEDIA SCHEDULING

Nearly everyone looks for ways to make social media scheduling easier, and while most people are familiar with Hootsuite and its abilities as a social media scheduler, they are also familiar with how much it costs—\$99 per month—and the advantages to using it. Hootsuite appeals to many people because of the ease of use, its in-depth analytics of social media posts, the ability to schedule across multiple platforms, and its built-in image editing capabilities. As one of the first social media scheduling platforms, Hootsuite has changed with the times. Unfortunately, growth and change has increased the cost of the platform.

Fortunately, there are other apps available, some free or low-cost, for you to choose from.

Buffer

One of the few social media scheduling platforms that has a limited free tier and relatively cheap higher tiers, Buffer has an affordable plan for authors at any level.

Pros: The biggest advantage to Buffer is the price range. If you want a virtual assistant to help with social media scheduling and engagement, plans start at \$10 a month. If you are handling everything yourself and only need to schedule posts for more than three social media channels, plans start at \$5—or you can schedule a limited number of posts on the free version, then wait for those posts to go live before scheduling more. You won't find another platform that charges less than \$30 a month for any tier they offer. Buffer allows you to cross-post content and has a great visual calendar so you can see what you have posted when.

Cons: Unlike other platforms, which offer in-depth post-performance analytics, Buffer's is limited. If multiple people schedule on the same accounts within Buffer, there is also a potential for scheduling conflicts, as each user's calendar is separate. And unlike other platforms, there is limited customization available when cross-posting. This makes it difficult to create custom posts per platform.

Unsure whether Buffer is right for you? Try the free plan and decide if it suits your needs. Learn more at <https://buffer.com>.

PromoRepublic

Although PromoRepublic features three premium tiers starting at \$49 per month and no free tiers, it has partnered with AppSumo a few times over the years, offering discounted plans for purchasers.

Pros: PromoRepublic will repost evergreen content within ninety-nine days of it originally posting. This is useful for authors who don't want to repost certain topics repeatedly. The app also has a library of industry-specific articles, posts, graphics, and GIFs that you can use for posts if you aren't sure what to post, as well as other post ideas. PromoRepublic offers an add-on feature, called Content Bundle, which provides you with templates and images designed with your business in mind. Finally, you can save templates you frequently use where you can easily find them for future post creation within the graphic editor.

Cons: An unfortunate downside to this platform, based on customer reviews, is that there seem to be several unspecified glitches that aren't easily resolved. In one case, social media networks constantly need to be reconnected. If you don't have the highest tier plan, customer support is also hard to reach. And the app doesn't allow you to schedule multiple videos over time; as of now, you can only have one video in queue at a time.

PromoRepublic has a free trial you can test out to decide if it works for you. Find out more at <https://promorepublic.com>.

Loomly

If you are looking for a social media scheduling platform that gives you as many stats and analytics as you can imagine, or one that allows you to manage comments and your individual social media inboxes in one place, Loomly is the platform for you.

Pros: Loomly scores high on support in multiple user reviews. When things glitch or you don't know how to use a feature, their customer support team is there to help. If you pay for Standard tier or higher, which costs \$60 per month, you gain the ability to export content, including posts and analytics. This is a game changer if you decide to change platforms or want to examine statistics over time. Loomly allows you to assign labels to your posts. Mark posts with labels such as "memes," "book promotion," "author share," and more, and you'll be able to find previous posts based on those tags. If you use a personal assistant for scheduling social media, Loomly is one of the few platforms that allows a second user at the lowest premium level. The number of users allowed increases with each tier.

Finally, Loomly features the ability to leave the first comment on Instagram and TikTok posts, which can help the algorithm get your posts to the right people.

Cons: Loomly does not curate posts for use again in the future. You'll have to keep track of posts that did well if you wish to recycle them. Even though Loomly is easy to use, it can take time to get used to the scheduler. This learning curve grows when you schedule posts to multiple platforms at the same time, then have to customize the posts based on the platform. Once you learn how each platform works, however, it takes less time to schedule posts. Finally, custom branding for posts is limited to the highest tier of the platform. This means if you don't have the highest tier, you'll have to do your branding outside of Loomly to use it on the app.

Loomly offers a fifteen-day trial for any of its tiers, so you can test them out and see which works best for you. For more information, visit <https://www.loomly.com>.

IMAGE CREATION SOFTWARE

Photoshop and Canva are among the most mentioned programs when authors and artists talk about what they use to create graphics for newsletters, social media, and more. Most authors have one of these programs, but if you are looking for an alternative that's less expensive or has room for more customization, check these out.

Affinity Photo

If you are looking for a program that has many similarities to Photoshop and has just as many tutorials available online, consider Affinity Photo. Not only can you create images from scratch, edit photos, and work with RAW photos, but it also includes features not available in Photoshop yet, like the combined crop and straighten tool.

Affinity Photo has one major difference from Photoshop: It has an affordable one-time payment instead of the subscription plan currently required for Adobe products. The Mac- and Windows-compatible versions of Affinity Photo each cost \$69.99, and the iPad app costs \$18.49, all excluding tax.

Pros: With a one-time payment structure instead of a subscription model, Affinity Photo is less expensive than Photoshop and works on multiple operating systems. If you have two different operating systems, it's cheap enough to purchase the corresponding applications for both of them, but if you have a PC desktop and a laptop, for example, you can install the same program on both devices. Additionally, Affinity Photo can be used commercially by the individual who owns the license.

Cons: Affinity Photo is not available for Android devices, but it can be used on an iPad. A new version was just released, but if you want to upgrade from version 1 to version 2, you must pay for the new software. Much like with Photoshop, there is a learning curve with Affinity Photo, but there are plenty of YouTube videos that can help with that.

For more information, visit <https://affinity.serif.com/en-us/photo>.

Book Brush

Book Brush is an ideal online app for authors who don't want to take a lot of time creating their graphics but still want to create promotional ads, banners, boxed sets, and more. The app is easy to use and tailored to authors, and you don't have to figure out how to add your images to the graphics as it's a plug-and-play setup.

Pros: Book Brush offers more than three thousand templates for ads, social media, and more. The templates are customizable as well. You can also create ebook, paperback, and audio covers with Book Brush, and the app offers templates you can use to create those. It also has added a feature to create vertical videos. Finally, if you have fonts associated with your brand, they can be uploaded for use with your designs. There are many videos available on Book Brush's website and on YouTube to guide you through the best ways to use Book Brush.

Cons: Book Brush is only available online and requires a monthly or yearly subscription to use, with tiers based on what you expect you will use it for. The free tier for the program limits users to fifteen images downloaded a month, while the least expensive paid tier starts at \$8.25 per month.

For more information, visit <https://bookbrush.com/#design-software-features>.

CROWDFUNDING

Kickstarter is possibly the most well-known platform for crowdfunding books and audiobooks. But it is not the only platform out there. If you are looking for a similar and just as reputable platform for your next crowdfunding campaign, consider one of these alternatives.

BackerKit

For years, individuals who used Kickstarter to run their crowdfunding campaign then used BackerKit to handle their surveys, order counts, add-ons promised after the campaign, and more. But in July 2022, BackerKit launched their own crowdfunding platform as an alternative to Kickstarter and other sites.

Pros: If you've used Kickstarter and BackerKit together in the past, the latter is already familiar to you. The site has a new page for the crowdfunding part of BackerKit that you'll use in addition to the Pledge Manager. Of course, a big plus is that you don't have to pay two different companies for your crowdfunding endeavors. Finally, with both parts of crowdfunding together on one platform, you don't have to worry about setting everything up on two platforms, eliminating the chances for things to get mixed up or lost in the shuffle between Kickstarter and BackerKit.

Cons: BackerKit may not have the name recognition that Kickstarter or IndieGoGo have, which may cause some buyers to hesitate to back your crowdfunding campaign.

For more information, visit <https://www.backerkit.com/crowdfunding>.

IndieGoGo

IndieGoGo is a crowdfunding platform that has been around since 2008. It started as a way to get funds even if you didn't reach your crowdfunding goal on Kickstarter because, at that time, Kickstarter had an all-or-nothing policy for delivering funding. IndieGoGo reaches around the world and spreads across as many categories for funding as Kickstarter does.

Pros: IndieGoGo provides connections with experts to support and boost your campaign. Much like BackerKit, IndieGoGo has everything built in to handle surveys and other logistics that may arise after a campaign has ended. There are also no limits on what you can raise funds to create.

Cons: IndieGoGo is the leading platform for technology products, but it has quite the following for art projects as well. While there are publishing and book-related projects on IndieGoGo, the audience might not be primed for regular book crowdfunding campaigns.

For more information, visit <https://www.indiegogo.com>. ■

Grace Snoke



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>.

The *IAM* Exec Team's Favorite Tools for Indie Publishing

Since its inception, *Indie Author Magazine* has had a team of indie authors at the helm, using the same platforms and strategies shared in these pages not only to produce the publication each month but also to manage our own author businesses. Every author's tech tool collection is as unique as their author business, and this month, our executive team is offering a roundup of some of our favorite tools and platforms for every step of the publishing process, as well as the features we love about them.



AIRTABLE

Who Recommends It: *IAM* publisher Chelle Honiker

Favorite Feature: Customizable views like Kanban, calendar, and grid

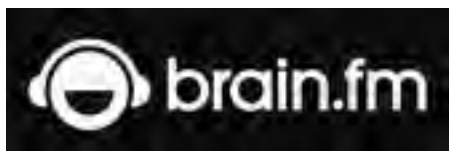
Airtable is a customizable, shareable spreadsheet database that integrates with a range of other apps, including Google Drive, Meta, and Zapier. "Airtable organizes editorial calendars, marketing plans, and project tracking in one place," Honiker writes. "It allows for easy switching between views to match the task at hand and integrates with other tools to automate data updates." Airtable is free for individuals to use with up to five editors, which makes it perfect for sharing with your accountability partner, co-author, or personal assistant.

NOTION

Who Recommends It: *IAM* Creative Director Alice Briggs

Favorite Features: Calendar, and research organization tools

An all-in-one productivity app, Notion is a customizable workspace that allows you to bring documents, calendars, databases, and to-do lists together into one tool, so your projects remain organized and in one place. The space is collaborative and has built-in AI to help you generate content or find information. Briggs uses it for tracking publication schedules and keeping research organized while drafting. "I like that you can layer in different types of content within the same doc with links to other Notion pages," she writes. "It's free, and the app works really well for on-the-go notes [and more]." Notion is available on Mac, Windows, and iOS, as well as at <https://notion.com>, and is free for individuals.



BRAIN.FM

Who Recommends It: *IAM* publisher Chelle Honiker

Favorite Feature: AI-generated music tracks designed to enhance concentration

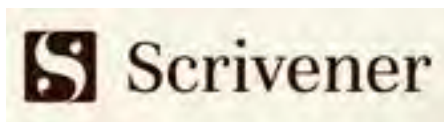
For those who like to listen to music while they work, Brain.fm provides a scientifically proven soundtrack designed to keep you on task. “Brain.fm creates focus-optimized soundtracks that help maintain deep concentration while writing or editing,” Honiker writes. “Sessions are customizable, with options for focus, relaxation, or creativity, depending on the task.” A subscription for unlimited access costs \$9.99 per month, or \$69.99 per year.

HABITICA

Who Recommends It: *IAM* Editor in Chief Nicole Schroeder

Favorite Features: Quests, and the ability to choose a class for your character

Although I don’t write GameLit, I love writing Fantasy, and Habitica is the perfect blend of both genres in one productivity tool. Habitica turns your to-do list into a role-play game, where each item you check off gives you mana, gold, and experience, and each daily task you miss costs you health. I use the app’s “dailies” to keep track of regularly scheduled tasks like sending my newsletter or keeping track of my accounting, and create “habits” for each of the writing projects I’m working on at a time. Habitica is free with an optional subscription for additional quests and gear, and it’s collaborative—join a party, and your productivity, or lack of it, will affect your party members’ characters as well as your own.



MS WORD

Who Recommends It: *IAM* Editor in Chief Nicole Schroeder

Favorite Feature: The Advanced Find & Replace tool

The bread and butter of writing programs, Word can seem like an unexciting option for writing your first draft. But as an editor, it's my preferred tool for editing and formatting a manuscript. The Track Changes feature and Find & Replace tool are more advanced than other programs on the market, and the application is free if used on the web.

SCRIVENER

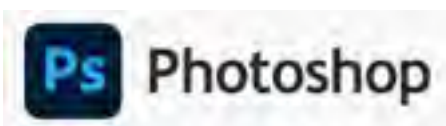
Who Recommends It: *IAM* Creative Director Alice Briggs and Indie Author Training Community Manager Karen Guyler

Favorite Features: Multiple content views, and notes and synopsis panes alongside writing space

Scrivener is one of the most popular writing programs among authors, providing a customizable writing space with numerous organizational features and focus tools to help you track deadlines, stay productive during writing sessions, and collect research and outlines. At a one-time cost of \$59.99, both Briggs and Guyler recommend the app for its multiple displays for content and its organizational tools. "I like that it has multiple ways to view your content, and that you can have two sections available to view at the same time," Briggs writes. She also likes the reporting function that helps track running word counts for the whole project, individual chapters, and more.

"The project targets bar is a great motivator for me," Guyler writes. She also uses the chapter headings for building out her books' timelines—although other programs can do this, Scrivener keeps things simple and on one screen. "The split pane is brilliant in allowing me to describe settings from photos, or refer back to my research. I even have my story bible in a Scrivener file."

Plus, Briggs notes, finished projects export easily to Word for sending to your editor or uploading into formatting software.



BOOK BRUSH

Who Recommends It: *IAM* Partner Relationship Manager Elaine Bateman

Favorite Feature: Built-in image dimensions for different platforms

For authors who want more options than Canva's graphics but like the site's easy-to-use image editing suite, Book Brush is an author-specific solution. The platform offers templates for covers, box sets, cover reveals, book trailers, and social media posts, as well as custom cover design and social media management with the site's designers. "Book Brush has a huge library of graphics, as well as platform and device logos. The text has [standard settings] to help it really pop on top of the chosen background," Bateman writes.

PHOTOSHOP

Who Recommends It: *IAM* Production Coordinator Grace Snoke

Favorite Features: Guidelines, and ease of duplicating content from project to project

As with any professional-level tools, Adobe Photoshop can come with a steep learning curve for new users. But for those who know what they're doing, the platform offers ultimate customization and the ability to create any image or graphic you may need, at any point in your business. "I use Photoshop to create ads, social media graphics, and promotional materials for my books as well as clients' projects," Snoke writes. "Each year they improve tools within the project, which makes my job easier, and there are ways to create automations within it to make repetitive tasks take less time." Adobe products follow a subscription model; Photoshop costs \$19.99 per month if purchased with the Creative Cloud photography plan.

The Meco logo consists of the word "Meco" in a white, bold, sans-serif font, centered within a solid black rectangular background.

MAKE.COM

Who Recommends It: *IAM* publisher Chelle Honiker

Favorite Feature: Multi-step workflows that connect design tools like Canva and social platforms

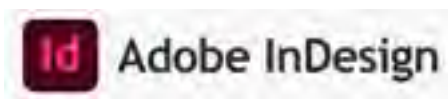
“Make.com automates social media tasks by pulling data from Airtable, generating images using Canva templates, and scheduling posts on platforms—all in a single workflow,” Honiker writes. The automation platform uses drag-and-drop mechanics to allow you to connect apps and visually build your workflow, integrating with more than two thousand platforms.

MECO APP

Who Recommends It: *IAM* publisher Chelle Honiker

Favorite Feature: A clean, email-free reading experience for newsletters

Email inboxes can be a black hole for information, leading to your favorite author’s newsletters getting buried or your writing time slipping away while you sort through the mess. Meco brings your newsletters out of your email app and offline, simplifying the reading experience and keeping you focused. “The Meco App gathers all my favorite newsletters in one place, away from my cluttered inbox. It helps me stay up-to-date with industry news and insights while avoiding distractions from regular email,” Honiker writes.



INDESIGN

Who Recommends It: *IAM* Creative Director Alice Briggs

Favorite Feature: Completely customizable formatting

Another Adobe product, InDesign is a publishing layout and design software that provides the same flexibility and customization options as Photoshop, this time for the manuscript as a whole. “I love the freedom and flexibility to create whatever I have in mind,” Briggs writes. “I like that it coordinates well with the rest of the suite, and that I have access to all the Adobe fonts—and that I know they’re commercially licensed. It’s a powerhouse, and there are [a] myriad of tutorials out there if I want to try something new.” InDesign costs \$22.99 per month on its own, or you can subscribe to Adobe’s full suite of programs with Creative Cloud, which costs \$59.99 per month.

VELLUM

Who Recommends It: *IAM* Production Coordinator Grace Snoke

Favorite Feature: Ease of copying front and back matter from one book to another

For those with simpler design needs for their books’ interior pages and looking for an easy-to-use formatting software, Vellum automates much of the process, cutting down formatting time from several days to several hours. “I’ve formatted ebooks and paperbacks with other tools, including Word and InDesign, but I found the smallest things could create the biggest problems, and I spent more time formatting than I would like. With Vellum, it’s easy to import, easy to custom-format however you want the book to look, and easy to copy parts of one file over to another file, which makes maintaining back matter easy,” Snoke writes. “I love that Vellum integrates with ProWritingAid, which allows me to do editing in a different program than my normal one and allows me to see more errors.” The program is available for Mac users only at \$199.99 for ebook creation and \$249.99 for those wanting to produce paperbacks as well.



OTTER.AI

Who Recommends It: *IAM* publisher Chelle Honiker

Favorite Feature: Automatic, real-time transcription with speaker identification

“Otter.ai transcribes spoken content into text quickly and accurately, making it easy to pull quotes, draft articles, or create content from webinars and interviews,” Honiker writes. Although the app is marketed as a meeting assistant, its fairly accurate transcriptions and time stamps make it useful for notating authors’ voice memos and drafting sessions as well. “I also use it to dictate my first drafts, which are automatically transcribed and saved to Google Drive for easy access and editing.” The free version of the app allows for three hundred transcription minutes a month, and Otter Pro includes up to 1,200 minutes per month at a cost of \$99.99 per year.

ZAPIER

Who Recommends It: *IAM* publisher Chelle Honiker

Favorite Feature: Pre-built integrations that are quick to set up

Zapier is another automation platform, perfect for building workflows that can perform the heavy lifting on more mundane administrative tasks. “Zapier connects apps to handle routine tasks, such as adding new subscribers to a CRM or sending deadline reminders, without requiring manual input,” Honiker writes. The platform is free to use for basic, two-step automations, and costs \$19.99, billed annually, for more complex workflows. ■

Nicole Schroeder



Nicole Schroeder

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

From the Stacks

BOOK CLUB SUMMARY:



Switch: How to Change Things When Change Is Hard

Dan Heath and Chip Heath

<https://indieauthortraining.com/courses/switch-by-dan-heath-and-chip-heath>

As an indie author, you're constantly adapting—whether it's refining your writing process, tackling new marketing strategies, or finding creative ways to connect with your readers. Change can be hard, but it's essential for growth and success. *Switch: How to Change Things When Change Is Hard*, by Dan Heath and Chip Heath, gives you a powerful toolkit to overcome resistance and make lasting, meaningful changes in both your creative and business journeys.

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.

TOOL:



ProWritingAid

<https://indieauthortraining.com/prowritingaid>

An editing tool should help you make your writing clearer and your message easier to read. Offering a comprehensive range of reports to highlight weak areas in your prose, ProWritingAid can help you to become a better writer. Digging down to the granular level, the tool can point out where you have used too many filler words, weak verbs, passive voice, or repetitive phrasing. In more of a helicopter view, it can show you where sensory details are missing, highlight your story's strengths and weaknesses, and point out where you're telling when you might want to be showing.

It can also suggest how to enhance your plot, refine your characters, and make your setting come alive.

WEBINAR:



"Don't Get Burned"

<https://indieauthortraining.com/webinars/dont-get-burned>

In this webinar, best-selling author and mentor Danika Bloom takes us through the many ways unscrupulous companies and individuals try to coax us into purchasing author services that don't deliver. Her straightforward, information-packed presentation shows you the red flags to watch for and offers ways you can check whether what you're seeing is real, with steps to help you guard your rights and finances. To help you further, Bloom is offering a free Self-Publishing Protection Pack, the link to which is in the webinar replay.

PODCAST:

Indie Author Magazine

<https://open.spotify.com/show/1MjZYaA5iCIRL2JMtEiY12>



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

"Grow Your Author Platform with Effective Newsletter Swap Strategies"

<https://open.spotify.com/episode/5N9J2TtnVgS8np6cpeo4la>

"From TikToks to Reels: A Guide for Authors Creating Engaging Short Videos"

<https://open.spotify.com/episode/6vpUfGDmNWEcXk0jJ6vekx>

Don't Sugarcoat It

GETTING DIABETIC CHARACTERS RIGHT IN YOUR WORK-IN-PROGRESS

Diabetes is one of the most well-known and most prevalent chronic diseases in the world. In 2021, it was estimated that 38.4 million Americans, or about 11.6 percent of the population, had the disease, according to the American Diabetes Association. The World Health Organization estimates about 830 million people have diabetes worldwide. So it's practically expected that diabetes would be well represented in fiction too.

When creating a character with diabetes, asking specific questions will help you create a well-rounded and realistic portrayal of the chronic illness and help you avoid harmful misconceptions. Like any illness or disability, diabetes shouldn't be used as a plot device alone, but when used correctly, incorporating it in your writing can not only help shape a more authentic, layered character; it

can create a more immersive story for your readers too.

MEDICAL AND PRACTICAL ASPECTS

First, determine what kind of diabetes your character has: type 1, type 2, or gestational diabetes, the kind some people develop during pregnancy. Let's talk about the two main kinds, type 1 and type 2. Type 1 diabetes is often called "juvenile diabetes," and occurs when the pancreas stops producing insulin, which allows the body to break down and absorb sugars. Those with type 2 diabetes still produce insulin, but their body can no longer use it properly. Neither is caused by simply eating too much sugar, but both types can cause long-term health effects if left untreated.

The type of diabetes your char-

acter has will determine things like the medications they use, how they manage it throughout their day-to-day life, and how long they've likely had the diagnosis. This can affect their confidence, routines, and habits around diabetes management, and how visible their diabetes is to other characters around them, such as whether they wear an insulin pump or a medical ID bracelet.

Diabetes requires people to work to regulate their blood sugar with food and medication so it stays at a normal level throughout the day. If your character's blood glucose becomes too high—called hyperglycemia—they might experience intense thirst, frequent urination, fatigue, blurred vision, headaches, or irritability. If left untreated, hyperglycemia symptoms can worsen, making it crucial for them to check their blood sugar, adjust

their insulin or medication, and rest while drinking water.

A character's blood sugar dropping too low—called hypoglycemia—is more immediately dangerous. As their blood sugar drops, they might experience shakiness, sweating, dizziness, confusion and foggy thinking, hunger, and irritability. If their blood sugar doesn't rise, these symptoms could worsen, leading to weakness or even unconsciousness. To counteract the low, a character may need a quick, carbohydrate-filled snack or a juice to provide their body with more sugar.

Diabetes care is far from one-size-fits-all; do your research to figure out how your character is likely to manage their condition. Consider what medication your character might be on, if they're taking medication at all. If they have insulin, how do they manage it? Do they use an insulin pump, take injections, or rely on a combination of both? Do they use a continuous glucose monitor (CGM)? This is a sensor attached to the body that sends regular readings to a cell phone. CGMs can offer more insight and control but might come with alarms and social implications. How do they handle highs and lows? Are they careful and cautious, or do they sometimes take risks?

If your character has not managed their diabetes well, they

may also have diabetes-related complications, like neuropathy or vision loss. Diabetes can even lead to amputations, and according to the Amputee Coalition, is the leading cause of amputations in the US. Details like this can add a realistic layer to your character and affect how they navigate their world.

LIFESTYLE AND PERSONAL LIFE

No matter the type, diabetes requires people to make several lifestyle changes in order to manage the diagnosis. As you write, consider how your character's diabetes affects their daily routine. What adjustments do they make for meals, exercise, or stress management? Do they need to take breaks to check blood sugar? Once you know your character's daily routine, consider also how your story has caused this to shift. If you write Thrillers, how does your character's diabetes come into play while they're on the run from the antagonist? How about if they're in a post-apocalypse world and food is scarce?

As you build out your character and your world, here are a few more questions you can consider:

How does your character feel about their diabetes? Do they resent it, accept it, or try to ignore it?

Do they talk about their condi-

tion openly or try to keep it private?

How does diabetes affect their eating habits? Are they particularly conscious of carbs and sugars, or do they have a more relaxed approach? Do they ever experience food guilt or discomfort when eating around others?

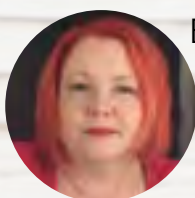
What is their relationship with exercise? Since physical activity affects blood sugar, do they enjoy exercise, or is it a challenge for them to manage their levels during and after workouts?

FURTHER RESEARCH

If you're looking for further information or have specific questions, try <https://diabetes.org> or <https://diabetes.org.uk>. More personal, anecdotal information might be found in the relevant Reddit groups. Finally, reach out to sensitivity readers, who can help ensure your portrayal of your character's condition is accurate and respectful, without falling into stereotypes.

Diabetes is a complex condition, and like any medical diagnosis, it affects everyone differently. However, pay attention to the details as you're writing, and it will add an element of realism and representation to your novel that's too sweet to pass up. ■

Elaine Bateman



Elaine Bateman

In her pre-author life, Elaine worked for FTSE 100 and Fortune 500 companies in procurement, project support, and IT Training. She has a bachelor of science in Systems Practice and Design.

Trope Talks

UNDERSTANDING THE TRIFECTA THAT SELLS THE ENEMIES-TO-LOVERS TROPE IN FANTASY ROMANCE

*The saying “opposites attract” may seem like it’s taken to the extreme with the enemies-to-lovers trope popular within Romance—and especially Fantasy Romance—books. But those same extremes are exactly what keep readers coming back for more. In the second article of her guest series, Trope Thesaurus author Jennifer Hilt explores what makes enemies-to-lovers arcs work using Rebecca Yarros’s best-selling book *Fourth Wing* as an example, breaking the arc down into three key elements that will keep your readers hooked and your love interests at each other’s throats...until they aren’t.*

The enemies-to-lovers trope has a special place in Fantasy Romance, offering writers a rich framework through which to explore character growth, tension, and emotional depth. This trope brings together two characters from opposing sides, often because of conflicting goals, loyalties, or even magical differences. But what makes this trope such a powerhouse in the genre?

Fourth Wing by Rebecca Yarros, published in 2023, provides a textbook answer. *Fourth Wing* is a New Adult military college Fantasy Romance that kicks off with heightened stakes and conflict. The plot involves scholar Violet (**fish out of water, woman in peril, politics**) suddenly entering a fighter pilot war college (**forced proximity**) at her mother’s direction (**family, boss, politics, secrets**). To survive, Violet must pass a series of tests and bond





with a dragon for battle (**ticking time bomb**). Eventually, she bonds with not one but two dragons and falls in love with Xaden (**warrior, scar, secrets**), whose father was executed as a traitor by Violet's mother. Not surprisingly, Violet and Xaden's relationship has an enemies-to-lovers arc.

Tropes: boss, family, fish out of water, forced proximity, politics, scar, secrets, ticking time bomb, warrior, woman in peril

Using examples from *Fourth Wing* by Rebecca Yarros, we'll look at three factors in developing the enemies-to-lovers trope in Fantasy Romance:

- Heightened stakes become a life-or-death conflict.
- Layering trust and suspense highlights power dynamics and equality.
- Banter and chemistry craft character growth and emotional arcs.

1. HEIGHTENED STAKES CREATE CONFLICT

In Fantasy, characters often have larger-than-life challenges, whether they be warring kingdoms, curses, or ancient prophecies. When romance blooms amid these high-stakes situations, it amplifies tension. With enemies-to-lovers, the conflict is doubled as protagonists navigate their mutual distrust alongside external threats. Writers can dig into each character's internal battles, emphasizing the emotional stakes of trusting someone who was once an adversary.

How does Yarros show this

story arc with her story's life-or-death conflict? The enemies-to-lovers arc plays out by building and testing trust. There are scenes in which each character is afraid to trust the other, yet the nature of their bonded dragons means they must work together. Their training involves flying around on dragons and practicing for battle. Despite their initial distrust, their bonded dragons' emotions seep into Violet and Xaden's interactions.

As authors, we can utilize this by showing how a character's feelings conflict with their intellect. Because Violet's mother ordered the death of Xaden's father, Violet believes he hates her. Her death by Xaden's hands makes sense. Yet despite Xaden wishing she were dead, their dragons have an unbreakable bond, which means their two riders are now connected. They hate each other initially, but their lives now depend on each other. Even more than that, they must work together to save the kingdom from a common enemy, the Venin.

2. POWER DYNAMICS AND EQUALITY CREATE SUSPENSE

Fantasy Romance thrives on power dynamics, and enemies-to-lovers stories often involve protagonists with equally matched skills or powers. This equality, whether in terms of magic, combat prowess, or intellect, brings satisfying tension as characters are forced to recognize each other's abilities. Writers can craft scenes that allow characters to earn respect through challenges or joint quests, reinforcing their mutual strength and interdependence.

Suspense is crucial in Fantasy Romance, and enemies-to-lovers intensifies this by weaving in elements of betrayal and loyalty. Trust is a slow burn in this trope; readers stay engaged, wondering when—or if—the characters will fully let their guard down. For authors, crafting scenes where the lovers have to rely on each other despite lingering doubts can create electric tension.

Fourth Wing uses numerous training pieces, tests, and battles to layer in trust and suspense. The academy setting provides a foundation for social, academic, and physical progress in storytelling; everything involves tests as a means to move ahead. Violet has to survive getting into the war college, then the dragon selection process, then actually learning to communicate with her dragons.

At their core, all tropes drill down power. Violet has a powerful mother, but rules prevent them from interacting. She has trained her whole life as a scholar before being assigned to test into the war college. She is woefully underprepared, turning her into a perfect example of the fish-out-of-water trope. Even though she's a powerful woman's daughter, Violet faces death regularly in her training. Yet she uses her training with her innate intellectual talents to increase her power. Violet bonds not only with the most powerful dragon but also with a younger dragon.

In your own Fantasy Romance, think about how trust between your characters can be made unbalanced in order to create more tension. Consider how your setting can amplify the power dynamic between the characters.



3. CHEMISTRY CREATES EMOTIONAL ARCS

Enemies-to-lovers plots demand that characters confront their biases, fears, and vulnerabilities. By overcoming initial animosity, characters transform, learning to see each other's humanity or hidden strengths. In Fantasy Romance, this growth often intersects with a character's journey to self-discovery or the mastery of a hidden power, giving writers a powerful dual arc.

The spark between enemies can create unforgettable dialogue. Sarcasm, teasing, and veiled threats become chemistry, creating a dynamic romance that readers can't resist. This chemistry increases by adding unique world-building elements, like magical languages or supernatural obstacles that characters must learn to navigate together, further building intimacy.

Fourth Wing's dragons provide a vehicle for the characters' chemistry within the story world. Violet and Xaden are natural enemies, given their family history. Violet's mother's murder of Xaden's father provides an almost insurmountable obstacle. The challenge is in creating a world-building system in which

exterior forces impact Violet and Xaden's emotions. Xaden's dragon and Violet's dragon are a bonded pair. As the human riders bond with their dragons, the boundaries blur. Violet and Xaden are attracted to each other despite their history and current situations.

Their frequent arguments already evoke strong emotions, and they must work together. Naturally, their dragons want to be near each other. Bringing these emotions to the surface creates instability in their power structure. Violet isn't physically strong, yet two powerful dragons have chosen her as their rider. Xaden is the leader of his group, yet suspicion about the role his father played in the uprising makes his leadership suspect. Their bickering increases the tension between them.

The enemies-to-lovers trope persists over centuries because it's rooted in transforming vulnerability and power. The trope explores how love changes the way characters perceive power. Initially, power may be viewed as a tool for control or domination. By the end, love reframes it as something shared, where the couple empowers each other to face external threats together. ■

Jennifer Hilt



Jennifer Hilt

Jennifer Hilt is a USA Today Bestselling author of *The Trope Thesaurus: An Author Resource*, a five-book series. She has written twenty-four books across four pen names plus her urban fantasy trilogy: *The Undead Detective*. She works as a plotter and concept creator. As a frequent podcast guest, she has appeared on Joanna Penn's *The Creative Penn*, Bryan Cohen's *Sell More Books*, Matty Dalrymple's *The Indy Author Podcast*, and Kobo's *Live Writing Life* among many others. She teaches authors about story development in workshop and classes across the US. With degrees in linguistics and literature, Jennifer loves collecting dictionaries in unfamiliar languages, binges scandi-noir series, and shouts out tropes from the comfort of her couch. Visit www.jenniferhilt.com for her events, classes and workshops information.

Fit to Write

A PERSONAL TRAINER'S PERSPECTIVE ON IMPLEMENTING A FITNESS ROUTINE IN A WRITER'S SCHEDULE

Hours spent at a desk can take a toll on the body. Most writers understand this feeling, considering it a labor of love. Many also know that a fitness routine may keep them writing longer, but then comes the next step: finding the time necessary to implement whatever program they've chosen. But whether you're making smaller swaps within your rest time or sacrificing some of your writing productivity for exercise, protecting your health is as important to your career—and as simple—as finding time to write.

SWAP

Finding time to implement a fitness program, like finding time to write, is done through little swaps and sacrifices rather than large, schedule-shifting actions. If all you have available is one hour a day for your favorite show, and your writing is

done for the day, you may need to swap your favorite show for an hour of your fitness routine. This ensures you can make the progress you need toward your fitness goals, so your writing can continue.

Consider writing sprints as something you can easily swap out with exercise, given they tend to be short blocks of time. A typical writing sprint is only a few minutes, followed by moments of resting. That rest time doesn't mean you can't exercise; it's just a rest from writing. If your fitness routine calls for walking, standing, stretching, or even chair yoga, consider using your rest period between sprints as time to rest from writing while exercising your body.

SACRIFICE

Sometimes, the answer to finding more time is making sure we're as



efficient with what time we have as possible. If we're not, a sacrifice is often necessary. If you know physical activity is beneficial to your health and the longevity of your writing career, you may find it worth it to sacrifice some of your writing time—that chapter, that edit, that blurb—for an investment in your health.

It doesn't take much. The American Heart Association recommends two and a half hours, or 150 minutes, of vigorous physical activity a week. Two and a half hours per week is roughly equivalent to around twenty-three minutes a day.

Try waking up twenty-three minutes earlier, swapping out a writing sprint, doubling down by walking and dictating, choosing to exercise over the latest episode on Netflix, or otherwise finding opportunities where you can use the time you have to prioritize fitness. You invest in your writing career; now be sure you're investing in the longevity of the machine that keeps the words flowing, too. ■

David Viergutz



David Viergutz

David Viergutz is a disabled Army Veteran, Law Enforcement Veteran, husband and proud father. He is an author of stories from every flavor of horror and dark fiction. One day, David's wife sat him down and gave him the confidence to start putting his imagination on paper.

From then on out his creativity has no longer been stifled by self-doubt and he continues to write with a smile on his face in a dark, candle-lit room.

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