

## INDEPENDENT PUBLISHING FOR THE (somewhat) LAZY AUTHOR HANDOUT

Part of the Florida Authors Academy Workshop Zoom series

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This is a workshop for authors either interested in independently publishing their own work or increasing their own understanding of what's involved in bringing a book or short story to market. If, at the end, you'll be better able to make a reasoned, informed decision about the direction of your writing, I'll consider the effort a success.

So, you've written a book and joined a critique group, and convinced or connived people other than your family to be beta readers. Then you picked a great, catchy title, and had your book edited. Now you want to publish your book, and you're here to learn how to make that happen.

Okay. Let's get started.

"Every good story should begin with a map." --JRR Tolkien

### THE LANDSCAPE

Publishing can be divided into two broad categories - Traditional and Independent

### TRADITIONAL PUBLISHING

Somebody else does almost all the work - you write the next book(s)

\*and do all the marketing

Traditional Publishing can be further broken down into: Traditional / Vanity

Before we go any further, we need to make a distinction between a traditional publishing house and a vanity press. In traditional publishing, the product is your book. The publishing house offers you a contract, gives you a little money, turns your wooden puppet into a real boy, and sells it.

In the vanity publishing model, the product is their services. The publisher still offers you a contract, but in this model you give them money, and you keep giving them money for services

until you either run out of money, you're satisfied with the book, or you quit in frustration.

\*\*\*My experience with vanity presses, vanity publishers, subsidy publishers, etc. - I've never talked to anyone who made a living using these services, and I don't recommend them for that reason.\*\*\*

This is a good time to mention Yog's Law. Many years ago, writer Jim Macdonald postulated Yog's Law, a handy rule of thumb about the direction money's supposed to flow in writing:

**“Money flows *toward* the writer.”**

For instance, you write an article for a magazine that wishes to publish it. They then pay you (the author) \$250 more or less. You sell a short story to an anthology or periodical - you get 5-10¢ a word, usually with a cap (maximum).

My advice: “If you look up ‘getting your book published’ and the link takes you to a web page that says “get a quote” anywhere on the site, hit your back button and try another result.”

#### TRADITIONAL PUBLISHING

So, how does a traditional publisher work?

YOU go out and find an agent to represent you & your manuscript to publishing houses, sells your manuscript to an acquiring editor who negotiates with the agent for various rights and royalties.

#### PREDATORY PUBLISHERS

Be careful, because there are predatory publishers out there. If you don't know what First North American Rights, or Reprint Worldwide Rights, or what Subsidiary Rights are, please get help negotiating with a publisher. For instance: what if your book takes off, and some movie producer wants to buy the North American film rights and make the next big blockbuster summer movie, but you gave away those rights to the publisher because you didn't think to look in Section 23, Subsection 27, where all those other rights are retained by the publishing house. Bye-bye big check.

#### TRADITIONAL PUBLISHING

A traditional publisher pays you, the author, an advance, usually \$1000-5000, of which your agent will get 10% off the top. The advance is yours to spend however you like, as long as you deliver your manuscript to the publisher on time. The advance is a loan against future royalties.

Royalties are typically 5% of sales of your book, paid on a quarterly or semi-annual basis (to be negotiated), BUT until the advance is payed back, you get nothing.

WHAT?? -- FIVE PERCENT!?! Where'd the other 95% go?

The other 95% paid for editing, paid for cover design, paid for buying an ISBN number for your book - and if it's a dead tree book, part of it went into interior design, printing cost, distribution costs, and another ISBN for that version. Then there's returns, etc., etc., etc., because the publisher took the risk to publish your book. They took the risk, they did the work, they get most of the money. Don't like it? You do it. That brings us to...

### INDEPENDENT PUBLISHING

A self-published author employs an editor, a cover designer, and if there's a print book, an interior designer, a printer to operate a press, but retains ownership of copyrights, ISBN's, the finished books and their distribution. This is different from a vanity publisher, because you hire the subcontractors to do the work you chose to hire out, from editing to uploading finished files.

- \*You are the publisher
- \*You do everything or pay others to do it for you
- \*You make all the money, after expenses

### WHY TO NOT PUBLISH INDEPENDENTLY

- \*Why to not to publish independently? Simple.
- \*You don't want to worry about all that stuff we just talked about
- \*You have neither the time nor the inclination to learn all that stuff
- \*You know your limits, and you'd rather spend your time writing the next book

If any of the above are true, you do not want to publish independently.

If that's you, you also got your money's worth by finding that out. You're welcome.

Over the years, "self-publishing" has taken on the connotation of a poorly written, amateurishly edited book with a cover that might as well be hanging on a refrigerator door. We prefer the term independent publishing or "INDY PUBLISHER."

### PUBLISHING ISN'T A COMPLICATED OR MYSTERIOUS PROCESS

**\*BUT\***

...it does require acquiring skills, just like writing, sculpture, photography, or bullfighting.

It's about turning your manuscript into a professional looking product that will attract readers of your genre, positioning it in a desirable way, and putting it in front of them at a price they'll agree to. At its most basic level, all publishing is, is formatting a book for ebook and print, designing book covers, and distributing the book to online marketplaces where readers routinely buy their books.

Where the process can go sideways:

If you've never designed a book before you're probably going to make decisions based on personal preferences rather than market experience. You're going to choose what you like rather than what readers like and expect. And that may ruin your chances for success.

There are people out there who have literally spent decades studying which serif font matches well with which sans serif font. Or what colors attract a reader looking for a thriller, and how to write a blurb - you know the thing at the back nobody reads that tells how exciting the story is and how captivating the settings are, and how the protagonist takes control of his/her life and sets the world right - you know that thing. If you don't care to know what kerning and leading is, or what widows and orphans are, that's okay. Be prepared to hire people to do the parts you can't or don't care to do, people who you will have to pay, and let them do what they know how to do.

If you're willing to learn, do the work, talk to people, pay them what they deserve, and you want to make a career out of your writing and pay some bills, you may want to stick around.

## SUGGESTIONS AND GUIDELINES

One of the most crucial steps to take before getting your ebook converted or converting it yourself, is understanding the common ebook formats. It's one of the things many, if not most authors lack basic knowledge of.

You'll want to start with ebooks, trust me.

## EBOOK FORMATS

There are two ebook files retailers use for distribution: EPUB and KPF (Kindle Package Format) for the Kindle.

Electronic publication (ePub) is the most widely used ebook format among e-readers and has

become the industry standard. It's open software created by International Digital Publishing Forum (IDPF), which means it's free and publicly available. Retailers like Apple, Barnes & Noble, Kobo and others use EPUB for distribution.

KPF is Amazon's proprietary ebook format. It's exclusively sold through Amazon and can only be viewed on Kindle devices or in the Kindle app. Since June 2021, Amazon has begun accepting uploads in ePub and converting the files into either KPF or mobi format for reflowable and fixed format, respectively. Please see Amazon's FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS for more information on this, and on different formats that Amazon accepts.

## EBOOK LAYOUTS

If you're an avid ebook reader, you most likely have experience with reflowable text. This format is defined by content that adjusts to the orientation (portrait or landscape) and screen size of your device. It allows the reader to make font style and text size changes. It's flexible and easily adapts to various devices. It's the standard layout for most ebooks. The reflowable format is commonly used for text-heavy projects, like novels and short stories. Both ePub and KPF files are reflowable

The other common ebook layout form is fixed-layout, which is characterized by static content. Much like a printed page, this format allows the design of the images and text to remain as intended, regardless of the screen dimensions and device size. A fixed-layout ebook will depict the content as it looks on a printed page. The font style and text size can't be altered, so the reader has to zoom in to read any small text. An example you're probably used to is PDF, which is fixed and can't easily be altered. This format is best suited for graphic-heavy titles, like picture books, coffee table books and graphic novels.

Samples of each format can be viewed on sites like Amazon, Apple, Barnes & Noble, Kobo, etc. These retailers all offer a preview option. The previews aren't one hundred percent accurate representations of what the ebook will look like on a specific device, but they're still worth reviewing for their layout and functionality.

## FORMATTING OPTIONS

Outsource it or DIY

## OUTSOURCING - PROS

If you'd rather leave it to professionals, it's best to use a reputable company for the conversion.

They'll be able to provide an EPUB file you can upload anywhere.

There are a myriad of options. The ones listed in the Alliance of Independent Authors (ALLi's) Self-Publishing services Directory have been vetted and approved. Contact the companies you're considering and ask for a quote, as well as look over their work for quality and functionality.

Any reputable company will give you references, let you see examples, and provide you a quote for any services requested. Be prepared to pay them - it'll be worth it in the long run.

#### OUTSOURCING - CONS

You won't know how your book formatting was accomplished. Every time you need to make changes, updates (and you will need to) you'll have to go back to that company and get them to make your changes - and pay them to do it - if they're still in business.

#### DIY - PROS

You'll learn a new skill, learn new software, and be comfortable making changes in the future.

#### DIY - CONS

You'll have to learn a new skill, have to learn new software, and have to rely on yourself in the future. And all these things will take time and occasionally, cost money.

#### PERSONAL RANT

You probably write in Microsoft Word. If you write novels or non-fiction books, you should probably stop using MS Word right now and find yourself a decent novel organizing program. There are half a dozen on the market. I've used 3-4 and they all work pretty well. By "pretty well" I mean they work a lot better than MS Word and Apple Pages, both of which come with significant shortcomings making them poor choices for longer projects.

If you're curious about what shenanigans Word is pulling behind your back, and why it's a lousy program to write a novel in, you can read more here:

<http://www.antipope.org/charlie/blog-static/2013/10/why-microsoft-word-must-die.html>

END RANT

All that having been said:

#### YOU CAN DO IT YOURSELF

If you'd rather DIY the process, please know that this option is best for text-only/mostly simple text projects like novels, memoirs, simple-format poetry, etc.

## WHAT I DO

I generally write in Scrivener, which was designed by writers for writers for the MAC, and works best in that environment, but there's a Windows version that also works pretty well. Anyone who hasn't used Scrivener and has questions, please contact me. Be advised there's a learning curve associated with Scrivener, and it's best learned in small steps, as needed.

Scrivener will export into EPUB, MOBI, and PDF. It also exports into DOC, but not very well, as Micro\$oft refuses to share it's proprietary code. I generally don't mess with all the variables in Scrivener's export mode (LAZY author, remember?).

I select all, copy/paste my manuscript to Open Office, which is a word processor, like MS Word or Apple Pages. However, it's open source, which means there's no proprietary nonsense under the hood doing stuff to my formatting without my permission.

Then, I do my layout in Open Office using Styles (the little drop-down window in the upper left corner), and finally make individual formatting corrections, like italics and centering asterisks, and save it to RTF format. RTF is an older word processor format that can be opened on any modern word processor, while saving all the formatting, like italics, word wrap, etc. RTF documents typically take up 1/3 the space of the same document would in DOC (Word) format.

If you don't know how to set, change, or make new Styles in your current word processor, go find out how it's done. All word processors are similar, but all are somewhat different. Your editor will love you, and your word processor will be less likely to try to slip some oddball coding into your manuscript under the radar.

That done, I upload my RTF formatted manuscript to Draft 2 Digital, which will convert it to ePub and PDF format for free. D2D is also a distributor, so they can post my manuscript, the cover, in JPG format, and let me copy/paste my blurb into their software form. I can also fill in important information like my name, etc. using their software, and it's automatically added to my book. D2D then allows me to choose where I want the book sold, i.e. iBooks, B&N, Kobo, Overdrive, etc. EVEN AMAZON.

Finally, I upload my ePub file to Smashwords (also a distributor) for distribution to any retailers not available from D2D, and I normally upload my file to Amazon, which they convert to KPF and make available through Kindle and distribute to any retail outlets not available to D2D and

Smashwords.

## KEEP IN MIND

When it comes to creating an ebook, the key point to avoid frustration and confusion - an ebook is NOT a print book.

This seems obvious, but it's difficult to wrap one's head around how an ebook functions when one's spent the majority of his/her life reading print books. There are natural expectations that come with reading print books, like very few hyphenated words and a linear reading experience in a set font. Unless you're publishing a fixed-layout ebook, a reflowable layout allows the reader to have almost total control over how they view the file. Some of the common features that can be altered on an e-reader or app are:

- font style (changing the type to a serif or sans serif font)
- text size (this can create a lot of hyphenated words)
- reading orientation (portrait or landscape)
- leading (the space between the lines of text)
- margins
- page-turn or scrolling
- theme (white, sepia, white letters on black background, etc.)
- auto-hyphenation
- single-page or two-page view

The availability of options depends on the device or app, but it's clear that your esthetic intentions may not be maintained once your ebook is in the reader's hands. The digital reading experience requires some understanding and time to adapt to the new platform. Be proud of your efforts, and remember, it's a learning curve.

## SOFTWARE PROGRAMS TO FORMAT YOUR EBOOK

There are approximately a zillion ways to format an ebook. Here's a small selection but by no means all the options available:

### Vellum

A popular choice for Indies who want to keep formatting simple. I haven't used it, but I'm told it's intuitive software that enables one to format a book in minutes. It includes a range of ebook styles as well as different trim sizes for print and large print formats. The downside to Vellum is



that it's a Mac-only product. At the time of writing, Vellum is \$200 for ebook only formatting and \$250 for BOTH print and ebook.

## D2D

Draft 2 Digital is my go-to solution for ebook formatting. I can upload my RTF manuscript and get it converted to ePub, mobi, or PDF (for print) FOR FREE, even if I don't use D2D for distribution. I do, because they have a great network, and they're constantly adding new distribution channels. They also have a dozen genre-specific templates that can add some really cool fancy stuff to the ebook. Best part, all this takes only seconds. Did I mention it's free? AND EASY?

## Calibre

Calibre is a powerful, easy-to-use e-book program that's good for anyone who want more control. It's also completely free and open source and great for both beginners and computer experts. I've used it and there's a bit of a learning curve for beginners.

## Reedsy ebook editor

The Reedsy eBook Editor is a free, all-in-one tool to write, edit, format and export your manuscript to both ebook and print-on-demand files. An author can import an existing DOC document, or write directly in the program. Both ePub and MOBI files are available in a few minutes, choosing from a variety of templates to customize the interior design. It's browser-based, meaning it's accessible any time, from any device, and it's 100% free. I've never used it, so I can't really comment on how well it works or how hard/easy it is to use.

## Smashwords

My first ebook sale was through Smashwords. Smashwords is like visiting your grandmother. Things look like they haven't changed in years, because mostly, they haven't. But they still work. My problem with Smashwords is they have a slavish love affair with manuscripts formatted in DOC, which I don't use. Fortunately, they do allow EPUB uploads, so I've been able to continue with them to the present.

## A WORD ON USING DRM (Digital Rights Management)

DRM in an ebook allows only the purchaser to view it and only on the device or app from that vendor. I don't use DRM, because it forces people who've bought my book to use the vendor's ebook reader, and prevents them from lending their book to a family member or friend. I'd rather a reader who wants to can loan my book to a friend who may then buy it.

KDP provides the author with the ability to enable DRM, but it's a one-time option that can't be changed after publication. Smashwords doesn't apply it to the books they sell on their site. Their retail partners (Apple, B & N, etc.) may have their own DRM restrictions I'm unaware of.

DRM's a controversial technology and ALLi recommends that as a principle, indie authors don't enable DRM. According to The Electronic Frontier Foundation (EFF) every device with a DRM-enabled file connected through the internet is actually more vulnerable to hacking, not less.

There's even an International Day Against DRM. Many readers dislike that DRM stops them being able to read a book on multiple devices or lending the ebook.

#### DISTRIBUTION\*\*\*\*

For ebook distribution, there are a huge range of options. ALLi authors tend to upload directly to KDP for the Amazon ecosystem. You may also, if you want to maximize your control, upload directly to Apple, Barnes & Noble, Google Play, and Kobo. Keep in mind if you make any changes, you'll have to upload the new version of your book to those sellers directly.

The other distributors like D2D and Smashwords distribute ebooks to those retailers and to hundreds of stores around the world, as well as libraries and other ebook outlets. Yes, libraries.

**CAUTION:** If you sign up for KDP Select on Amazon, you're signing an exclusivity contract. There are benefits like getting paid for borrows, but **YOU CANNOT HAVE YOUR eBOOK FOR SALE ANYWHERE ELSE!!!** If you're caught, Amazon will yank all your books and shut down your account - right now. Another thing to consider: if Amazon has 70% of the ebook market, that means there's an additional 30% available through the other sellers. By going KDP select, you're effectively leaving 50% of your potential sales on the table.

I don't use KDP Select, nor do I recommend it. In my humble opinion, this is Amazon's not-so-subtle way of forcing out competition, and while I have no proof (except their typical heavy-handed, brutish business practices), I strongly suspect if they do manage to force every other distributor out of business, they won't be quite as kind to authors as they currently are.

Forewarned is forearmed.

A word about Smashwords: Smashwords is an ebook distributor that has been going head-to-

head against Amazon since 2009. I used Smashwords for my first book and most since. My first book sale was through Smashwords. I've exchanged emails with founder Mark Coker and he's a decent guy, whom I respect. I neither know nor respect Jeff Bezos.

There are several other online distributors, like Reedsy, but I haven't used them, so your mileage may vary.

## ISBNs

ISBN (International Standard Book Number) is the 10-13 digit number in the lower right corner of a paperback book. It's the way ALL books are ordered from publishers and distributors, globally.

Does an ebook need an ISBN? The answer is—yes. ISBN is how books are ordered by retailers, and all books are required to have an ISBN number. The good news - D2D and Smashwords will assign a free ISBN for any ebook distributed through them. It lists that company as the publisher, but hey, it's a benefit of using their service. Amazon will assign an ASIN number as a free benefit of using their service.

Hint: every title you publish will eventually need 3-5 ISBNs (ePub ebook, Kindle ebook, paperback print book, hard cover print book, audiobook) you can see how fast they add up.

The bad news: there's only one place to buy your own ISBN - Bowker.com

The good news: the more you buy, the less each ISBN costs, and they never expire.

## HOW TO UPLOAD EBOOKS

D2D - submit a DOC, DOCX, ODT, RTF or EPUB document and a jpg cover - follow the directions

Smashwords - submit a DOC or EPUB document and a PDF cover - follow the directions

Kobo (through KWL) - submit a DOC or EPUB document and a PDF cover - follow the directions

B&N - submit a DOC or EPUB document and a cover - follow the directions

iBooks - submit an EPUB document and a PDF cover - follow the directions

Amazon - submit a DOC or ePub document and a PDF cover - follow the directions

HOW DO I UPLOAD EBOOKS (lazy author/publisher, remember?)

D2D - submit a RTF document and a JPG cover - follow the directions and choose the retailers I wish to sell the book.

\*download the ePub file for upload at other sites

Smashwords - submit the EPUB file and a PDF cover - follow the directions

Amazon - submit a DOC or ePub document and a PDF cover - follow the directions

NOW THAT WE'VE DONE THE EASY PART

## PRINT BOOKS

### FORMATTING

Your book must be in PDF format to be printable, whether it's printed through Amazon or IngramSpark.

### OUTSOURCING?

Be prepared to pay anywhere from \$200 (50,000 word book) to \$500 (150,000 to 200,000). Shop around. Check references. Do your due diligence.

D2D, Amazon, Calibre, and Vellum will all convert your manuscript into PDF which is the required format for print, and D2D recently started a print on demand service, just like Amazon and IngramSpark.

### DIY?

All the programs listed above for ebook formatting will also produce PDF files.

There are decisions to be made - like do you want to start your chapters on the right-hand page, possibly leaving the left (verso) page blank. This is the traditional design (because of the way books were printed in the past), but recently, designers have been getting away from it.

Type font? Page numbers - top or bottom? centered or outer aligned? Headers & footers - title on odd or even pages? Author name on odd or even pages? Opening paragraph formatting?

### AS FOR ME...

I prefer to use Scribus, a free, open source desktop publishing program that gives me much more control over what each page looks like (again, I have some basic training in print setup). There are good instructional videos on You Tube for this as well.

## PRINT BOOK FONTS ARE PRETTY STANDARDIZED

Generally, book fonts are pretty standardized. You can use Times New Roman, and it'll work, as far as it goes, but there are other standard serif fonts that will look just a little better, a little more professional. Do NOT use Arial or Helvetica, or any sans serif font on a print book. It's harder to read on paper, and looks like you didn't even consider the font. Again, you'll want something that looks better, not different. I prefer Garamond. It's a standard serif font, renders well on a printed page, and it's not Times New Roman, which is a subtle cue to a potential reader that someone actually consciously chose it and didn't just use the Microsoft Word default font.

Page numbers typically go at the top or bottom, either centered or outside-aligned. Headers and footers are either centered or outside-aligned. First paragraphs and chapter headings are handled separately. The chapter headings (usually a number) should match the title font on the cover. The first paragraph will typically not be indented, and have a little flair (a big fancy first letter - called a "drop cap" because it's 2-3 times as big as the rest of the text), or the first line in all caps, or maybe a few words in bold. While one can be creative with drop caps, I don't suggest being too fancy with bold or all caps, though.

I generally use centered page numbers at the bottom (centered footers) and centered headers (with neither one on chapter opening pages), the header contains the title on odd pages and the author name on even pages. I start new chapter text 1/3 down the page, and typically use drop caps and non-indented first paragraphs. Oh, and I don't leave verso pages empty.

## THE COVER

Let's talk about the cover's job. The cover's job is to attract people who read the genre you wrote a book in and get them to start reading the description (the blurb). The cover doesn't communicate anything about the story, nor should it try. The cover only attracts the right readers of that genre enough to get them to read the description. Period.

For fiction, this is mostly about colors and contrast and a humanizing element. The cover should make the potential reader feel something. It should be well done, but if it contains too much stuff (characters, setting, objects, details) it's moved from emotional to intellectual and failed. Porsche doesn't sell cars based on miles per gallon, they sell fun and excitement.

If writing a book is a seduction of the reader (and in many ways it is), the cover is the book's smile, it's the sideways glance that holds the potential reader's attention a moment too long. The cover is the book's jeans that fit just right in the just right places. Your cover gets the potential

reader's attention and makes them curious - about what's under the cover.

Most author/publishers begin with their cover design with a specific scene from the book, which is a bad idea. A scene doesn't incite a potential reader's curiosity. If the story's about a girl meeting a wolf, don't use a scene of a girl meeting a wolf on a clear, sunny day, all smiles and pleasant hellos. A potential reader will see that, decide they already know the story, and keep going. Instead, maybe put her in a forest, at night, bundled up on a couch with the wolf, drinking coffee. That might make a potential reader linger an extra moment and wonder about the story. The cover makes a promise to a potential reader - "Psst - Hey. Yeah, you. This is the kind of book you like to read, but there's something more here. Check out the description."

Many authors want their cover to stand out, to be different from all the other covers in their genre. This is a mistake. Readers subconsciously expect certain genres to conform to certain ideas. Publishers design covers that conform to other books in the genre because genre is the way we manage reader expectations. You want your book to look like it belongs with all the other books in that genre. It can be better, but it shouldn't be different. Most importantly, the cover should be clear, not clever.

For most fiction, there are generally three layouts. One is a background, with a humanizing element (clothing, footprints, a shadow) something that refers to a character, preferably the same sex and age as the main character - because without a character, there's no story. Another would be a landscape with a character, either in the background for larger, epic stories, or a closer view of the character for action or character-driven stories. The third is a character's face or part of a face in the upper half of the cover above a landscape in the lower half.

## THE BLURB

Book description - the blurb. Use keywords, but don't stuff them in. The first sentence has to hook and hold the potential reader. The first paragraph should get into the story. Make the description action-oriented and personal to the characters and world. Include the conflict(s). Show the potential reader why this story is better or has a different twist than the others. This is the part that makes the potential reader interested and excited. This makes them want this book. A potential reader should hear you whisper in their ear and feel your breath on their neck as you show them why they want this book. Remember, this is a seduction. You're bringing your potential reader in with a promise that the book will deliver on - and more.

## BONUS

Some sources of information on independent publishing:

1. ALLi The Alliance of Independent Authors <https://www.allianceindependentauthors.org/>
2. Joel freidlander <https://www.thebookdesigner.com/> (11 JAN 1948-7 MAY 2021)
3. Derek Murphy <https://www.creativeindie.com>
4. <https://blog.reedsy.com/how-to-publish-a-book/>
5. Kindle Direct Publishing
6. Smashwords.com
7. draft2digital.com

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Contact information:

For any questions, concerns,

or just to say “hi,” I can be

contacted at:

<https://www.mjcarlson.com/contact-form-7-id1687-titletalk-to-me/>

or

<https://www.facebook.com/mj.carlson.16/>

or

<https://www.facebook.com/MJ-Carlson-writer-541197405998287>