

Welcome to [\*\*The Insecure Writer's Support Group\*\*](#) Newsletter.

The Insecure Writer's Support Group is a database resource and support group for writers and authors. Weekly guests and tips, monthly blogfest gathering, Facebook groups, and thousands of links – all to benefit writers. We even have our own t-shirt and book!

Thank you for signing up to receive the newsletter. As our gift to you, here are the five best and most popular articles from our website.

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## **Things I Look for When Editing a Query Letter by Michelle Hauck**

As the host of many contests that feature query letters, like Query Kombat and Sun vs Snow, I've seen my fair share of letters that are designed to capture an agent's attention. Over four years, I've probably seen just about everything and this has helped me figure out a little about what works and what doesn't.

When I dig into a query for a contest or for one of my clients, I first examine each sentence on its own merit, including the greeting, closing, and bio paragraph. I usually cheat by looking at these easy to correct sections of a query first and saving the "meat" of the query for later. In the information paragraph, I look for anything that doesn't really belong. Are the sentences straightforward and to the point or are they crowded with extra words? It doesn't matter too much if this part comes at the beginning or the end, but agents appreciate queries that don't waste words in the bio/word count/genre paragraph. Concentrate most of your query letter word count on the part of the letter where you tell about the story. All you really need is:

TITLE is a (age category, genre), complete at XX,XXX (round to the nearest thousand) words.

Then add your comps (if you use them) and bio.

It may appeal to fans of blank...

Tip: Here's a trick for whether to put your word count/genre/bio section first or last in your letter. If your genre is out of favor or your word count is higher or lower than standard, put it at the end. If your story features some super diversity and that's reflected in your bio or your genre is hot or you have strong publishing credits, put your information paragraph upfront.

After the easy part is done, I turn to the heart of the query. This is usually three paragraphs often described as the hook, the line, and the sinker. What I'm looking for by going sentence by sentence is that no sentence is merely a repeat of what the reader already knows and that each sentence follows logically on the one before it. There's just not enough room in a query to waste space on repeating information. And jarring sentences that don't follow one another logically destroy the flow. A query shouldn't jump from topic to topic. If the sentences flow one to the next, you're also eliminating another likely problem, which is getting side-tracked by side plots.

Tip: A query letter should stick to the main plot and avoid venturing into channels of side plots.

By side plot, I don't mean things that motivate your characters. There is a slight difference, which can be difficult to discern. The main character may be motivated by the death of a family member due to a doctor's mistake. A lawsuit against that doctor could be an example of a side plot if the real plot is the sudden magic powers the MC discovers.

Tip: Show your character's motivation, usually in the first paragraph with the hook. Why do they act as they do? What defines their personality?

When going sentence by sentence, I'm also looking for bulky sentences that have extra words and awkward sentences that just need to be rearranged. I'm looking for important pieces that are missing, like the main character motivation and well-defined stakes. Are the sentences full of specific details or are they full of cliché words like family secrets, dark phantom from her past, sudden powers and more?

If all I learn is that your main character has a secret and they are hiding from a dark phantom because of their sudden powers, I don't really know anything about the story. That doesn't entice and it's the biggest problem I see in query letters in contests. Compare that to a main character who accidentally killed her sister when her ability with fire appeared as she was trying to protect them from a sword-carrying bird creature. Clunky but you get the picture.

Tip: Fill your query sentences with specific details relating to the plot.

So the hook paragraph should tell us something about the main character, their motivation, and the obstacle they encounter that stops them from their goal. But be careful to avoid character soup. Limit your query to three named characters, and if it's set in a fantasy world, limit those names, too.

The line paragraph is where we learn more about the obstacle in detail, and what the main character does about it. This is a good place to show how the conflict escalates. How does the problem get worse? Agents like to see a sense of problem growth so they know the plot doesn't stall: there is an obstacle, but then it gets harder to overcome.

Tip: Have your main conflict escalate and get worse in the query.

The sinker paragraph is where you lay out the stakes and the character choice. What bad thing will happen if the MC fails? Will the whole human race be wiped out? Will they lose their scholarship and chance to go to college? Will their family fall apart? Spell it out for the reader in detail and work it in with the choice the MC must make. Will the MC take the easy road and live safely or will they surrender their freedom to take that rocket ship to the moon and confront the villain? Laying out the main character's choice should be the end of the sinker paragraph, but be sure not to give away the ending and which way they go. Here's an example from one of my own queries:

She'll have to accept Garrett's chains or lose her humanity forever, unless the sun's deadly rays awakens magic within her.

Note that I have already spelled out what the chains are, how her humanity is at stake, and why the sun creates magic early in the query. Now I'm just laying out the character's choices.

Tip: The end of the sinker paragraph can be less about plot points and more about the indecision the main character faces. What reality do they have to brave to overcome the obstacle?

I always edit three revisions for my clients. In the first pass, I look to nail down the basic plot and make sure all the things I talked about above are in place. We make the query structurally sound. In the next two revisions, I ask the author to focus on the details and add bits that reflect the world building, the character personality, the mood of the story, and the tone of the story. In other words, it helps to nail down the story and stakes, then go back and add voice.

Tip: Take bits of slang from the manuscript and try and word sentences in your query the way your main character would say them. That does not mean write the query from your main character. Just try and copy the same voice and mood/atmosphere from your manuscript into the query. If your character is cynical, your query should reflect that. If they are bouncy, give zest to your query.

If your story is horror, give the query a creepy feeling. If it's a romance, focus on the character building and add sex appeal. Make the query match the manuscript is a good way to capture an agent's attention. Another thing to check for is did you remembering to highlight what is unique about your story, including the concept.

Tip: Pick out the elements of your story that are unique and make sure that is in the query letter. You don't want a query letter that is full of stale and used concepts.

So there you have the strategy I use to judge query letters and to discover if they are strong enough to entice an agent. I hope this helps you to shape your own query.

And a final tip: Even when you land an agent, there's a good chance you'll still be writing query-type blurbs for your manuscripts. I wrote one for Grudging before it went on submission. An agent will want to have your take on what should be in their pitch letter to editors. So keep polishing your query skills.

BIO and LINKS:



Michelle Hauck lives in the bustling metropolis of northern Indiana with her hubby and two college kids. Besides working with special needs children by day, she writes all sorts of fantasy, giving her imagination free range. She is a co-host of the yearly query contests Query Kombat, Nightmare on Query Street, New Agent, Picture Book Party, and Sun versus Snow. Her Birth of Saints trilogy from Harper Voyager starts with GRUDGING and FAITHFUL on November 15, 2016. She has another epic fantasy entitled KINDAR'S CURE.

Twitter: [@Michelle4Laughs](#) Blog: [Michelle4Laughs: It's in the Details](#)  
Facebook: [Michelle Hauck, Author](#) Goodreads: [Grudging](#)  
Goodreads: [Faithful](#) Goodreads: [Kindar's Cure](#)

## **Making a Series Bible Using Excel by Heidi Hormel**

### Excel at Tracking with a Book Bible

See what I did there? Made a pun about Excel, which really does need some puns. This accounting spreadsheet program (or its open-source versions) can be used for more than numbers, including a nifty Book Bible, so called because it is a place to keep track of ... well, everything (that you want to keep track of).

### What to track

I use my Book Bible to keep track of:

- Character names
- Physical descriptions
- Relatives
- Ticks/traits
- Back story
- GMC
- Music (they like or that reminds you of them)
- Setting details (which can be its own sheet—which I'll explain below)
- Locations
- Life events (at those locations)
- Research

The list could really be endless and that can be a problem. You might want to think like a reader to decide on which details to include. I know eye color, for example, makes readers a little crazy if it changes from book to book (unless they're an alien or something).

I also try to copy and paste verbatim good “nut” graph descriptions into my spreadsheet. These are ones that capture hero/heroine, setting, etc. in just a sentence or a few words. I can then re-use a version of it to describe the character in future books.

If you're writing a mystery or a story with a longer arc, you may need to include plot points, red herrings, or other non-character details in the Bible.

### The bolts & nuts

Whether you use the “real” Excel or an open source spreadsheet program, the basics are the same.

The basics:

- Open a new Excel document
- Save it as whatever your series name is.
- Rename the tabs at the bottom of the document (which in Excel is called a workbook) from Sheet 1, Sheet 2, etc., to a book title and/or a setting for a book (I write small town romance so setting is really, really important).

\*I've included a jpeg of one of my books and a filled out Excel sheet. I know visuals are always helpful. (Disclaimer: I do not use this program to its fullest)

The screenshot shows an Excel spreadsheet with the following structure:

	D	E	F	G
1		Kids at Hope's Ride	Molly	Her Parents
2	Doris	Alex Suarez		
3	Physical	prosthetic leg, black hair in ponytail	could be Jessie's son	pudgy shetland pony
4	Back story	<p>He'd been under Payson's care nearly since birth, including the multiple surgeries he'd endured in his short life. The geneticists insisted that he was affected by an unnamed syndrome. For Alex, the vague diagnosis meant that he had fragile tendons and ligaments that tore easily and stretched so that his bones became misaligned.</p> <p>Mother: Karin</p>		met at Texas A&M; mother in her first semester; she grew up on a small cattle operation; her parents didn't speak with her for years live in Tucson
5	Relatives			

When I gave this presentation at my local writers group, another writer/editor suggested that characters be listed down the left-hand column and the items you want to track along the top, including in which books the character appears.

The point of the Bible is to have all of your details in one place so that you don't need to re-read books to confirm parentage, age, or favorite song.

I also have created calendars through an Excel template to keep track of a pregnancy in a book as well as birthdays and characters' ages over the time span of the series.

The bottom line is that a Bible will not write the book or fix every mistake, but it will make life easier when you're on book six of series and you need to know the shape of the scar on your hero's cheek when he showed up in book one.



A former innkeeper and radio talk show host, Heidi Hormel has always been a writer. She spent years as a small-town newspaper reporter and as a PR flunky before settling happily into penning romances with a wink and a wiggle. Her [Angel Crossing, Arizona](#) series for Harlequin Western Romance include cowboys, cowgirls, llamas, and kilts (not necessarily in that order). Her latest books are [THE KENTUCKY COWBOY'S BABY](#) and [THE BULL RIDER'S REDEMPTION](#). Visit her online: [HeidiHormel.net](#); Facebook, [Heidi Hormel, Author](#); Twitter, [@HeidiHormel](#); and follow her on Goodreads, [Heidi Hormel](#). Thanks, Heidi, for sharing. So how about it IWSGers, do you use a series bible? Do you use Excel for keeping everything straight? What other kinds of things do you keep track of in your bibles?

## Christine Frazier and the Better Novel Project

How did the Better Novel Project begin and evolve over time?

I wanted to write a novel but I didn't know where to begin-- I felt comfortable with prose and description but didn't know how plot or structure worked. I decided to study successful books-- Harry Potter, The Hunger Games, and Twilight-- to see what structural elements they have in common. As I began my research, I thought I would start posting my findings online to both help other writers, give me some accountability, and start building a platform.

The biggest evolution over time has been the artwork. When I started, I purchased stock photos to accompany the articles. I learned a lot about blogging and copywriting from my older brother who writes NoMeatAthlete.com. He pointed out that I love to doodle, and suggested that drawing my own pictures for my posts would help me stand out. He was right! Now I spend just as long on creating an infographic or shareable image as I do the actual research (and it's a lot of fun!)

What common elements do you see in successful books?

There are probably 100 common elements in the master outline! In the beginning, I picked up on very broad similarities-- I think one of my first posts was about how Harry Potter, Twilight, and The Hunger Games all involve a young adult protagonist and element of magic of science fiction. As I've become more familiar with those three books, I can pull out smaller similarities and zoom in on the structure of scenes themselves, like a [fight scene](#).

You cover so many story aspects in your posts. What and where do you research to pull it all together in your articles?

For the first few months of my blog I consulted some great books like Hit Lit: Cracking the Code of the Twentieth Century's Biggest Bestsellers by James Baker Hall and The Key: How to Write Damn Good Fiction Using the Power of Myth by James N. Frey. They definitely set my off on the right foot. To get in the correct mindset for deconstruction, I also like Save the Cat by Blake Snyder and of course, The Hero with a Thousand Faces by Joseph Campbell. Now most of my research just comes from the main source novels themselves. I see something different every time I go back to them. I will also get inspired by films I love, like [The Dark Knight](#) or [Star Wars](#).

#amwriting

BetterNovelProject.com

You say you discovered the joy of research and outlines while in law school. How does it all figure into what you do now outside of Better Novel Project?

Yes, I loved law school! I was a practicing attorney for several years, and now I am taking a break to focus on my novel, Better Novel Project, and my other site TheRoyalHamster.com.

What's the one thing that causes writers to struggle the most?

The most common e-mail I get from readers is asking whether something in their plot is "right." As much as I love studying patterns in writing, they are just patterns, not rules. I think structure is worthwhile to study so that you can meaningfully deviate from that structure as you see fit for your own story.

As for myself-- my biggest struggle is sitting down and doing the work. I can always find a legitimate-seeming distraction that bumps its way to the top of my to-do list, leaving "no time" to write. I can get overwhelmed easily by the prospect of a big scene I want to do and then end up doing nothing at all. My trick is to tell myself I only have to write for five minutes, and then I can get up if I want. It makes the getting started part a lot easier, even if I end up writing for longer!

Thanks again!



About Christine Frazier

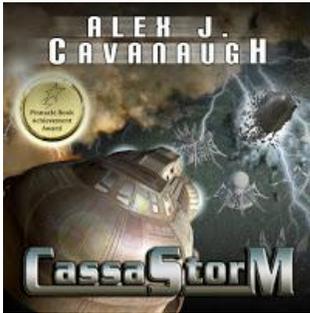
Hi there! I'm Christine. I studied creative writing at The Johns Hopkins University, and then discovered the joy of research and outlines while in law school.

Yes, joy.

I love researching literary patterns and their creative applications. I'm also a compulsive doodler. (I do the illustrations for [The Royal Hamster](#))

You can keep in touch with me on [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#), [Pinterest](#), and [Instagram](#).

## Audio Books - Options, Pros, Cons, Dos, and Don'ts by L. Diane Wolfe



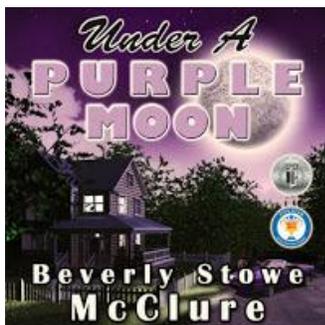
Several years ago, audio books were tanking faster than mass market paperbacks. EBooks were taking a large chunk out of both and the rest of the market share. But in the past two years, audio book sales have soared. This is the result of lower production costs and more options for listening.

For authors and publishers looking to take the plunge into audio books, there are several options:



Royalty-share platforms - [ACX](#) is one of the largest, and it also offers producers for hire. With royalty-share, the distribution company keeps a portion of profit and the narrator and author/publisher split the rest 50/50.

Hire a producer and narrator - this can be done on your own (using a company like CDBaby for distribution) or through a company that will do it all for you like Infinity Publishing or Dog Ear Publishing.



Produce and narrate yourself - for those with the resources and equipment to complete an audio book for uploading to a distribution platform. After paying the distributor, all of the profit goes to the author or author/publisher.

What are the advantages and disadvantages of audio books?

Pros-

Exposure - There are a lot of companies distributing and selling audio books now. Plus there are fewer audio books, so you are more visible to buyers.

Another source of income - Multiple streams of money is better than all of your eggs in one basket, and it's an additional boost to your current income.

Reach a wider audience - There are people who don't read a lot of books. Some may not have time or they struggle with reading. You'll reach non-readers, active people, and those with poor vision.

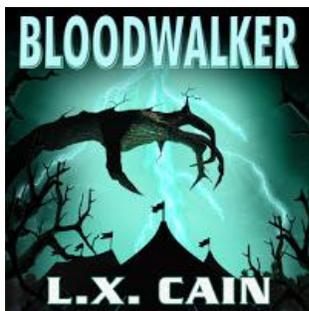
Always in stock - Like an eBook, your audio book is always in stock.

Cons-

Cost - The biggest one comes from producing the book yourself or paying someone to narrate and/or produce. Unless you are doing royalty-share, you have to weigh the cost (usually in the thousands) versus return on investment.

Time involved - An eight hour audio book requires an average of sixty hours to produce. Narrators often take several weeks and if you're doing it yourself, it could take even longer.

Promotions - Audio books aren't instant sales. The author and publisher still have to promote the titles just as they would a print or eBook.



While some authors will tackle the narration themselves, most will work either directly or indirectly with a narrator. Both the author and the narrator invest time in the story and consideration is required from both sides. There's etiquette to consider and dos and don'ts:

Do –

Provide pronunciations, character accents, and character descriptions. Make it easy for the narrator to do his or her job.

Expect professionalism. The narrator should provide a quality product in a timely fashion.

Plan marketing with the narrator, especially if it is a royalty-share project.

The key - communicate!

Don't –

Accept shoddy or extremely late work. The narration should be high quality and delivered on time as promised.

Expect perfectionism. The audio book will NOT sound exactly as you imagined it. The end result will be the narrator's interpretation, just as a movie is the director's interpretation. Remember, your readers will also have formed an idea of the character's voices and doubtful those match up with yours, either.

Be overly demanding. You do not want to be a pain to work with! Like any industry, word gets around. No one wants a miserable experience.

The audio book market is wide open and booming - weigh your options and be prepared. Are audio books right for you? Have you already taken the plunge?

### **L. Diane Wolfe**

Speaker, Author, & Owner of Dancing Lemur Press LLC

Known as "Spunk On A Stick," Wolfe is a member of the National Speakers Association. She conducts seminars on book publishing, promoting, leadership, and goal-setting, and she offers book formatting and author consultation. Wolfe owns Dancing Lemur Press, L.L.C. and is the author of seven books. She travels for media interviews and speaking engagements and maintains numerous websites & blogs, including the Insecure Writer's Support Group.

[Spunk On A Stick](#) / [Spunk On A Stick's Tips](#) / [Dancing Lemur Press, L.L.C.](#)

## Demi Stevens: A 6 Step Guide to Creating a Book Fair

Readers' & Writers' Field of Dreams

A 6-Step Guide to Creating a Book Fair

As a blogger and writer, you've probably asked yourself:  
"Does anyone really want to read my stuff?"

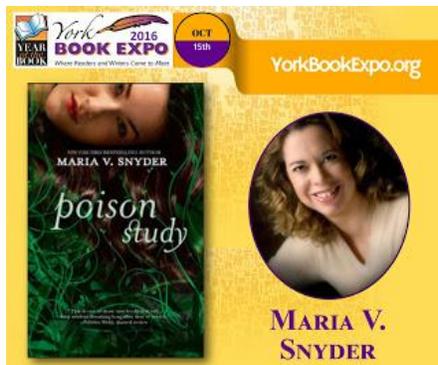
While I'm not as gloomy on the prospect as Steven Pressfield's [Nobody Wants to Read Your Sh\\*t](#) (hysterical and crammed with great advice, btw), we must realize no one will ever want to read our stuff until they know it exists.

Building name recognition and an author brand unassisted is like trying to assemble a giant Lego set without instructions. Our work needs to be recommended – that shiny badge of social proof that comes from having glowing Amazon and Goodreads reviews – by someone who doesn't share a family resemblance.

To help my author friends build their brands, I created [York Book Expo](#), where a hundred authors and thousands of readers will join us Saturday, October 15. While you might not be ready to launch something quite this big, you can still use this 6-Step Guide to help create a great multi-author event and massive buzz.

### 1) Unleash the power of a "headliner"

Celebrity always attracts (and it almost always enjoys being placed in the spotlight). Use a bigger-name author to bring a crowd to your event. Ask around your writer's group, libraries and bookstores to find out who's "trendy and hot," and then reach out.



### 2) Snag a good date and venue

No day is immune to conflict, but don't schedule your event at the same time as your local team's game, or in conflict with festivals or concerts your ideal readers are likely to attend. During the week, try 10am for a children's book event, afternoons for older readers (who sometimes don't drive after dark), and 7-9pm for other markets. On Saturdays, use 10am-noon, 1-3pm, or 2-4pm, but if you're creating something longer, remember to plan access to food and drink (and bathrooms!). On Sundays, afternoons work best. Above all, make sure there's sufficient parking.

### 3) Get your author friends on board

Invite other writers to share the spotlight (and hopefully the publicity load!). You can reach out through social media, writers' group, and often libraries and bookstores. These authors will want to know if there's a cost involved (does the venue charge a flat fee, or take a percentage of sales?), how much space will they have, will a table and chairs be provided, and is there electricity and/or wi-fi (for laptop displays and credit card processing).



While your first event will probably be smaller than York Book Expo, feel free to download the [info sheets and registration forms](#) and modify them for your own use. Make sure you get up-to-date contact info for all your vendors, including author websites/social media, to make online advertisement and posting a breeze.

### 4) Tell people about your event

Use multiple channels to spread the news. Start with social media posts – tagging vendors to reach their fans too – and include images. Try Facebook Live videos for quick interviews and book readings! People will need to hear about your event 7+ times before they'll decide to attend. Send a Save-the-Date card early, then post daily 2-3 weeks prior to your event. Encourage all authors to re-share these posts. If you feature a different author or book in each post, it will keep them from getting boring, and entice readers in your combined network that your event is absolutely worth attending.

Next, create a flyer with all the event details (author names/pics, date, time, location). Hang them throughout your community – grocery stores, post offices, nail salons, banks, churches... even Starbucks and Panera have community

bulletin boards. Make sure the text is large enough to read from a distance, and stick to just 1 or 2 fonts. For this year's York Book Expo, we created colorful bookmarks that say, "Bring this to the event for 5 free raffle entries."

Finally, issue a press release to newspapers, and local radio and TV stations. Include the names of all the authors, where they live, the event date/time/venue, and any story "hook" that might convince them to cover your event. (Are any of the authors related? Raising funds for a charity? Have a timely theme to their books?)

Here's an example of a short-and-to-the-point Press Release:

September 29, 2015

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

York, PA – What do you get when you cross a secret bank account worth millions, a lawyer who hates to practice law, and a Golden Retriever? Answer: A recipe for a comical book series by New York Times best-selling author David Rosenfelt.

York Book Expo will be held Saturday, October 17, 2015, from 1-5pm at Memorial Hall East at York Expo Center. Organized by Year of the Book publishing, and sponsored by Shipley Energy, the event will spotlight the books and art of 100 local and regional authors and illustrators in addition to book sales and signing with Rosenfelt. Book enthusiasts can browse titles from romance to hard-core sci-fi/fantasy to thrillers, mysteries and children's books.

#### 5) Welcome your authors and customers

Make sure all your authors know where and when to report for set-up, and whether they need to bring tables, chairs, tablecloths, book stands, \$\$ change \$\$, a bag lunch, etc.

If there are multiple entrances to your venue, mark the main doors with a flyer, yard sign, or balloons. Greet customers and ask what kind of books they like to read. Make a connection to other authors, too, and remember to smile and be friendly! Check out this lesson from [Laura Rudacille](#) to make your next author event a success, including snagging customer email addresses so you can stay in touch.

Remember to leave your venue clean and clear so you get invited back for future book signings.

#### 6) Thank the people who've helped you, and ask for feedback

In this digital age, receiving a handwritten thank you is the equivalent of gold. If someone helped you design or hang flyers all over town, thank them. If your reporter wrote a glowing article, thank them. If your headline author invited their huge fan list and did a great job for you, thank them doubly! And then ask everyone personally if they noticed ways the event could be improved next time so you can put on better and better events – and ultimately help grow your author brand and sell more books!

#### About Demi Stevens



Founder and CEO of Year of the Book press, Demi Stevens turns writing dreams into successfully published books. She has personally assisted in the production of 150+ titles by more than 100 authors, ranging from children's picture books to sizzling romance, award-winning mysteries, and bestselling business books. A self-acknowledged book slut, Demi loves quilting, crocheting, roller skating and travel. She is a classically trained flutist and author of two children's picture books. To start your book project, contact her at [demi@yotbpress.com](mailto:demi@yotbpress.com).

Have you ever helped organize a book event or participated in one? Do you live close enough to York, PA to participate in the conference or attend the book fair? What kind of swag do you like to pick up at book fairs? Have you read any of Maria V. Snyder's books?

### **The Insecure Writer's Support Group**

A database resource and support group for writers and authors. Weekly guests and tips, monthly blogfest gathering, Facebook and Goodreads groups, Twitter, and thousands of links – all to benefit writers. We even have our own Twitter pitch event (#IWSGPit), books, and swag!

IWSG - <http://www.insecurewriterssupportgroup.com/>

IWSG Facebook - <https://www.facebook.com/groups/IWSG13/>

IWSG Twitter - <https://twitter.com/TheIWSG>

IWSG Goodreads group - <https://www.goodreads.com/group/show/214387-the-insecure-writer-s-support-group-book-club>

IWSG Guide to Publishing and Beyond - FREE! -

<http://www.insecurewriterssupportgroup.com/p/iwsg-guide-to-publishing-and-beyond.html>

#### **IWSG Admins:**

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Lynda Young <http://lyndaryoung.blogspot.com/>

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L. Diane Wolfe <http://circleoffriendsbooks.blogspot.com/>

J.L. Campbell <http://www.joylcampbell.com/>

Chrys Fey <http://writewithfey.blogspot.com/>

C. Lee McKenzie <http://writegame.blogspot.com/>

Nick Wilford <http://nickwilford.blogspot.com.au/>

Pat Hatt <http://rhymetime24.blogspot.com/>