

HM WARD DISCUSSES HER WRITING PROCESS



Well, you can't call her lazy. She churns out more books in a year than many writers do in a lifetime. And although [HM Ward](#) may write fast, she puts care into detail and has created a process that not only maximizes her time, but feeds the beast (her fans) as often as their hunger pangs for more are demanded.

I had the opportunity to connect with HM Ward about how she [creates](#) such amazing stories, both long and short, in such little time, how she [overcame](#) her dyslexia and her suggests for others who would like to follow her path.

What is your writing process? Do you outline first or do you just pants-it and then how do you revise your work until it goes to your editor?

I map out the story in my head, fully, and then I write it. After that, I go over it once, smoothing and fleshing things out, and then hand it to the first editor. They'll make notes where I need to clarify, and after I do that, it goes to another editor. Then proofreaders, then publication.

My editors are private. One is my husband and the other is an employee. I've tried going outside, but I've had trouble finding people that can turn things around fast, and whose judgment I can trust completely.

So, you don't outline at all?

That's right, no outlines. And I won't begin a book until I have the entire thing mapped out in my mind. My formal training is in theology and I was taught to write sermons. My books mirror that style by telling a story through 'moves.' Each move is mapped out in detail and characters are decided before I begin.

Most of the time, I give the characters a Myers-Briggs personality profile type. Ivy, in DEMON KISSED, is an INFJ and that book has Calvinistic tones of predestination—it doesn't matter what you do, your life will still follow the same path. For an INFJ that idea is terrifying. We're control freaks, idealists, and yes, I'm one.

How long does it take for the story to germinate in your mind, before you start writing?

It varies. Sometimes I have an idea, but not the scope of the story, so I set it aside. Other times it just comes to me, usually because there's an emotional attachment to the storyline. SCANDALOUS was dreamed up one day and I wrote it the next week. It's about a missed kiss. One day, I was wondering what would have happened to me if Mike didn't kiss me that night 20 years ago. What would have happened to us? The story germinated quickly, because it was so personal.

And you do your own covers, right?

Yes, I make my own covers. I do the graphic design. I also shot the covers of the DEMON KISSED series, STONE PRISION, and CATALYST. Recently, it's been too time-consuming to do my own shoots – I'd rather be writing. But, I still try to choose

covers that are evocative, that I'd shoot myself, and that readers respond to. Things that are similar, but different.

How many words do you write per day?

It depends on the day. Max is 14,000 words a day and I'm a babbling wreck at the end. About 5,000 per day is comfy. SCANDALOUS was written in 6 days, start to finish. I was curious to see how fast I could write a novel.

What time do you start writing every day?

I usually try to write in the morning. By the end of the day, my brain has turned to mush. And if it gets too close to bedtime, I'll spend the entire night turning stories over in my head.

How often do you take breaks?

As often as my physical therapist tells me to or I get yelled at because she can tell. So, every 30 minutes to an hour, I get up and walk around. It's annoying if I'm in the zone, but necessary.

How long are your novels?

They range from 300-500 pages. I also write serials – which I really enjoy reading and writing. Those tend to be around 150 pages.

What does the first editor of yours do that the second editor

doesn't?

The 1st editor looks for structural issues with the overall story, timeline, and my word choices. I've been known to drift into writing poetry at times. His job is to pull it back to common usage so the reader is reading the story and not distracted by the words.

Why do you use more than one proofreader?

Because there's more than one typo. I'm dyslexic and have Irlen syndrome. In other words, I can't see very well at all. Reading is difficult and I can't catch my mistakes. Proofreaders help me catch the typos that the first two rounds of editing missed.

Guest Post: Top 5 Nonfiction Resources for Beginners

Starting as a Nonfiction Writer

Nonfiction is an honest, helpful, and emotional genre that tells the true stories of people's lives. It's personal and poetic. When you're starting out as a nonfiction writer, you may wonder what makes it that much different from fiction. Or is it just the same with true facts? How do you craft a great biography versus a memoir? What types of editing programs can help you if you want to self-publish your material? There are tons of online and print materials but below is a list of the best resources for beginners just starting to collect

materials.

Top 5 Resources

- **Grammarly**: Grammarly covers every base you need as a beginning writer. They have teaching tools, a [grammar check](#), a proofreader, plagiarism checker, and the tool goes so far as to learn your style for a more customized experience. When you're first starting out, you may not be the best when it comes to grammar and punctuation. Grammarly can help you learn when to use an em dash and an en dash. It can help you with figuring out which parts of your style fit together and which clash. The tool learns how you write to teach you how to avoid errors. Good writing starts with good mechanics. If you can utilize Grammarly to build up a great writer's framework, that will show in the quality of your work down the road.

- ***On Writing Well* by William Zinsser**: This book changed the way I thought about nonfiction writing and helped me improve my techniques immensely. Not only does it cover the basics, but it dives deeper into diction, syntax, and writing as a craft. It inspires you to keep writing as well as improve your skills. For a beginner, this book will help you pick yourself back up after a rejection but also put you on the right path to growing as a writer. Pick it up the next time you go to the bookstore and you won't regret it.

- ***Writer's Market***: This is always quoted to be the writer's bible. It has every agent, publisher, and idea you need to help you be a successful writer. Looking for an outlet for your nonfiction biography about Andrew Jackson, you can find a publisher and agent within *Writer's Market*. They even provide a payment chart to help you figure out how much you should pay for editing services. *Writer's Market* also includes several articles in the front of the publication to help you realize your writing goals. Whether you want to write articles, blog posts, or novels on your chosen topic, *Writer's Market* can give you realistic and thorough advice while

connecting you to the resources you need.

- ***On Writing by Stephen King***: I love this book and recommend it to all of my writer friends. It's funny, interesting, and filled with insights that many beginning writers need to know. It's half biography and half lessons. You get to see how Stephen King tells his own story of becoming a writer, but also get his advice on how to become a better one. Although he is a fiction writer, the advice can apply to both nonfiction and fiction writers. Understanding and applying his lessons honed my skills as a writer and definitely improved my form.

- ***The Elements of Style by William Strunk and E.B. White***: This is an essential book for anyone trying to become a writer. It teaches you how to write correctly and understand the mechanics of writing. Just like building a house, writing starts with framework. As a beginner, making it your mission to learn grammar, punctuation, and style will not only help you write better but will make editing easier.

Each resource fulfills essential knowledge that a beginning writer needs while pushing and motivating a writer to become better. These resources help you from foundation to cleanup and any beginner who has the desire to become a writer should certainly invest the time and money in them.

By [Nikolas Baron](#)

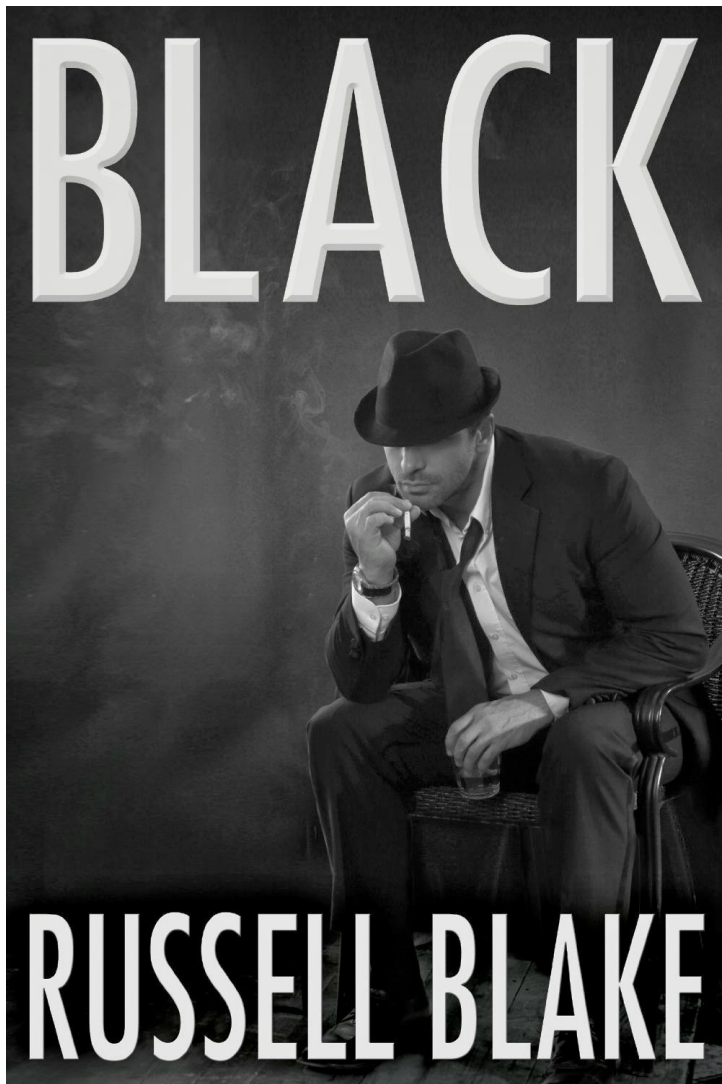
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Bio:

Nikolas discovered his love for the written word in Elementary School, where he started spending his afternoons sprawled across the living room floor devouring one Marc Brown children's novel after the other and writing short stories about daring pirate adventures. After acquiring some experience in various marketing, business development, and

hiring roles at internet startups in a few different countries, he decided to re-unite his professional life with his childhood passions by joining Grammarly's marketing team in San Francisco. He has the pleasure of being tasked with talking to writers, bloggers, teachers, and others about how they use Grammarly's online proofreading application to improve their writing. His free time is spent biking, traveling, and reading.

Indie Powerhouse Author Russell Blake on the Secrets to His Success



When I got wind of indie author, [Russell Blake's success](#), I had to reach out to him. His books may not have graced the top of the NYT bestsellers list yet but they will and he's proven that writing in volume and quickly does not have to conflict with writing quality material.

As noted in the recent [Wall Street Journal article](#) which is featured about him, Blake has written over [25 novels](#) in just 30 months, that's roughly a book a month and in doing so, not only has he quietly garnered [over a million dollars](#) but has sparked the

interest of none other than thriller great, [Clive Cussler](#).

In my interview with Blake today, I had to know his take on what is happening in the indie scene today, his writing process and how he stays motivated when there are so many things that can distract an indie author nowadays.

How do you choose what to write about next? Do you follow trends? Do you search the top Kindle books and then make a decision based on that?

I don't really pay attention to trends – they tend to only be good for telling me where the market's been, not where it's

going. When all's said and done, a good story's a good story. I prefer to make a trend than follow it, honestly, and in my genres, there really aren't any useful observations I can make, other than competitive pricing trends. As to what I choose to write about, I lay out a production schedule for the year so I don't procrastinate too much, and I stick to it, just as though I were a contractor and my publishing arm was the customer. Without that understanding of what I intend to publish I'd probably just wallow around. The structure helps me focus, although, for instance, last year, all that went out of the window when the idea for Upon A Pale Horse came to me. So it's a guideline that I try to adhere to, but not at the expense of a cool idea.



How do you keep motivated when it's so easy to get distracted by checking your Facebook update every 5 minutes?

I stay off the internet when I'm writing. Otherwise I'm sucked in, and my productivity drops by 50%.

I'm curious about your treadmill desk. Any photos you writing on it that you can share?

Sure. I use a Lifespan 1200 with an adjustable height desk. It's been a lifesaver for me. Sedentary is bad. Active is good. If you want to live to enjoy anything...

Do you outline before you start writing or do you just wing it?

I write a paragraph or two summarizing the story. Then I do

the first 15 chapter headings as one sentence summaries, a la "Intro Jet, attacked in shop, escapes, attacked again in street." Then I start writing. By the time I get to chapter 15, I have a much clearer idea of how I want to adjust chapters 15-30, so I repeat the process until finished. I spend no more than a couple of hours outlining, because once I've got the basic story idea, I want to write it, not write about it. And I'm impatient, so I generally give in to that impulse.

Are your first drafts as bad as mine? Just how bad are they? or are they pretty clean?

Mine are about 95%. But it's the other 5% that's the difference between okay and sparkling.

How many drafts do you do before your manuscript is off to your editor?

Typically three.

How many words do you normally write a day? And what time do you start writing and finish writing?

I shoot for 7K a day. It generally takes me 10-12 hours to get there. I'm a slow typist, and I sometimes want to think about an element before I charge forward. As a shorthand I'll insert XXX or YYY when I'm uncertain about a name, place or fact, and come back to it later, so as not to stall my momentum. Occasionally I'll have a 10K day when I'm completely on, but it's just as likely to be a struggle to get to 5K, if life intrudes.

Do you edit as you write or do you just do a brain dump?

Nothing comes between me and my prose. I write it, come back and rewrite it (usually shaking my head wondering how the hell I'm ever going to whip it into shape) and on third draft, I'm usually surprised that it doesn't completely suck. I find if I try to edit as I go along it's a major momentum killer.

Sometimes I have a problem finishing a story. Or if I write a novel, I only write the first draft, more like a crapdraft and then I abandon the project and work on something else. How do you keep from doing that and completing each book so that it's ready for release without losing confidence, getting frustrated about the amount of work it's going to need in order to be truly ready and moving on to something new when it's half-baked?

I force myself to keep at it until it's finished. Nobody ever succeeded by quitting, and I think if you abandon it, it's likely to stay abandoned. I sort of make a deal with myself to finish it, and that's what I do.

In the WSJ article it says you use two editors and a proofreader? What do each of them do? And why that many?

My first editor does structural and prose adjustments. My second editor has different skills, so is looking at the same material, only at a more technical level. He's a military fella, and so is tuned into the more technical aspects of the subject matter, as well as on the lookout for repetition. Every editor is going to have strengths and weaknesses, just as writers do. The more eyes on your work, the better the final product is likely to be. The proofreader cleans off the nits the two editors didn't catch.

What tips do you have for writers who are trying to choose the right type of editor?

Get sample pages done, and ask for references. Better yet, ask authors whose work you think is of a high caliber for a referral to their editor. That's what I did. And ensure that the editor doesn't alter your voice, but rather, improves it.

It was mentioned in the WSJ article that you are expanding into other genres such as romance. Why? How important is finding the right subgenre in finding indie success and how do you personally select which subgenre to maximize sales?

My foray into romance is purely a function of a discussion I had with Melissa Foster when she was conceptualizing her romance series. We got to talking, and a lot of ideas went back and forth. It became obvious over time that our collective brainpower might create a different enough product to make it worth our while. So we agreed to give it a try. She's blowing up the charts with her offerings, so she's clearly doing it right in that genre.

Come summer we'll give it a go, and hopefully the result will be greater than what either of us could have done on our own. As to subgenres, again, I don't pay much attention to them. I write stories I would want to read myself, and after I have an idea for the story, try to figure out where they fit. Fortunately, most of my work fits in the action/adventure/thriller genre, so it's easy. But my advice to budding writers is to pick one genre and stick to it until you've established yourself. Otherwise the reader doesn't know what to expect from book to book, which generally translates into no sales.

Once you have a book cover, do you write your own descriptions? How do you know when the descriptions are just right and really going to sell your book well?

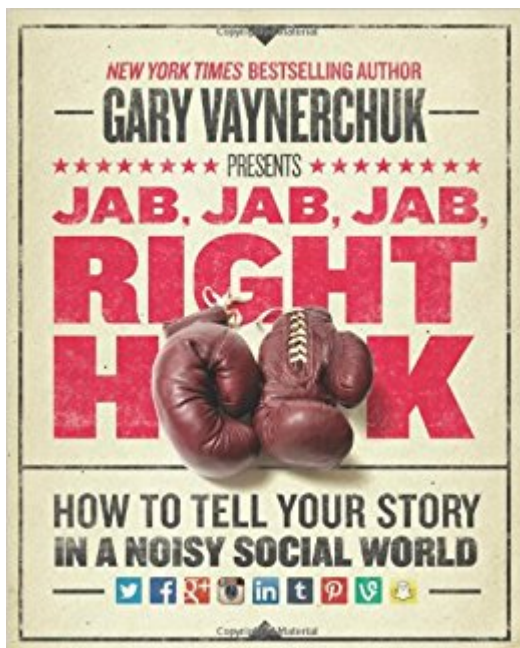
I write my own descriptions. Nobody else will do it better, and it's part of the job. I try to synthesize the high concept into two or three sentences that make the reader want to know more. That's the only job of a blurb – it's ad copy. A blurb doesn't create a synopsis of the story, and it's not a book review; it's an ad for the book that should compel the reader to click buy or at least check out the Look Inside. I know it's done when it would get me to buy the book, not before.

What do you do from the moment you upload your book to start promoting it? What advice would you give writers starting today compared to when you started almost three years ago?

I do a cover reveal, a blog announcing the book, put up an announcement on Facebook and Twitter, and then run a few ads. The big thing is building a mailing list, because then you can put out an announcement to your loyal readership and they'll buy the book in the first few days, which gets you onto the radar of the Amazon algorithms and onto the Hot New Releases list. The truth is that I haven't found any launch technique that's much more effective than putting the books out with a minimum of fanfare, which is partially driven by the amount of time I have. If I'm writing much of my time, I don't have two weeks to mount a sustained marketing campaign for each book and meet my production schedule. I could probably sell more books on release if I did more of an official launch with fanfare, but there are only so many hours in the day, and I only allocate 20-25% of my time to non-writing tasks. So really, it's whatever I can accomplish with that 20-25% of my time. When I slow my production in 2014 to only four Russell Blake novels a year, I'll do more of a launch strategy. It will be interesting to see if that makes much difference. I hope it does, but suspect it won't.

[For more inspirational interviews and posts for writers, click here.](#)

Why Your Social Media Campaign is Not Working – Gary Vaynerchuk (JJJRH)



If you're wondering why your social media campaign is not selling any books, you might want to take a look at Gary Vaynerchuk's amazing new book [Jab, Jab, Jab, Right Hook: How to Tell Your Story in a Noisy Social World](#).

As authors, we're taught by our publishers, literary agents and every writing blog known to mankind that we need to spend more time on social media but what does that mean exactly?

Many believe that means tweeting more or posting more updates on Facebook about buying their book and when they do that very thing, they begin to find out real quickly, no one's listening and worse yet, their campaign is not working.

But what's an author to do? In Vaynerchuk's book, he argues that long gone are the days when we used to spray and pray emails and social media updates to sell products or books in our case, but rather, we've come full circle to a time when we need to go back to doing one-on-one personable messages, taking an interest in the other person and building a long

term relationship, one tweet, one Facebook update, one email a time.

Slower, more time consuming? Yes but Vaynerchuk argues (and has the case studies to prove it) that it's a lot more effective.

If you're feeling stuck in any way and frustrated about your own marketing efforts, I highly recommend his book. (5-stars)

[How to Land a Sponsor](#)

Post by [Jeff Rivera](#).

[Frequently Asked Questions About Book Publishing:](#)

Frequently Asked Questions About Book Publishing:



There are so many people much more qualified than me to answer the most common book publishing questions I get. So, instead of answering them, I'm going to paste links to their information below and let them do the talking. These people I highly recommend.

This is exactly where I learned everything I know. When I was just beginning my career as an author, I knew nothing and I

hadn't a penny to spare. So, I rolled up my own sleeves and learned most everything on Google and from trial and error. That's what I recommend you do too. If you've got more money than God and you want someone to just do all the work for you, there are legitimate people who can do that for you like [Story Merchant](#). Other than that, I suggest you read every single post from every single link listed below. Do that, and you'll know everything I know and more!

Here it is: <http://jeffrivera.com/archives/book-publishing/>

What Really Sells Books – Tip 4 – Slow Down



We are inundated with social media and advertising nowadays. It always seems that someone is trying to yell at us to buy something. And I really do mean yell.

Everyone's trying to shout over everyone else to get our attention and we're already busy as it is with our family, our career, our pets, etc.

That's why those that follow my 4th tip on What Really Sells Books will find much more success: **Slow Down**

A personable one-on-one email or FB private message works. And I mean, a custom-made message; even if it's only customizing the first couple of sentences.

Asking one person at a time, after you've gotten to know them, to read your book and review it or to buy it and then following up with them every couple of weeks until they do, works 100 times more effective than a Facebook update, a tweet or a BCC to everyone.

And when I say, "get to know them" I mean, you've spent at least a few weeks doing nothing but taking an interest in them and what they're passionate about without even hinting that you'd like them to read your book.

I'm telling you this after having made that mistake many times in the past. I cringe when I think about the mistakes I've made in the past, getting too anxious or impatient or desperate. They didn't bring me the results I wanted. But hey, everyone makes mistakes they wish they hadn't so why dwell on the past? Just learn from it.

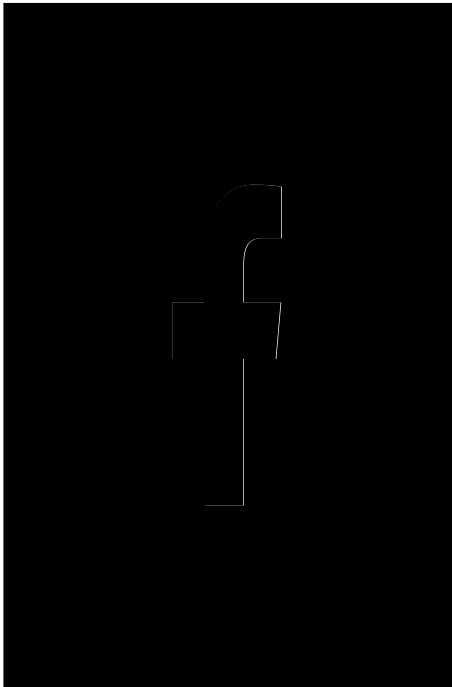
Then it dawned on me, especially looking back on the last 10 years. "It's amazing how much you can get done when you ... just slow down."

The person that masters being personable, taking an interest in the other person first, growing the relationship over time, even if it's just a matter of weeks, then ask for the sale, and finally follows up until they do, will be much more successful than the 99.9% that are not taking that route.

Yes, it's slower. Yes, it takes more effort but it also works.

International Bestselling Author Cheryl Kaye Tardif Shares Her Life as a Writer

How long have you been a writer?



I've been a writer ever since I can remember. When I was very young, my mother caught me scribbling underneath the lines in a Dr. Seuss book and when she asked me what I was doing, I told her I was writing the story. Apparently I thought Dr. Seuss needed my help. I have always had the desire to create stories.

Why do you feel compelled to create stories?

I love creating the worlds, characters and stories that populate my mind on a daily basis. And it's the only way to turn off the voices I hear. Yes, I hear voices—my characters' voices. Sometimes they're impatient with me because it's not the right time to write or I have other priorities. But once I am buried in creating a novel, everyone is happy. Especially

me. It's the only way to shut them up!

What book are you most proud of?

That's a hard one; it's like asking a parent of 12 kids which child they're most proud of. My "heart book" is WHALE SONG, and that's because it has changed people's lives for the better, something I never really expected. It has saved relationships and lives. [CHILDREN OF THE FOG](#) and SUBMERGED are probably my best works to date and both deal with fears that I have had—the fear of a child being abducted and the fear of being trapped in a submerged vehicle. The one title I am proud of because of outstanding sales is CHILDREN OF THE FOG. It is my #1 bestseller and has sold over 60,000 copies.

What do you credit as being the main factors in "learning" how to write something that sells?

I wrote short stories while in school and sometimes they were critiqued by my teachers. This taught me many of the basics. I also studied other great writers in my genre, like King and Koontz. I really absorbed how they put their sentences together, how they created tension, how they paced themselves. I took a journalism and short story writing course in my early 20s and graduated with Highest Honors and a 98% overall score. I joined various critique/writers' groups over the years, read books on writing, editing, and more.

Where do you see yourself in 5 years?

I see myself as even more successful, with more foreign rights and audio deals. I feel there's at least one movie in my future, maybe more, and that could happen within 5 years. And I see myself having made the New York Times bestsellers list

at least once! I know...I have lofty goals.

From August 12-18, you are going to attempt to achieve one of these goals. Tell us about it.

August 12th is my 50th birthday, and I'm going to be GIVING AWAY gifts during a special multi-author promotion, in hopes of making the USA Today or New York Times bestsellers lists. I am one of 8 authors who form the Power Authors, and all of our books will be on sale for one week in August & September.

My week is Aug. 12-18, and everyone who purchases a Kindle ebook of my bestselling supernatural thriller, CHILDREN OF THE FOG, or gifts it to someone, could help me achieve my dream. The more copies that are sold from Aug. 12-18, the better chance I'll have of making it.

How do we buy or gift a copy?

CHILDREN OF THE FOG is available at [Amazon](#) (Kindle ebook and trade paperback), [Barnes & Noble](#) (paperback), [Createspace](#) (paperback) and other paperback retailers.

Any other links or info you'd like to share?

Cheryl's website: <http://www.cherylktardif.com>

Official blog: <http://www.cherylktardif.blogspot.com>

Twitter: <http://www.twitter.com/cherylktardif>

Facebook:

<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Cheryl-Kaye-Tardif-novels/29769>

[736630](#)

And don't forget my [contest](#)!! I'm giving away LOTS of awesome prizes—including a Kindle Fire HD!

[What Really Sells Books? Tip 3 – Speaking Events Work](#)

✘ In this series of posts, I've been looking back at my last almost 10 years of working as professional author and reviewing out of all the things I've tried, what has actually sold books.

My motto lately has been, “promotion and awareness is great but what actually sells books?” The last two posts I covered two tips. One was [the basics](#) and the other was about doing [book signings the right way](#).

This week's tip is about something that I know sells books immediately, doing speaking engagements. And I don't mean wasting your time trying to put together your own groups of people but rather speaking at pre-existing groups that are always hungry for new speakers.

My first novel was an urban love story. Yet I sold hundreds of books at Rotary Clubs all over the country. I was invited to speak as far as Nigeria. Rotary Clubs are generally local business people. So, how did I manage to book gigs there? I focused on my back story, of how I came from very humble beginnings (having lived in my car as a teen) and accomplished my dream of being an author. And this was before I landed the Warner Books contract with the same book.

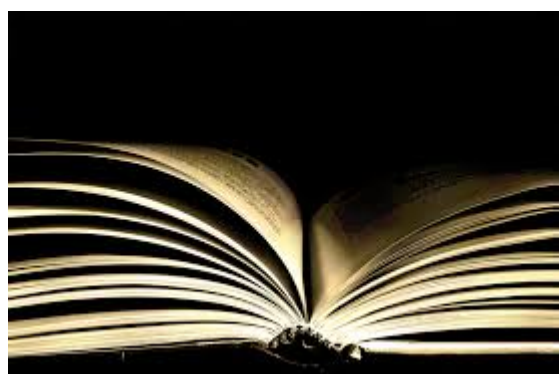
I absolutely loved speaking to these groups all over the place and after my 15-20 minute presentation, I sold books in the back of the room. Usually on a bad day, half the people who attended bought copies but generally 70-90% of those in attendance bought books.

That's my tip for you, find groups such as Rotary Clubs, Elk's Clubs, Women's Organizations, Business Associations that are looking for speakers. Send them a quick email introducing yourself and offering to speak for free in lieu of being able to sell books after the engagement.

There are a lot of details that go into doing this but that's the gist of it and it works!

Next post, we'll discuss a way you can sell books without leaving your house.

What Really Sells Books? Tip 2 – The Basics



Last post, we talked about how doing book signings the right way, can sell books quickly. But there's something you need to do first.

You need to have the basics covered. Without these things, you have slim to no chance of selling books. Awareness is great,

building a fan base is great and equally important but at the end of the day, we want to sell books.

Here are a few things that are very important: (arguably, *in*

order of importance according to the way many readers shop)

1) A great cover. You don't have to spend hundreds of dollars on a first-class cover. Whether you're doing an eBook cover or a physical book cover, I've seen great covers for [as little as \\$5](#). If you're going to splurge on anything, I say start with a great cover. Without it, even the best story ever told, may not be looked at twice by a potential customer. If you have the talent to do it yourself, go for it, but most of us are not professional book cover designers and even if we are, we may not know how to design a cover that will sell a book to our particular audience. Go to Amazon or [Goodreads](#) and find book covers that you love but most importantly book covers from books that have sold well and give those samples to the graphic designer. A great book designer will know how to create a great front and equally important back cover.

2) A great description. You can be the greatest writer in the world and not write [a great book description](#). There's an art to it and oftentimes a writer is not objective enough about their book to know what elements of it that are appealing to their readers. Get help. There are many [reasonably priced writers](#) who'll do it for you and if you have a small budget, trade favors with other writers you respect and ask them to write your description for you. Do blurbs work? It helps to have a couple of blurbs from famous people or those respected by your audience but is it guaranteed to sell your book? Not necessarily. Don't go crazy. Putting a blurb by an author your particular audience has never heard of may be a total waste of time.

3) A great [back story](#) or bio. Credibility is important in your field. If you write medical thrillers and you're a doctor, great! If you're a mother of three or teacher and you write kids books, perfect. Make sure that if you're using your career background for part of your author bio, that it's relevant to the genre you're writing in. If you have a powerful back story about what lead you to writing the book,

use it. This too, should be written by someone else, if you feel that maybe you're too close to write it objectively.

4) Professionally [formatted](#). If your book doesn't look like "a real book", a reader may not be able to pinpoint what's wrong but they will feel it's amateur. Get a professional to do it or go online and get a [template](#) that will help you make your book as professional as possible. It doesn't have to cost a lot but you will oftentimes see a big difference between hiring a professional and trying to put it together yourself.

5) A great opening chapter. I don't know about you, but if I'm not hooked by the first 3-5 sentences, I put the book down. If you're going to splurge on anything and you cannot afford to hire an editor for your whole book, get someone who'll [line edit](#) and copy edit your first few chapters. They must be as strong as ever.

In my next post, I'll talk about another way that sells books in 30 minutes or less – speaking engagements.