

# What's in a Name?

## Perks and Pitfalls of Pen Names

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Disclaimer: The information contained in this presentation is provided for informational purposes only, and should not be construed as **legal advice** on any subject matter.



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# ABOUT ME

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Dianne Farb



- Bestselling, award-winning indie author of contemporary romance and women's fiction under the pen name **REBECCA HEFLIN**.
- Twelve books out, working on lucky number thirteen.
- Reformed lawyer

[www.rebeccaheflin.com](http://www.rebeccaheflin.com)

# DEFINITION

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A pen name, pseudonym, or *nom de plume* is a fictitious name used by an author to conceal their true identity. It can also be used for branding purposes.



# GUESS THAT PEN NAME

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**Hello**

my name is

- Samuel Clemons
- Mark Twain
- Mary Ann Evans
- George Eliot
- Currer Bell
- Charlotte Brontë
- Ellis Bell
- Emily Brontë
- Ericka Leonard
- E.L. James
- Mary Bly
- Eloisa James
- "A Lady"
- Jane Austen
- Eleanor Robertson
- Nora Roberts
- J.D. Robb

# REASONS

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- Privacy
- Branding
- Marketing
- Simplicity
- Writing in a new genre
- Removing inhibitions (and self-censorship)

# PRIVACY

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- Perks

- You can hide behind the name
  - For your job
  - For anonymity from friends and family
  - To disguise your gender

# PRIVACY

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- Pitfalls
  - In-person events can be difficult
  - You can't get emotional support from family or friends
  - You can't ask friends and family to buy your books
  - You can't connect a face with a name among readers
  - If you live in a small community, word will eventually get out
  - Registering copyrights

# COPYRIGHT

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- Copyright claimant
  - Legal name – this information is public
    - You can leave it off, but it could make enforcing your copyright more difficult
    - You would need to prove that you are the author
  - Author name – Pen Name (or legal name)



# BRANDING

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- Perks

- You can get creative with a name
- You can create a persona that matches what you write (Note: this does not mean creating false credentials)
  - If you write western romance, you can dress like a cowgirl (or cowboy)
  - If you write sweet historical romance, you can take on a soft feminine persona
- You can choose a name that fits your genre/sub-genre
  - Someone who writes romantic suspense might choose initials (i.e. J.D. Robb)

# BRANDING

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- Pitfalls

- Can make in-person events difficult, if not impossible (see privacy)
- Depending on the name chosen, if you write multiple genres, you may need more than one pen name.

# MARKETING

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- Perks

- See Branding

- Getting creative with your branding and persona, means you can get creative with your marketing.
      - Including giveaways, swag, and online presence

# MARKETING

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- Pitfalls

- See Privacy

- In-person events can be difficult if you want to maintain your privacy

- Requires the creation and management of a new online presence, including social media, websites, blogs, etc.

- This can become time-consuming if you write under more than one pen-name

- Especially if you want to keep your alter egos separate

# SIMPLICITY/CLARITY

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- Perks

- If your name is difficult to pronounce
- If your name is common
- If your name is the same as a celebrity, artist, or politician

# SIMPLICITY

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- Pitfalls

- If your name is difficult to pronounce, selecting a more common name could land you in a pile of authors with the same or similar names
  - Makes it confusing and difficult for readers to find YOU
  - Makes it especially difficult if you write sweet romance, and another author with the same name writes erotic romance.

# WRITING A NEW GENRE

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- Perks

- A pen name can allow to try a new genre without confusing fans (or potentially destroying your career, if the new genre venture tanks)
  - You might use your legal name to write middle-grade fiction, but now you've got this awesome idea for an erotic SciFi cozy mystery mashup

# WRITING A NEW GENRE

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- Pitfalls
  - See Branding and Marketing pitfalls above
    - Writing under multiple names requires an online presence for each name
  - See Privacy pitfalls above
    - Makes in-person appearances difficult



# REMOVE INHIBITIONS

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- Perks

- Using a pen name might make you a better writer by allowing you to stretch your limits and get out of your comfort zone.
  - Maybe you've always wanted to write erotic romance, but for personal reasons have never felt comfortable writing it under your legal name.

# CONSIDERATIONS

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- Pronunciation – Pick a pen name that's easy to pronounce (and spell)
- Brand appropriateness – For instance, if you write romantic suspense, initials + last name
- Copyright – How willing are you to expose your legal name, and if not, how hard are you willing to fight to protect your work?
- Commonness – Do an internet search for the name you choose
- Outing yourself – Know that there is a good chance you could out yourself
- Who Will Know – If you're doing it for privacy reasons, who will know you're, well, you're your pen name?

# PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

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- Reason
  - Job
- Name Choice
  - Great-great grandmother's name
- Regrets
  - A few

# TAKEAWAYS

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- Don't
  - Use a TM Name – many authors trademark their pen names; search the U.S. Trademark site.
  - Choose a common name (i.e. Mary Smith) – You want a name that stands out and that won't be confused with thousands of other people.
  - Choose a name the same as, or similar to, a celebrity, artist, or politician.
  - Be flip – If you plan on having a long writing career, choosing the wrong name can make it difficult to change midstream, once you've amassed a following. Give the name you choose careful consideration.
  - Create false credentials – This will come back to bite you if your readers find out, especially if you write non-fiction.

# TAKEAWAYS

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- Do
  - Research names (yours and any pen name you are considering)
  - Pick a name that's easy to pronounce (and easy to spell)
  - Pick a name that's brand appropriate
  - Create a persona that's brand appropriate

# A FINAL WORD

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- Writing under a pen name does not protect you from legal liability. You can still be sued for plagiarism, infringement, defamation, fraud, etc.
- Check your state's laws
  - You may be able to use your pen name to create a limited liability company (LLC), obtain an employer tax ID number, and open bank and credit card accounts using the name.
    - This could protect you from personal liability
  - Even so, depending on the state, your legal name associated with the LLC could be public.



# SHAMELESS PLUG

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