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.



ABOUT ME

Dianne Farb





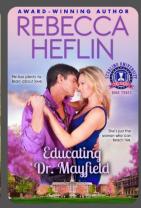


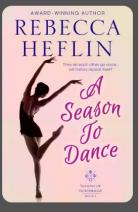


















- Bestselling, award-winning indie author of contemporary romance and women's fiction under the pen name REBECCA HEFLIN.
- Twelve books out, working on lucky number thirteen.
- Reformed lawyer

DEFINITION

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



- 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

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

PRIVACY

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

PRIVACY

- 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

- 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

- 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

- 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

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

MARKETING

- 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 penname
 - Especially if you want to keep your alter egos separate

SIMPLICITY/CLARITY

- 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

- 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

- 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 smashup

WRITING A NEW GENRE

- 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

REMOVEINHIBITIONS

- 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

- 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

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

TAKEAWAYS

• 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

• 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

- 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.



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