

SHOULD YOU USE A PEN NAME OR YOUR OWN NAME?



You are about to self-publish your first book, and you wonder: pen name or not? What are the advantages and disadvantages of using a pen name? What are the pros and cons of using your own name? Let us take a look.

One question I see a lot is: should I publish under a pen name?

What Is a Pen Name?

A pen name is also called a pseudonym or alias. It is a name you use instead of your own. It can be completely different, even with a different gender, race, or nationality. Or it can be part of your name, like Jane Doe becomes J. Doe.

What Are the Advantages of Using a Pen Name?

Are you nervous about the entire project of publishing a book? Some writers are. They are scared that readers will hate their books. They fear that nobody will buy it. They make it a personal issue: I risk being a total failure.

If you are a new writer, it may help to publish your books under a pen name. It takes the personal risk out of the equation.

That said, should your book get no sales, it does not mean that you are a failure. It merely means that your book got no sales, and that could be for a lot of reasons. That is for another day.

You could also be writing books about topics or genres that you do not want your friends or family to know about. And to hide those, a pen name will help you. Your secret is safe with Amazon and the other places you publish. None but you need to know about your pen name.

Some writers think that if they write in completely different genres, then it is best to have a pen name for each genre. Others say that this means you have to start from scratch with each new pen name. Still, if you want to keep your categories apart, then using a pen name is a good idea.

And it is definitely a good idea if you write in completely different categories like erotica and Christian romance. You will not want a reader from one category to buy one of your books from the other category.

If you are teamed up with other writers, writing the same book, then gathering you all under one pen name makes it neater. This is especially true if you outsource your writing.

When your books are strictly meant for one group of people, for example, if you are writing only for women, then having a pen name makes sense. That way you can hide your true identity.

Finally, if you are writing a controversial book, you may find stalkers ringing your door-bell. To avoid that, use a pen name.

The Disadvantages of Using a Pen Name

There are only two disadvantages of using a pen name, but they are both big disadvantages.

The first is that you do not get boasting rights over your pen name's success. When you meet somebody at a party and say that you are "Jane Doe," he will not recognize you as the famous author "Jaime Doe."

If you can live without the fame, then you could be good to go with your pen name.

The other disadvantage is that if you write a series of books that get success, and you start with a new pen name for another series of books, then you start from scratch again.

Some writers solve this problem by "cross promoting" their new pen name to their mailing list or on social media.

Those were the advantages and disadvantages of using pen names. Let us look at the alternative, using your own name.

Pros of Using Your Own Name

You get full credit for your books. Your name will be on the cover, and people who know you or get to know you can find your books. This can actually bring in a lot of sales, because people are curious and want to know what you write.

If you run a mailing list and have your customers on the list, you do not need to hide your true name. The CAN-SPAM law states that you must provide your physical address, so although you can use your pen name in combination with your address, smart people can look it up and see which names are really listed under that address.

When you publish in different genres and categories, you can promote to existing readers. You do not need to start from zero again.

That said, there are disadvantages of using your own name as well.

Cons of Using Your Own Name

If you are at all worried about publishing, it makes it a lot harder when your person is involved. It may feel as if you will fail if a book fails. If it is just a pen name's book that fails, it is not such a big deal.

Like mentioned previously, if you use your own name, creepy people can send you nasty letters or even show up on your doorstep.

If you are writing in genres that are each other's contrary, like erotica and clean and wholesome romance, or Christian prayers and passionate atheism, then you will repel all your audiences.

Finally, if you hate fame, then using your own name is risky. You could succeed with your books, you know.

So, What Should a Wise Writer Do?

If it makes it easier—or even possible—for you to publish, if you know you can hide under a pen name, then do so. A pen name carries the blessing of anonymity.

If you write in opposing categories or genres, use a pen name.

If you write controversial books and fear the consequences, write under a pen name.

Otherwise, use your own name, because it makes it easier to have all your books gathered under one umbrella.

You can even do what a lot of writers do: start out with pen names and then segue into using their own names. That gives you the best of both worlds:

Safety when publishing your first works.

Discoverability later, when your writing has improved.

In the end, the answer is up to you and your preferences. Now you know what the advantages and disadvantages are for either of your choices.

References:

<https://definitions.uslegal.com/m/mailling-lists/>