

Beta Readers, ARC Readers, and Advance Reviewers

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Writing a publishable story (or nonfiction book) can rarely be accomplished alone. We all need help.

First, I want to point out that alpha readers, beta readers, ARC readers, and advance reviewers are NOT the same thing as your *editor*. In most situations, a highly skilled or professional editor is needed to help an author get a book to a publishable level. Let's just accept that as a given.

In addition to your editor, it can be extremely helpful to enlist the help of one or more of the following categories of readers: alpha readers, beta readers, ARC readers, and advance reviewers.

Generally, an author pays an editor, whereas alpha readers, beta readers, ARC readers, and advance reviewers are typically *volunteers*.

Let's make sure we understand the difference between these.

Alpha Readers

Usually, an alpha reader is your *first reader*. Trish is the very first person (besides me) to read my short stories and chapters, so she is definitely my alpha reader. I write my first draft, then I read it and make any changes I can, which results in my second draft. Then I give it to Trish to read. She goes through it twice, making suggested changes. I apply those changes, resulting in the third draft.

Usually, you have only *one* alpha reader.

What does an alpha reader do?

An alpha reader might point out typos and other minor errors, but the real purpose of an alpha reader is to point out overall structural problems with the chapter, story, or book. Are there any plot holes, major inconsistencies, or other big issues?

After you fix the major issues pointed out by your alpha reader, have the alpha reader read it again, to confirm that the issues have effectively been corrected.

Trish does this one chapter at a time, and I apply her suggestions before writing the next chapter. She looks at the revised chapter (or short story) again (as I read it aloud), and then I apply her second set of suggestions, resulting in fourth draft.

Some authors finish their entire first draft of their book before giving it to an alpha reader. Some authors do not use alpha readers at all.

Beta Readers

Generally, beta readers do not see your story until you have self-edited it to the *best of your ability*. This is the main difference between beta readers and alpha readers. Some authors don't use beta readers until after the entire editing process, including the help from one or more professional editors (remember, professional editing could include structural editing, line editing, or proofreading).

Important: If you have your beta readers look at the story *after* all the professional editing, what happens if several of them point out some major structural problems? You might have to go through the pro editing process again after you restructure the story. That's expensive. If you are going to use beta

readers, I suggest using them earlier in the process, so that all structural problems are fixed *before* the professional editing.

What does a beta reader do?

The answer is—it depends. Basically, they read your book and give you feedback. Some authors want their beta readers to give their overall impression of the book. Others want their beta readers to look at tiny details, such as typos and grammar. It depends on the author's needs and the skill set of the beta reader (and what they are willing to do—remember, they are unpaid volunteers).

As an author, you should be clear about your expectations with your beta readers.

It is good to have several beta readers. Perhaps up to about *ten*.

ARC Readers

ARC stands for *Advance Review Copy*. This one is the easiest to explain. ARC readers are the *last* people to read your story before publishing. They get a FREE copy of the ebook version of your book, already formatted correctly and with the book's cover. Yes, you could distribute print copies, but the logistics and expense are daunting).

Their purpose is *not* to provide editing suggestions (although, as an author, I'm sure you would appreciate them telling you if they spot a typo).

What does an ARC reader do?

Their purpose is to help you *spread the word* about your new book (again, their purpose is *not* to provide edits). Some authors call them their *street team*. They are to read the final copy of the book, then post an honest review on or shortly after the book's release date. They post their review on Amazon, Goodreads, Bookbub, and maybe other sites. You might also ask them to post something on social media.

Getting reviews, especially soon after the book's release, is *really* difficult. Which is why ARC readers are so important to an author. You cannot require them to post a review, but you can *encourage* them to. It helps to remind them that they received a free copy of your book.

So... with ARC readers, the more the better. The more ARC readers you have, the more reviews you get.

Advance Reviewers

I included this title because this is what I call my street team—my *Advance Reviewer Team*. Remember, every author has different needs. Your needs will be different from mine.

I like to keep things simple, so I have combined beta readers and ARC readers into my Advance Reviewer Team. It's a *hybrid* team.

I have written enough novels and short stories to be confident in my overall story structure. So, I do not request suggestions on overall structural edits (for beginning authors, I recommend getting help with story structure, until you become confident in your own ability to develop overall plot and story arc).

For reference only, here is my sequence:

I write the *first draft* of a chapter or short story, then the *second draft*. Trish (alpha reader) helps me create the *third draft* and the *fourth draft*.

My professional (paid) editor helps me create the *fifth draft* of all the chapters. Trish reads the entire book, looking for typos I made when applying my professional editor's suggestions (*sixth draft*).

Now the book is ready to publish. I have already commissioned a cover. I write the front and back matter of the book and format the whole thing as a completed ebook.

I send this completed ebook to my *Advance Reviewer Team* (free, of course). I have about 140 readers on the team (which usually gets me about 60 or more reviews within a few weeks of the book's release).

Here's where things are different for me: I have made it clear to my Advance Reviewer Team that I would like them to do TWO things—provide me with a list of typos they find, and post an honest review on, or soon after, the book's release date.

How do you get alpha readers, beta readers, and ARC readers?

Ask your own readers

The best way—*by far*—is to ask the readers subscribed to your email newsletter (or who follow your blog, social media, etc.). They are people who are already interested in your writing.

However, if you do not have an email newsletter and subscribers, here are a few suggestions:

Friends and family

Caution... you do NOT want readers who are unwilling to tell you the harsh truth! Your family members might be rather biased, or reluctant to point out errors. Authors do not need praise, they need suggestions.

Or, they might be overly critical, telling you how much they hate everything about your story. Maybe simply because they do not like your genre. You need readers who love the genre you write in.

Ask people that you know will provide honest feedback.

Ask other authors

Some authors enjoy this (if they have time). I recommend offering to *trade* this service. You be a beta reader (or ARC reader) for their book, and in return you ask them to do the same for your book.

You can also find prospective author beta readers in online writing groups, such as **Writers Helping Writers** (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/mikegeffnerpresentswritershelpingwriters>)

Additional places to find beta readers and ARC readers online:

Critique Circle. (<https://www.critiquecircle.com>) This one come highly recommended by some authors. Thousands of excellent beta readers available there.

And here is a list of **25 sites** for finding beta readers:

<https://thejohnfox.com/2022/06/25-ways-to-find-beta-readers>