

Researching your Genre: A Guide for Independent Authors Cheat Sheet

Our research goal in one sentence

To understand the essential story elements in a genre, subgenre or niche, to understand how those elements are promised in the cover, developed in the blurb, and then delivered by a story.

We study this so we can learn how to fold those elements into our own style, and into our own stories.

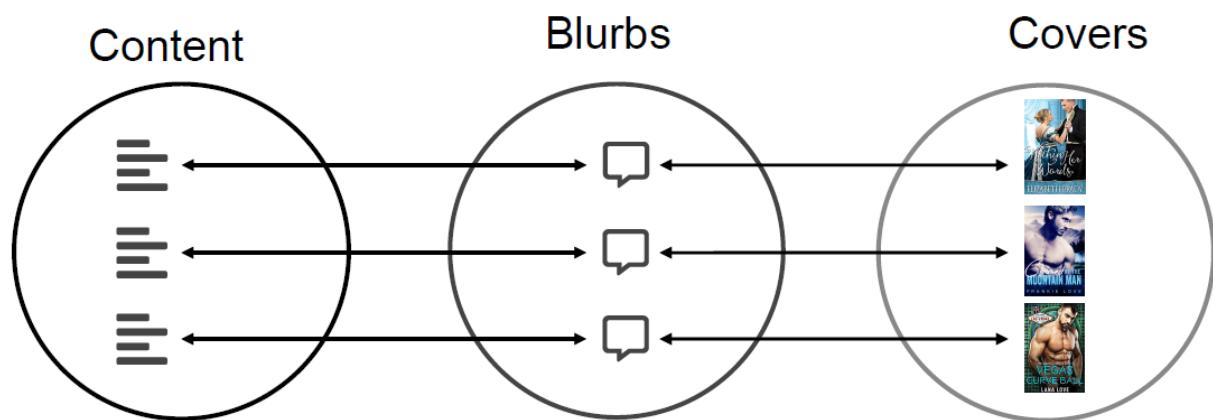
Think of genre research as having four parts

Content	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Choose books to read that are relevant to your own work (authors with whom you share an audience)• Make notes for each book on story elements – topics, tropes, themes – so you can compare them later• Craft books can help identify story elements, but ultimately you'll develop your own map• Read reviews and note down elements that readers mention – positive or negative• This is a different type of reading to reading for enjoyment, or reading for style – try to stay high above the story and perceive its shape
Blurbs	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Challenging to do well at, but often cheap and quick to improve• Find ~3 different styles of blurb that are relevant to your work. Try to draft your blurb in all three. They will (probably) be lousy; stick with it• Go back to your content notes, and compare the blurbs with the story elements you identified.• In a good blurb, <u>every</u> sentence is doing work• Rewrite your three blurbs trying to make every sentence relate to a story element• Present your blurbs to an audience, and ask the audience to rank them. Don't be afraid to combine elements of all three!
Covers	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Covers make promises to readers – first and foremost about <u>genre</u>• Covers also drive your branding• Scan the lists of top books for your complementary titles and try to identify cover styles• Make notes on specific covers. Look for: people, camera distance, faces/no faces, objects, dominant colours and shades, typography, recurring visual elements• Go back to the blurbs for those books: what elements in the blurb are linked to elements on the cover?
Mechanics	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• This is everything else about your genre/subgenre/niche which isn't

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| | <p>specifically your book</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Release frequency/age of titles • Traditional vs independent (self-published, small press) • Standalone vs series • Length • Pricing • How does your book fit in the market? Remember: you don't have to follow others, but it pays to understand where your book fits and why |
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Conclusion

Genre research is about understanding the individual story elements which resonate with readers, and tracing them through from covers, to blurbs, to content.



There are no binding rules which guarantee or forbid success. BUT understanding at a detailed level what other authors are doing, and understanding the norms of your genre, the norms of your market, will help you make informed decisions, and it will help you fine-tune your course bit by bit as you find what works for you.

Questions? Comments? Please email nat@kindletrends.com