



LITERARY INSPIRED · A FREE FIELD GUIDE

The ARC Team Field Guide

How advance readers help your book start gathering reviews from release day, and how to build a team that comes back for the next one.

For authors who'd rather be writing.

literaryinspired.com

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What an ARC Team Does for Your Launch

An ARC (an Advance Reader Copy) is your finished book, handed to a small group of readers a few weeks before it goes on sale. They read it early so that when the book goes live, they can post their honest reviews in the opening days, when a brand-new listing needs them most.

That first handful of reviews is what a cold, browsing reader looks for before they buy. A launch with a few reviews already up is a different first impression to one with none.

A well-run campaign gives early readers the time and tools to read and review, so the reviews are there when the book goes live.

Recruitment, timing and reader care matter more than any service promising a fixed review count.

WHAT IT CAN GIVE YOU

Early social proof · fuller retailer pages · reader feedback after release · word of mouth · a reader base you keep.

WHAT IT CAN'T PROMISE

Sales · ranking · visibility · a set number of reviews · positive reviews. Anyone guaranteeing those is selling a scam.

A few things to know about ARC readers

If you're not deep in the online book world, ARC culture can feel like a foreign country. You don't need to live there (that's my job), but a few norms make everything that follows fall into place.

**They're volunteers.**

They're giving up their own reading time for free, so nothing about it can be demanded.

**They're mood readers.**

Huge to-be-read piles, real lives. DNF is normal, and completely fine.

**They're generous, but allergic to a hard sell.**

Clear, friendly communication works better than sales language. Being marketed at pushes readers away fast.

**Reviews stay voluntary and honest**

Pressure or review gating damages trust quickly, and readers talk to each other.

**They speak in shorthand.**

ARC, DNF, HEA, TBR. The glossary at the back decodes it.

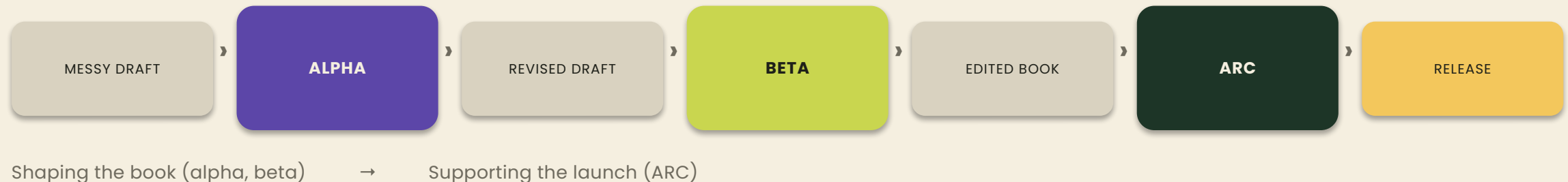
**Retailer reviews start at release**

Retailers only let readers post once the book is live, so the bulk arrives from release day on. Goodreads is the exception and takes reviews earlier.

These norms are what the rest of the guide builds on.

Alpha, Beta and ARC: Who Reads When

These three get muddled constantly, and using the wrong one at the wrong stage wastes everyone's time. They aren't ranks. They're different jobs at different points in your book's life. Two help shape the book. One supports its launch.



Alpha and beta readers help shape the book. ARC readers support its launch. Don't ask one to do the other's job.

Who Reads When

Alpha Reader

When: while you're still drafting.

Reads: rough, unfinished pages, sometimes chapter by chapter.

Gives you: gut reaction. Is the story working? Where did they drift?

Usually: one or two trusted people. Often another writer.

Beta Reader

When: after the draft is done, before editing.

Reads: a full but unpolished manuscript.

Gives you: reader-level notes on pacing, characters, plot holes.

Usually: a small handful. Genre readers, not editors.

ARC Reader

When: 2–3 weeks before release, on the finished book.

Reads: the final, edited, formatted book.

Gives you: honest reviews at launch and early word of mouth.

Usually: a team of many, there for your launch.

What an ARC Reader Signs Up For

An ARC reader receives your finished book early, reads it in their own time, and, if they choose, leaves an honest review during release week. Nothing beyond that is owed.

In return, they get a book they already wanted, before anyone else, for free. It's a fair trade, as long as you keep treating it like one.

WHAT EARLY READERS CAN HELP WITH

- **Early social proof** the reviews a cold buyer checks before they click buy.
- **Early momentum** reviews and word of mouth at launch give a book its best shot.
- **Readers who stay** a team that comes back for the next book.

THE FAIR TRADE

You give:

a finished book, early and free, with everything they need to read and review it easily.

They give:

their time, and an honest review if the book earns one.

You're asking for a review. The lasting value is a reader who comes back for the next book.

What ARC Readers Are Not

- ✕ **Not editors.** They might flag a stray typo. They're not there to proofread, and you never ask them to.
- ✕ **Not obligated reviewers.** A review is hoped for, never owed. DNF is always allowed, with no penalty and no awkwardness.
- ✕ **Not your promo staff.** A share is generous, not required. You can't demand social posts or tags.

On honesty: you ask for an honest review, never a positive one. Gating reviews by star rating (“only post if it's four stars or more”) is manipulation, and it can violate retailer review policies and put the account at risk.

Is Your Book Ready?

“Finished” trips a lot of authors up. A book can be written and still not ready to send. Run this check before your campaign begins.

- ✓ **Final proofreading and formatting are done, so readers get the real thing, not a draft.**
- ✓ **Cover and blurb are locked** and unlikely to change before release.
- ✓ **The release date is confirmed** so we can count backwards from it.
- ✓ **Retailer or pre-order pages are prepared** where possible.
- ✓ **Earlier books are available** for a later-in-series ARC.
- ✓ **Content warnings are finalized** and ready to share up front.
- ✓ **The file opens cleanly on more than one device** so nobody's first experience is a broken file.
- ✓ **You're reachable during the campaign** for the occasional quick question.

If any of these are still unticked, hold the campaign and read the next page first.

When to Delay the Campaign

Sending too early causes more damage than sending a little late. Hold the campaign if any of these are true:

- ❗ **Major edits are still underway.** A story that changes after readers have it invites reviews of a book you no longer publish.
- ❗ **The release date is unstable.** A moving date breaks the whole count-back, and readers lose the thread.
- ❗ **The book can't be delivered reliably yet.** If the file won't open cleanly on more than one device, fix that first.
- ❗ **You're hoping readers will catch errors.** That's what proofreaders and beta readers are for, not your ARC team.

What Format Does an ARC Go Out In?

EPUB

The standard. Works on almost every e-reader and app. What most ARC readers expect and prefer.

PDF

For fixed-layout, illustrated, or special editions, or a reader who asks. Less flexible on e-readers.

MOBI

Legacy Kindle format, now largely retired. EPUB works on Kindle today, so you rarely need it.

WATERMARKED, AND TESTED

Every ARC is watermarked to the individual reader, and stated up front: sharing the file removes them from current and future teams. The file is also tested on more than one device before it goes out, so nobody's first experience is a book that won't open.

BookFunnel handles the format conversion and watermarking. More in Chapter 12.

Why Content Warnings Matter

A content warning isn't about hiding what your book is. It lets the small number of readers with a specific reason to avoid something opt out before they start, instead of picking it up by accident, having a bad time, and leaving a one-star review about how it made them feel rather than about the writing.

It also tells a browsing reader you know exactly what's in your book. Coy reads as amateur.

You give me the honest list; I turn it into the right wording for each place it appears.

Unwarned readers review loudly. A clear warning heads that off.

WHERE IT GOES

The ARC signup form, the ARC email, and a short version on your book's site page. Not the Amazon blurb.

RETAILER vs ARC

Retailer-facing copy sometimes needs different wording from the full ARC warning. I handle that reword separately; readers receiving the ARC always get the complete, honest note.

How Your Team Comes Together

Recruitment decides how large and well-matched your reader pool is, and it's the part I run for you. Readers come in from wherever your genre gathers:

Your newsletter · your reader group · genre Facebook groups · your socials · your existing team · author swaps · a group-promo tool · and Literary Inspired's own reader network of thousands.

I recruit across several relevant channels so the team never leans on one audience. If you have no list at all, I lean more on my own reader network and relevant genre groups.

I use your hoped-for review range to plan how many readers to recruit.

10–20%

of a team tends to post a review in my campaigns, so to reach around ten I plan for roughly 50–100 approved readers. A planning range, never a promise.

EVERY READER IS SCREENED

Not everyone who signs up is approved. Readers are vetted for genre fit before they get a copy. That screening is part of what I handle.

The Form That Filters for Fit

Every reader fills in a short form I set up. It screens for genre fit, and keeps ARC participation separate from your newsletter. Readers are asked:

- › Which format would you prefer, EPUB or PDF?
- › Which store or region do you normally review on?
- › Have you read the previous books in this series?
- › What do you usually enjoy about this genre?
- › Where do you expect to post a review?
- › Do you agree not to share the watermarked file?
- › Join the author's newsletter too? (separate & optional)

You never touch the form. I build it, run it, and vet every applicant.

WHAT A GOOD ANSWER LOOKS LIKE

“I love fantasy romance with political intrigue.”

tells me far more than

“I read everything.”

A blank or generic answer can be a reason to decline when places are limited.

How the Team Is Managed and Kept

- ✓ **Everyone hears back.** An automatic confirmation on signup, then a note when they're approved. No one is left guessing.
- ✓ **Declines stay warm.** "Not the right fit this time," never an accusation of piracy or dishonesty.
- ✓ **Invited per campaign.** Being on the list doesn't mean auto-getting every ARC. The team is invited to each relevant book, opting in easily.
- ✓ **Inactive readers, fairly.** Someone who repeatedly accepts copies but never opens or responds may stop being invited, judged on participation rather than rating.

WHAT I TRACK FOR YOU

- Name & email
- Preferred format
- Store / region
- Series books read
- Approved / declined
- ARC sent
- Review posted
- Follow-up sent
- Invite next time?

Find your readers, without the overwhelm of searching for them.

How an ARC campaign runs

A full ARC campaign runs eight to ten weeks end to end. The exact days flex; the order doesn't. One thing shapes the timing:

ARC readers read a lot of books. Give them too long between the copy and release day, and by the time your book launches they're three books further on, and have forgotten what they loved about yours.

8–10 wks

a full campaign, end to end, from planning to post-release.

6–8 wks

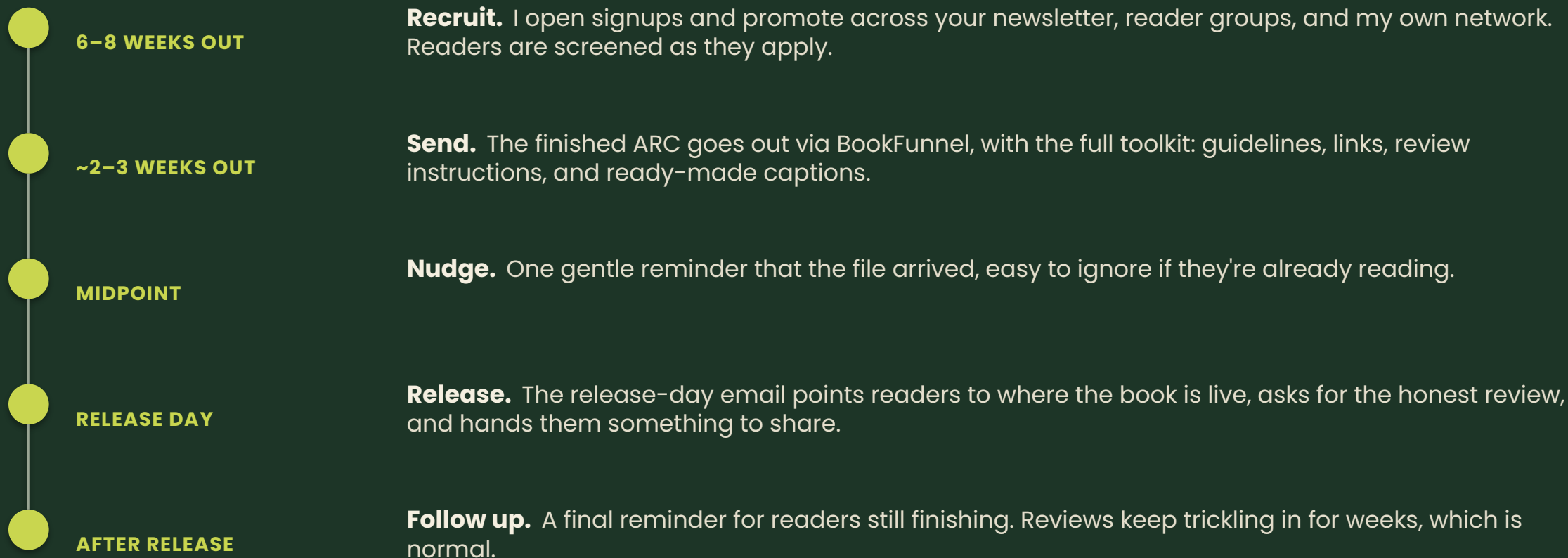
before release, recruitment opens and signups fill.

2–3 wks

before release, the finished copies go out.

Time it wrong and the review arrives after the moment it counted, or the reader has moved on and never posts it.

From Signup to Release Week



The Five Emails, and What's Inside Each

1 Approval

Dates, expectations, format, content warnings, and how to reach me.

2 ARC delivery

The BookFunnel link, the review window, the disclosure line (e.g. “I received a free advance copy and am reviewing voluntarily”), and troubleshooting.

3 Midpoint check

Confirm the file arrived, repeat the help route, and never mention missing reviews.

4 Release day

Live retailer links, the Goodreads link, and optional social assets to share.

5 Final follow-up

Thank readers, acknowledge those still reading, and give an easy opt-out.

I write and send all five for you. You never draft a reader email.

When the Standard Count-Back Changes

January Releases

They compete with the entire holiday season. I push to get January ARCs out before the holiday break, rather than counting straight back from the date. No one is reading your ARC on Boxing Day.

Physical & Digital

Sending physical ARCs or PR boxes? Those go early, because they create photos and buzz in the run-up. Digital ARCs stay held until close to release week, so the reading finishes when the review counts.

The order is fixed: physical early, digital late. Never the other way around.

When reviews start appearing

This is the question every author asks, usually a little too early: when will I see reviews?

Reviews usually start appearing from release day, for a mechanical reason. If your ARCs haven't gone out yet, the review window simply hasn't opened.

Release day

is when the bulk of reviews start appearing, not before.

10–20%

of your team leaving a review is a good, normal return. Part of why it isn't higher: Amazon only lets accounts with \$50+ of spend in the past year post a review at all.

Weeks

is how long reviews keep trickling in after launch.

If the copies aren't out yet, the reviews can't be either.

Which Platform, and When

GOODREADS

Accepts reviews before release day, and it's where early reader discussion builds. It isn't a retailer review, so it won't appear on your Amazon page.

RETAIL STORES

Amazon, Apple, Kobo and the rest usually only accept reviews once the book is live. These help buyers on that store's page.

YOUR STORE

Selling wide or direct? Point readers to the shops that matter to you, where their reviews and ratings help shoppers judge the book on that store.

So a quiet review period before release is completely normal. The copies are being read, and most reviews can only post once the book is live.

What a Healthy Return Looks Like

“Across the ARC campaigns I run, I plan on roughly 10–20% of a team posting a review. It's healthy, not a shortfall.”

Readers are volunteers juggling their own lives, their own TBRs, and their own moods. A team of fifty giving you eight to ten honest reviews at launch is exactly what a healthy campaign looks like.

~1 in 6

readers is a realistic, healthy conversion to a posted review.

ON RATINGS: LET READERS DECIDE

Readers choose their own rating. My job is to make reviewing easy and to leave the rating entirely to them. A thoughtful three-star review still helps the right reader recognize the book is for them, and coaching ratings is the fastest way to lose a reader's trust (and breach a retailer's terms).

Readers reach their own conclusions. Reviews are never bought, and never nudged toward a number.

When Things Go Wrong: Part One

Most campaign problems are routine. Here's how I handle the ones that come up, and most of it happens on my side.

Signups are low. We promote in more places, extend the window, lean on genre groups and my network.

Too many unsuitable readers apply. They're screened out on the genre question, and a vague answer is a soft no.

BookFunnel emails hit spam. The delivery email tells readers to check promotions and whitelist the sender.

A reader can't load the file. BookFunnel's live help handles it, which is what it's for.

The release date moves. We reset the count-back and tell the team once, clearly.

A retailer link isn't live yet. We send the link we have, note the rest is coming, update on release day.

When It Gets Trickier

Amazon removes a review. It happens, often for reasons nobody can see. We don't chase a single removed review.

A reader posts a low rating. That's allowed, and honest. We don't reply to it, and never ask them to change it.

A reader finds a typo. Even a finished, proofed book can have one slip through. We thank them, pass it to editing, and never turn them into an unpaid proofreader.

Someone shares the ARC. The watermark shows which copy it was. Verify what you can, revoke access, apply your ARC guidelines.

Few reviews on release day. Normal. They trickle in for weeks. The gentle follow-up goes out and we wait.

You're tempted to over-remind. We don't. One nudge, then trust them. Chasing volunteers is how you lose them.

Do These

- ✓ **Ask for honest reviews, always.** Never positive ones. Honesty is the only thing you request.
- ✓ **Make it effortless.** Give the exact links, the review window, and ready-made captions.
- ✓ **Thank readers, often.** They're giving you their time for free.
- ✓ **Allow DNF freely.** "This one wasn't for me" is a normal, healthy outcome.
- ✓ **Point review links at the book's listing.** Never your author page, which isn't where it sells.
- ✓ **Set expectations early.** Tell readers when and where to review, before they need to.

Keep your contact with readers useful and light, rather than turning every message into a request.

Never Do These

- ✗ Never pressure, guilt, or chase readers for reviews.
- ✗ Never imply that future ARC access depends on a good review.
- ✗ Never ask readers to withhold reviews under a certain star rating.
- ✗ Never treat the team as free labor or unpaid marketers.
- ✗ Never buy reviews or use a service that guarantees a number. It breaches Amazon's terms and can get an account deleted.
- ✗ Never ask readers not to review just because the feedback stung.
- ✗ Never load the team with close family or friends. Amazon strips reviews from anyone with a personal or financial tie to you, like a shared address or payment method.

Bully or beg, and you don't just lose a review. You lose the team, and word travels fast.

Building a Team That Comes Back

An ARC team isn't a one-time list you burn through and rebuild. It's a group of readers you keep, invited to each new book across your whole catalog.

Treated well, each launch starts warmer than the last, because the team already knows your work and already wants the next one.

They return

a reader who felt respected signs up again. That's what keeps a team alive.

It grows

every book, your team is a little bigger and a little warmer.

They trust you

and readers who felt respected last time are the ones who sign up again.

How you treat your readers follows you, in both directions.

How I Look After the ARC Community

- 1 Communicate like a person.**
Warm, clear, never a policy memo.
- 2 Protect the reader's time.**
No guilt, no chasing, no deadlines that punish.
- 3 Invite, don't enlist.**
The team is asked to each relevant book; opting in is easy.
- 4 Give them everything they need.**
Every link, every date, every caption, done for them.
- 5 Welcome honesty, even critical.**
“Not for me, but perfect for X reader” is review culture working.
- 6 Let people step back.**
Life interrupts reading. “No problem at all” keeps them for next time.

Readers who had a good experience are more likely to join you again for the next book.

BookFunnel: How the Book Reaches Readers

BookFunnel is the delivery tool most ARC campaigns run on. It converts your file to the right format for each reader's device, watermarks every copy to the individual reader, and gives each one a one-tap “get my book” button plus live help if they get stuck. It takes the messiest part of a campaign (getting the file to everyone cleanly) off your plate.

Auto-format

One upload, and every device is handled: Kindle, Kobo, Apple, apps.

Per-reader watermark

Built in, no manual work. Every copy is traceable to its reader.

You invite me

You set up the account and invite me, then I run the sendout. You never wrestle with “certified mail.”

Once you invite me to the account, I handle all of the BookFunnel setup and sending.

Choosing a BookFunnel Plan

Plan names and features shift over time, so choose by what it does, not what it's called. For an ARC team, the plan needs to cover:

- ✓ **Certified delivery** the ARC-grade sending method, not just a basic download link.
- ✓ **Your team's size** enough reader volume for the whole list, not a handful.
- ✓ **Sending to a list** delivering to your team at once, not one reader at a time.
- ✓ **Integration** a link to your email tool, if you use one, sometimes a paid add-on.

Names like Mid-List, Bestseller, and Publisher come and go, and integration may be included or a paid add-on. Confirm the current tiers on bookfunnel.com.

If I'm running your campaign, I'll tell you exactly which plan you need.

Beyond Your Own Team: NetGalley

Your ARC team is readers who already know you. NetGalley is different: it puts your book in front of professional reviewers, librarians, booksellers, and media who don't know you yet.

YOUR ARC TEAM

Readers who chose you. Warm, personal, built for release-week reviews. This is what ARC Team Management covers.

NETGALLEY

A marketplace of vetted industry reviewers. Wider reach, more editorial and trade reviews, though less personal. A different tool for a different job.

NetGalley Without the Full Price Tag

A standalone NetGalley membership runs into the hundreds of dollars a year, which is hard to justify for a single title. A co-op listing solves that: you rent a slot on an established NetGalley account for a fraction of the cost, and still reach the same professional reviewers.

Victory Editing runs the co-op I recommend to authors.

[Explore the Victory Editing NetGalley Co-op →](#)

An affiliate link. It costs you nothing extra, and it helps keep this guide free.

Try NetGalley on a co-op first. Buy your own account only once you know you'll use it.

What I Need From You

The campaign runs on my side. What I need from you is small, and it comes in three parts.

1

Hand over the pieces

Final files, cover, blurb, buy links, release date, and your honest content warnings. That's the bulk of your job, done once.

2

Set up BookFunnel & invite me

Open the account, invite me in, and I run the sendout. You never touch certified mail or campaign links.

3

Show up for your readers

Reshare when a reader tags you, be gracious, and don't panic about review timing. Warmth from the author goes a long way.

Once we start, none of it waits on you. You've handed me the book, and I run the rest.

Different Authors, Different Campaigns

Debut, no mailing list

We lean on genre groups and my reader network. Recruit longer; expect a smaller first team.

Established with a team

We invite your existing readers first, then top up. Your warmest, fastest campaigns.

Later book in a series

We screen for readers who've read the earlier books, so nobody reviews from confusion.

Wide or direct sales

We point readers to the stores that matter to you, not Amazon by default.

Rapid release

We compress the window and keep digital ARCs close to each release date.

Backlist relaunch

We drop the “before release day” framing and build renewed reviews and visibility.

What Happens, and When

Your campaign timeline on one page, from your side of it. You bookend it; I run the middle.

6–8 WEEKS OUT

You send files, blurb, dates, links, and content warnings. I open and promote recruitment.

6–3 WEEKS OUT

I recruit and vet the team across your genre's channels and my own reader network.

2–3 WEEKS OUT

ARCs go out via BookFunnel with the full toolkit. A gentle midpoint nudge follows.

RELEASE DAY

The release-day email points readers to your live links. Reviews begin to appear.

THE WEEKS AFTER

A final follow-up goes out. Reviews keep arriving. Your team stays, ready for the next book.

You'll get your own dated version of this the day we begin.

The Shorthand, Decoded

ARC

Advance Reader Copy. Your finished book, out early for review.

DNF

Did Not Finish. A normal, allowed outcome, no penalty.

TBR

To Be Read. The list of books a reader is planning to get to.

Beta

A reader who reads the draft before editing, for feedback.

Wide / KU

Sold everywhere, or exclusive to Kindle Unlimited.

Co-op

Renting a slot on a shared NetGalley account.

Watermark

A per-reader stamp that traces a leaked file.

HEA

Happily Ever After. The romance reader's non-negotiable.



You'd rather be writing.



So let me run the ARC campaign. Recruitment, toolkit, delivery, reader care, and release day are handled, with the team reading before launch and everything they need to review the moment your book goes live. You get the campaign without ever opening the spreadsheet behind it.

Ready to build your team? Let's talk.

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