



LITERARY INSPIRED · A FREE FIELD GUIDE

The Author Newsletter Field Guide

Why the list is the audience you can keep, and how to build one that readers want to be on.

For authors who'd rather be writing.

literaryinspired.com

START HERE

What's inside

01	The premise	Why an email list beats every platform you don't control.
02	The foundation	Starting a list from zero: the lead magnet and where the signup lives.
03	The welcome	What the first few emails should do, and the sequence that does it.
04	The rhythm	How often to send without burning out or being forgotten.
05	The pitfalls	Selling every issue, vanishing for months, and the other ways a list dies.
06	The glossary	Open rate, list health, welcome sequence. The jargon, decoded.

Skip to Chapter 06 if someone has just said "open rate" at you.

The audience you can take with you

Every platform rents you reach. You post, and the platform decides how many of your own followers get to see it. Then it changes the rules, usually without telling you.

Social platforms regularly change which formats they push, and authors who built everything on one format can wake up to a very different app.

An email list changes that. The reader who signed up hears from you directly, without a feed algorithm deciding whether your message is shown.

The list is the part that stays yours when a platform changes.

100%

of your subscribers you can export and take with you

0

feed algorithms deciding who sees what you send

Days

how fast a platform can change its format

What you're working with on a rented platform

Reach on a platform is never guaranteed. The platform decides how widely each post is distributed, and those rules change.

Your reach is the platform's call

A good week is the platform showing your post widely. A bad week is the same post reaching almost no one. The post didn't change; the platform's distribution did.

The terms change without notice

Formats, feeds and follower reach get rewritten overnight. You rebuild around the new rules, and then they change again.

The numbers are inflated

A view is counted the moment a thumb pauses. It isn't a reader and it isn't a sale. A big view count tells you more about the platform than about your audience.

You can't take them with you

If your account vanishes tomorrow, so does every follower. You have no way to reach a single one of them. A list you can export.

THE PREMISE

2.5 million views. 25 subscribers.

In one case I looked at, an author had put real money and two years into a platform and built up around 2.5 million views. It looked like it was working.

Then you check how many of those views became subscribers the author could contact. Around twenty-five.

The views were the platform's number, and they converted to almost nothing on the side the author controlled.

There is little point pouring effort into a channel your readers won't follow you off. Reach you can't keep counts for far less than it looks.

2,500,000

views

25

subscribers you can reach

The number that matters is the one you can contact directly.

Build what you keep

Put your effort where the result stays yours. Build the list, and use the platforms to feed it.

What you own

- The list, and every address on it.
- The right to reach a reader directly.
- A file you can export and take anywhere.

What you rent

- Followers the platform can hide from you.
- Reach that moves with the algorithm.
- A number you can't take when you leave.

Post on the rented platform. Move the reader to the one you own.

How to start a list before you have one

You do not wait until you feel ready to have a newsletter. You put the signup up now, so people can join while you are still busy being everywhere else.

1 Set the signup up before you want it

The worst time to start collecting subscribers is the week you want to launch. Put a form live today, even if you don't send anything for months. Every person who signs up in the meantime is one you'd otherwise have lost.

2 You need three things to start

An email platform, a signup form, and one reason to sign up. Everything else is refinement you can add later.

3 Start with the readers you have

A hundred people who asked to hear from you can matter more than ten thousand who scrolled past once. Start small, and start now.

What makes a good reader magnet

A reader magnet is the free thing you give in exchange for a signup. The simplest ones, tied closely to your books, tend to do the most.

Give them a real reading experience

A prequel novella, a bonus chapter, a deleted scene, a short story in your world. Readers sign up for more of the thing they already like, not for a discount code.

Connect it to your books

A magnet that leads straight into a series or first book gives readers an obvious next read. Someone who loves the free novella is one click from starting the paid one.

Deliver it instantly and painlessly

Signup, then the book, in one step. Tools like BookFunnel hand the file over for you. Test the delivery before you promote it; a broken download loses the reader immediately.

Keep the offer simple

"Get the free prequel" beats a paragraph of persuasion. The reader decides in about two seconds. Give them the two-second version.

Where the signup goes

A signup form only works if readers can find it. Put the same link everywhere a reader already meets you.

The back of every book

The last page, right after "The End". A reader who just finished is one of your most receptive, because they have just spent hours with your work. Give them somewhere to go.

Your link-in-bio

Not your book's buy page. Send the tap to the signup, where you can reach them again, instead of to a sale you only make once.

A pinned post and your profiles

One line, one link, on every platform you use. The people already following you are the easiest to convert.

Your website

For an author building a reader list, the signup should be easy to find and near the top, not buried on a contact page.

Your email signature

Add the signup link under your name. Every email you send then includes it, at no extra effort.

Wherever you guest

Podcasts, blog features, group takeovers. Send new readers to the list, not to a single book they may not be ready for.

It is the same link every time. Copy it once, paste it everywhere.

Who belongs on your list, and who to let go

A list is people who chose to hear from you. Keeping it that way protects your deliverability and everyone else on it.

Who belongs

- People who deliberately signed up.
- Buyers, ARC readers or giveaway entrants only if they also opted in.
- Anyone you can honestly say asked for your newsletter.

Who to remove

- Hard bounces and dead addresses, cleared out promptly.
- Long-term non-openers, after one re-engagement email.
- Anyone you imported who never asked to hear from you.

A smaller list of people who chose you is more useful than a big one that never opted in.

What happens after someone subscribes

The welcome sequence is a short run of automatic emails that goes out the moment someone joins. Welcome emails usually get strong engagement, because the subscriber just asked to hear from you. Set it up once and it runs automatically.

Why the welcome sequence matters

- ✓ Interest is highest right after signup, so don't leave a new subscriber waiting weeks to hear from you.
- ✓ It sets the expectation: who you are, how often you'll write, and what they'll get. Readers who know what's coming stay.
- ✓ **Early opens and replies tell the inbox your emails are wanted, which helps every future one land.**

The welcome sequence, email by email

Four short emails over the first week or two. Automated, warm, and never a hard sell.

Email 1: sent instantly

Deliver the free book

Hand over what they signed up for, immediately, with the download front and center. Say a warm hello and nothing else. Keep this first email focused on delivering what they came for.

Email 2: a day or two later

Tell them who you are

A short, human introduction. What you write, why you write it, and what to expect when an email from you arrives. Let it sound like you, not like a press release.

Email 3: a few days later

Point them at your books

Now they've read the free thing, show them where to go next. Your first-in-series or your best backlist book, with one clear link.

Email 4: end of week two

Invite a reply, set the rhythm

Ask them one easy question and tell them how often you'll write. Inviting a reply can start a real conversation, and it helps future emails reach the inbox as wanted mail.

WORKED EXAMPLE

A worked welcome email

THE GOAL

Deliver the free book, sound like a person, and ask for nothing. This is Email 1. Names invented, for illustration.

Subject: Your copy of Wilder Tides is here

Hi there,

Thank you for signing up. Here's the book you came for, no strings:

[Download Wilder Tides]

I'm Josie. I write small-town romances about people who think they've got life figured out, right up until someone inconvenient moves in next door.

You'll hear from me a couple of times this week, then about once a month.

No spam, no daily emails, I promise.

For now, go and meet the harbourmaster. He's grumpy. You'll like him.

Josie x

WHY IT WORKS

- The download is the first thing, not the last. The promise is kept before anything is asked.
- It sets the cadence out loud, so the reader isn't ambushed by the second email, or forgotten by the fifth.
- It has a voice. "He's grumpy. You'll like him." tells the reader more about the book than a paragraph of description would.

How often to send

There is no perfect number. The right schedule is the one you can keep for a year without dreading it.

Once a month is a fine place to start

Regular and low-pressure. It is enough to stay familiar, and rare enough that you can give readers a reason to open each one. Move to fortnightly only when you have things to say, not because a guide told you to.

Showing up regularly matters more than often

A reader forgives a quiet month. Six silent months followed by a launch email is what loses them. Predictability is what keeps a list warm.

Send when you have something, within the rhythm

A cover reveal, a release, a real story from your writing life. If a month is empty, a short warm hello still beats silence.

What goes in a regular issue

A newsletter people stay on is mostly for them. The sell is small, and it comes last.

01	Something to read or feel	Most	A story from your writing life, a recommendation, a behind-the-scenes moment. The reason they open it at all.
02	News they'd want anyway	Some	A cover, a release date, a sale, a new chapter. News, not manufactured urgency.
03	A little of you	A bit	The book you're loving, the thing that made you laugh, the reason this month was hard. People subscribe to a person.
04	One clear ask	One	Buy, preorder, review, reply. One, stated plainly, at the end. Never five asks fighting each other.

The ask comes last, and it's the smallest part of the email.

The two lines a reader sees first

The subject line and the preview text decide whether an email is opened at all. Treat them as one unit.

Say something specific

A concrete detail beats a vague tease. “The scene I cut from chapter one” gets opened; “An update” does not.

Do not fake urgency

Manufactured “last chance” lines train readers to distrust you. Save urgency for when it is real.

Let the preview add, not repeat

The preview text is a second line, not an echo of the subject. Use it to give one more reason to open.

Write for a phone

Your subject line also needs to work on a phone, where only the first few words may show. Put what matters first.

Skip the deceptive tricks

No fake “RE:” or “FWD:”, no misleading “you won”. It works once, then costs you trust.

One idea per subject

A subject that tries to say three things says none. Pick the detail most likely to make a reader curious.

A specific subject line gives the reader a clearer reason to open than a vague tease.

Sending the right email to the right readers

A segment is a slice of your list grouped by something they did. A few simple ones let you send more relevant emails.

By series or pen name

Romance readers and fantasy readers under one name do not need the same launch email.

Your ARC and launch team

The readers who help you launch want early, specific asks the rest of the list does not.

By the magnet they joined for

Someone who downloaded the cozy prequel is telling you what they want to read next.

Launch-day buyers

Readers who bought on release day are your warmest audience for the next book.

Audiobook and format interest

Tag the readers who ask about audio, so an audiobook invite reaches the right people.

Lapsed openers

Group readers who have gone quiet, so you can try a re-engagement email before removing them.

Start with one or two segments. You do not need a complicated system to be relevant.

How the newsletter changes for a release

Between launches, once a month is plenty. Around a release, a short sequence keeps readers with you from preorder to release week.

Preorder announcement

Tell the list the moment the preorder is live. Early orders help the book on day one.

Cover reveal

A cover reveal is an easy, visual email that builds anticipation without asking for a sale.

ARC and launch-team invite

Invite your most engaged readers to read early and help spread the word.

Release day

One clear email: the book is live, here is the link, thank you for being here.

The week after

A gentle follow-up for readers who missed it, and a light nudge for reviews.

A later sale

When the book goes on promotion, that is a natural reason to write again.

Step up around a launch, then step back to your usual rhythm. Readers can tell the difference.

Newsletter and Substack do different jobs

You can run both. If you do, give each a clear purpose so subscribers aren't getting the same thing twice.

The email newsletter

Short, personal, and sales-aware. It arrives in an inbox they check. This is the list you own, and the one you use for release news, preorders and launch emails. Keep it tight.

Substack

The debrief. Process, craft, world-building, longer essays that surface to new readers on the feed. It's a discovery tool, and it can host paid subscriptions or serialized fiction too.

Some authors use one, some use both. Decide what each one is for before sending the same material through both.

How newsletter engagement slips

Newsletter engagement usually drops gradually. A reader stops opening, then forgets they subscribed, then leaves. Here is how it usually starts.

The list you only email to sell

If every issue is an ask, opens fall and stay fallen. Readers learn that your name in the inbox means "buy something," and they stop looking.

The disappear-then-pitch

Six silent months, then a launch email out of nowhere. It reads as "I only remembered you because I need money," and it often produces a wave of unsubscribes.

The list you never warm up

Buying or importing a pile of addresses that never asked for you. It damages your deliverability and gets your mail filtered as spam.

Habits that kill a list, and why

Selling in every single issue

Opens drop and stay down. If every email is an ask, readers have little reason to open between launches.

No personality, just announcements

If an email could have come from any author, readers have no particular reason to open yours. Your voice is a big part of what keeps them.

Never letting them reply

A no-reply address tells the reader this is a broadcast rather than a relationship. Replies are a positive engagement signal, and they help future emails reach the inbox.

Vanishing, then reappearing to pitch

The comeback that only happens at launch reads as pure self-interest. Readers feel used.

One long wall of text

A newsletter is skimmed on a phone in a queue. A single dense block gets closed, not read.

Chasing new signups, ignoring the list

The people already on it are the ones who buy. Chasing new signups while rarely emailing the ones you have gets you very little.

Reaching the inbox

Getting delivered is mostly about trust signals your provider and your habits build over time.

Send from your own domain

An address at your own domain (you@yourpen.com) is trusted more than a free Gmail or Yahoo one. Most providers help you set this up.

Turn on SPF, DKIM and DMARC

These are authentication records your email platform walks you through. They tell inbox providers the mail is really from you.

Never buy or scrape a list

Bought lists are full of traps that damage your sender reputation. Grow slowly and honestly instead.

Clear out hard bounces

Remove dead addresses as they appear. Sending to them repeatedly tells providers you are careless.

Watch spam complaints

A few people marking you as junk does serious damage. Only email people who asked, and make unsubscribing easy.

Warm a neglected list gradually

If you have not sent in months, start with your most recent, most engaged subscribers before emailing everyone at once.

Good deliverability comes from sending wanted mail consistently and keeping the list clean.

WORKED EXAMPLE

If you have gone quiet: the comeback

THE GOAL

You went silent for months. Reappearing with a hard sell backfires. Say hello and be straightforward first.

Subject: It's been a while

I haven't sent one of these in months, so I wanted to say hello properly before turning up with book news as if no time had passed. I'm still here, still writing, and there's a new book on the way. I'll tell you about that next time. Today I just wanted to check in. If you've forgotten why you're here, you signed up for the free prequel, and you can unsubscribe below any time. Thanks for sticking around. Josie x

WHY IT WORKS

- It names the silence instead of pretending it didn't happen. Readers can feel a papered-over gap.
- It asks for nothing this issue, so you're re-earning attention before making any pitch.
- It offers the unsubscribe openly, which respects the reader and leaves you with a more engaged list.

The jargon, decoded

Your email platform will show you all of these and define none of them.

Open rate: The share of subscribers who opened an issue. Treat it as approximate, since privacy tools inflate it, and watch the trend over time.

Click rate: The share who clicked a link inside. Usually a truer measure of interest than opens.

List health: Whether your subscribers are real, engaged, and reachable. A smaller engaged list is generally healthier than a large inactive one.

Deliverability: Whether your email arrives in the inbox or the spam folder. It underpins everything else here.

Sender reputation: How much inbox providers trust you. Built by people opening and replying, wrecked by spam complaints.

Bounce: An email that couldn't be delivered. A hard bounce is a dead address; clean them out.

Unsubscribe rate: The share who opt out of an issue. A small, steady trickle is normal and healthy.

Spam complaint: A reader marking you as junk. One of the most harmful signals, and a few can damage your deliverability.

Segment: A slice of your list grouped by something they did, so you can send the right people the right email.

Double opt-in: Making a new subscriber confirm by clicking a link. Fewer signups, far cleaner list.

Setup and sending

The setup terms. Learn these once and the platform stops looking intimidating.

Lead magnet / reader magnet: The free thing you give in exchange for a signup. For authors, usually a novella or bonus content.

Welcome sequence: The automatic run of emails a new subscriber gets right after joining. It reaches them while their interest is fresh.

Automation: Any email that sends itself based on a trigger, like signing up. Set it up once, then check it now and then.

ESP: Email service provider. The platform you send from: MailerLite, Mailchimp, Flodesk, and others.

Reader magnet delivery: The tool that hands the free book over, like BookFunnel. Removes the download friction.

A single metric can jump around. Compare it with your recent sends before deciding something has changed.

List: Everyone who has signed up. The audience this guide is about.

Tag: A label on a subscriber, so you can tell a launch-day buyer from a brand-new signup.

From name: The name in the inbox. Use yours, a real one. "Josie Marchetti" gets opened; "Newsletter" gets ignored.

Plain-text vs designed: A simple letter-style email, or a branded one with images. Plain often feels more personal and can perform better.

RSS-to-email: Turning a new blog or Substack post into an email automatically. Useful, but not on every platform.

A sending rhythm you can keep

If a content calendar helps you, use one. If it becomes another thing to maintain, a monthly reminder is enough. What matters is a schedule you can keep.

1 Set the welcome once

Four emails, automated. Set it up once and every future subscriber is looked after automatically.

2 Write one issue a month

One story, one update, one small ask. Put it on a repeating day so it never becomes a decision.

3 Keep the signup everywhere

Back of the book, bio, signature, site. Once it's in place, it collects readers while you write.

Guardrails at a glance

- The list is the audience you keep. Platforms only lend you reach.
- Put the signup up now, not in the week you launch.
- Make the free magnet more of your writing, rather than a discount.
- Set the welcome sequence up once; it usually gets strong engagement.
- Serve far more often than you sell.
- A schedule you keep matters more than a frequent one you abandon.
- Write like a person. Your voice is a big part of why readers stay.
- Never disappear then reappear with a pitch. If you went quiet, say so first.
- Watch list health rather than follower counts. A small, engaged list is the goal.

Now go and write to the people who chose you.

A list builds slowly, which is part of its value. Subscribers stay while platform numbers reset, so the reader who joins today can still be there for the book you publish in two years.

Set the signup up, write the welcome, and send one real thing a month. It's simple, though it does take some consistency to keep going.

IF YOU'D RATHER NOT BUILD IT ALONE

Literary Inspired sets up and runs author newsletters and Substacks, so the list gets built while you get back to writing.

literaryinspired.com

Give readers an easy way to join, and start today.