

Field Guide #2

ENTICE -

helping readers find you

Exploring the intersection
of Substack & entrepreneurial writing

by
Joyce Wycoff



August 23, 2023

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Note from Joyce:

Remember ...

**this is YOUR creative project.
Be YOU!**

**Send questions or
comments to:**

jwycoff@gratitudemojo.com

What's Here

Substack Field Guide #2		
Lessons	Do Now	Begin
Readability	Subscribe Widely	Notes & Restacking
Forgetting Curve	Rethink Big 3	Develop Calendar
Signature Touches	Rework About Page	Post Recipe

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Search Categories
Paywalls
IMHO
Ponies

*"You never have to change anything
you got up in the middle of the night to write."*

— Saul Bellow



5 E's Marketing Model

Substack Marketing One Step at a Time

How many elements and features make up Substack?

It seems as though there are more every day and it's hard to tell which are critical and which can be done later. Until we have a mental model of the process involved with bringing a stranger through the Substack door in a way that makes her/him a loyal reader, it's hard to know where to spend our marketing time.

This is the simple model we will use throughout the *Field Guide*:

ENTICE - ENTER - ENGAGE - EXIT - EXTEND

Goal: If you want to ...	Then: Focus on these ...
* ENTICE ... Readers are busy and time is precious. To entice readers to our newsletters, they have to know we exist. We need to help readers find us.	Main elements: title, bio profile, Brief description, search tags, categories,.
ENTER ... First impressions are crucial. Our front door is made up of post titles and subtitles, how we use our header space, graphics and the look of our posts and emails. Our front door should invite readers to step in.	Main elements: Post titles and subtitles, paywall, navigation bar, about page, services promised, graphics.
ENGAGE ... Readers want an experience. They want something that makes them say "wow!" and talk about it to their friends. They want to be invited in and welcomed like esteemed guests. Newsletter readers want connection.	Main elements: welcome email, email headers and footers, questions, headlines/skimmability, graphics/photos, index pages, consistent schedule, home page, polls, challenges.
EXIT ... How readers feel when they leave plays a huge role in their willingness to return. Reading one post does not make a fan; they need to want to come back for more. Readers want to feel valued and appreciated.	Main elements: calls to action, buttons, likes, comments, wrap up summaries, coming attractions.
EXTEND ... Making the experience last is key to establishing a strong relationship. Ask them to share with friends or social media ... or give them something unexpected. Readers become fans when they feel part of the community.	Main elements: Recommendations, share, free one-month subscriptions for friends, extra value items, recognition, chats.

Substack Writers' Job #1: Create Value

Before you can ENTICE readers to your Substack, you have to have a sense of who THEY are and what they want.

Substack is a technology designed to be easy to use. All of the “how to’s” are simple ... do this, get that. That’s great, however why do you use each piece and how do they fit together into a marketing strategy? That’s where the **Field Guide** and this simple, **5 Es** marketing plan come into play.

SCOPE: Marketing, of course, includes everything outside of Substack ... social media, advertising, direct sales, conferences, etc. However, the first issues of the Substack Field Guide will focus ONLY on using Substack elements and features.

Over the next several **Field Guides** we will take each step of the marketing plan and show you the why’s and hows to most effectively use the Substack elements to achieve your goals and create value for your readers.


More beautiful examples ... Less theory

Here’s a great read from Karen Cherry
[How to Go From 0 to 2000 Subscribers](#)

Three ways to grow from ZERO that you can start doing today

Karen tells a great story about [Kristina God](#) who creating a **Brief Description** with a value proposition that reads: “A weekly advice column about starting your online business (part-time), writing, earning money, promoting content, driving growth, and accelerating your success.”

Boiled down to its essence: writing is intended to make readers feel something or understand something. While the little mantra I developed during my fiction days (make ‘em laugh, cry or wonder why) doesn’t quite cover it; it always makes me stop and think about whether or not my writing is having an impact, bringing value to my readers. **That’s always the bottomline.**



Make ‘em
laugh, cry,
or wonder why.

***What are your creative
gifts you can share
with your readers?***

Trail Guide: Mike Sowden, *Everything Is Amazing*

Trail Guide: Mike Sowden, *Everything Is Amazing*



Everything Is Amazing

By Mike Sowden

Over 18,000 subscribers

A newsletter about seeing more, feeling more, and asking better questions.
Curiosity makes everything better - but can it be “learned”?
Let’s find out.

I first came across Mike in Office Hours. He was always friendly, encouraging and helpful. I liked his title enough to check it out and found an over-active curiosity exploring parts of the world that I’m also curious about. His writing style is casual and he explains complex things in a way that makes me see the magic and also wind up feeling a little smarter. Plus, he makes me laugh a lot with his rather self-deprecating humor.

**(Fascinating content with an engaging style makes
Mike a great Trail Guide.)**



Earned Badge: Titles and Subtitles

[The \(Mostly\) Forgotten Battle For American Independence...in Yorkshire.](#)

Sorry, *what*? And *where*?

[Oh, How Our Cities Will Shimmer](#)

The colourful weirdness of our urban future - or maybe not so much?



Earned Badge: Reader Engagement (Questions)

[Open Thread: What Would You Do With Your Nerdiest Year?](#)

[Science Fiction Helps Us Ask The Hardest Questions](#)

The second part of my interview with writer Antonia Malchik



Reader Delight

**[*Everything Is Amazing*](#) —
Substack I come back to frequently.
and learn from always.**

Trail Guide: Heather Brebaugh, *Kindness Magnet*



Heather Brebaugh

@heatherbrebaugh • Writes After 21 Club and 1 other publication

Author of 2 Substacks: *Kindness Magnet* (subscribers in 56 countries) and *After 21 Club* - A sweet retreat where Friday meets you on the way to life's little pleasures. Reviews, recommendations, and thoughts to share from multiple generations.

The #1 newsletter with science-based kindness habits you can use. Join us to improve your health, relationships, opportunities, and happiness. Now in 57 countries.

I was drawn into Heather's Substack by her subject and went back frequently because of the stories she tells and her willingness to share her own perspectives and challenges.

(Heather makes a great Trail Guide as she experiments frequently with form, constantly looking for better ways to connect with her readers.)



Earned Badge: Well-themed Stories

[Build Your Business Through Kindness](#)

Did I mention...it's Free

[Part 1: 1936 Olympics; Courageous Kindness](#)



Earned Badge: Signature Touches

(Opening graphics, quotes, humor)

[Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs... Meet Lunchbox Notes](#)

Love, Belonging and Self Esteem

[My Brain is a Washing Machine](#)

Or maybe a suitcase or a root beer float...



Reader Delight

[Kindness Magnet](#) —

Substack that always inspires me and makes me want to have coffee with the author.

Trail Guide: Heather Brebaugh, *Kindness Magnet*

***What are seeds to tend?
What are weeds to pull?***

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3 Lessons
3 Do Nows
3 Begins

Substack Field Guide #2		
Lessons	Do Now	Begin
Readability	Subscribe Widely	Notes & Restacking
Forgetting Curve	Rethink Big 3	Develop Calendar
Signature Touches	Rework About Page	Post Recipe

Lessons: These are bedrock for your newsletter. Summaries here will provide brief overviews and reminders, which is all many of you may need. Links and weekly posts will provide deeper information for those of you who need more.

Do Now: There are a thousand things you could be doing as you plan your time around your Substack. Writing your posts, of course, is Job 1 ... however, the lessons and tasks discussed here should take precedence over less crucial items ... especially while you're thinking about how to entice new readers.

Begin: These on-going items will become part of your work flow processes, improving not only the quality of your writing but also how well you attract and serve your readers.

CAVEAT:

**Substack is YOUR creative project ...
do it your way.**

The following pages are suggestions only!

LESSON #1: Readability Is Key

Readability

Short or Long? Length is not a measure of quality or value. Substack newsletters are delivered through email which leans toward short messages, but also online which supports longer, graphic-rich posts. Your posts should be as long as necessary to support your message while being as short as practical. (Some advocates suggest no more than 800 - 1,000 words in a post.) I believe people will read longer ... IF the message is important to THEM and if the quality of information and writing is excellent.

Sentence and paragraph length? Casual writing forms should telegraph. Newsletters are more casual than academic or scientific papers and need shorter paragraphs and shorter sentences. You might want to rethink a paragraph with more than four or five sentences.

Headings. Think skimmability. Think of your readers as if they are on a spectrum of interest levels and familiarity with what you're writing about. Some readers may want to savor every word; others though may just want to hit the high points. Remember, almost everyone in today's world is over-busy.

Black and white. Greyed out type seems to be "in" these days. And, graphics-oriented designers like to play with white text on dark backgrounds. Both of those elements make reading harder (not what we're going for) ... and, please for the sake of tired eyes, do not use a font size less than 10, which is what this is.

Avoid distractions. CAPS, !!!!, **colored type** (except for links and **emphasis**) all make reading and comprehension harder.

Bullets can be effective ... or off-putting. Great for lists, information, and clarity, they can also signal a lecturing, non-personal style.

Graphics should fit the message. Original art or photos can build relationships. Graphics that look "borrowed" or cheesy take away from the uniqueness of you and your message.

*Who are you
becoming?*

Forgetting Curve

LESSON #2: The Forgetting Curve

Most people forget 90% of what they've learned just a few hours after learning it. This phenomenon is known as the forgetting curve.* Here are some ideas to help your readers remember your message.

Built-in repetition: In my old workshop days, we were told to:

Tell 'em what you're going to tell them.

Tell them.

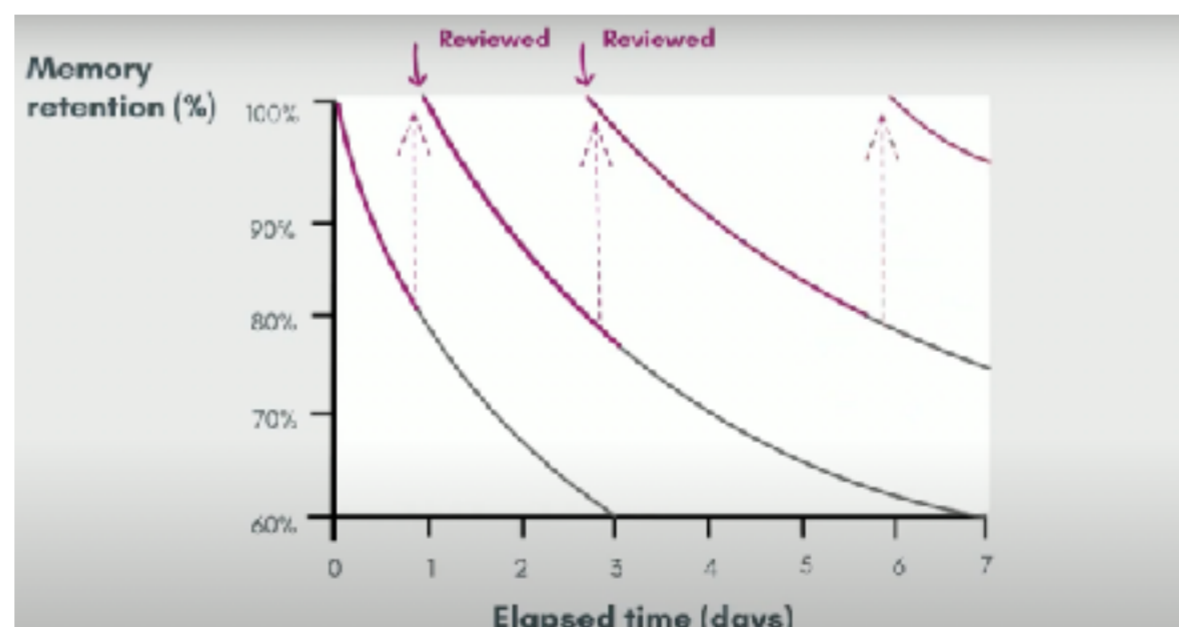
Tell them what you told them.

In a newsletter, for content you want readers to remember, you can do that by giving them (up front) a summary of what's coming, as well as a recap of what you want them to remember at the end.

Stories, metaphors, emotions: People remember what they understand and connect with most strongly.

Reinforce regularly: Highlighting key points with phrases like "in other words" or repeating points before going on to next ones, or recapping the highlights of a story before moving on to the next point can greatly reinforce memory.

Add to the sensory level: Create diagrams or models to add visual connections to your information; add videos, music, textures, and movement whenever possible.

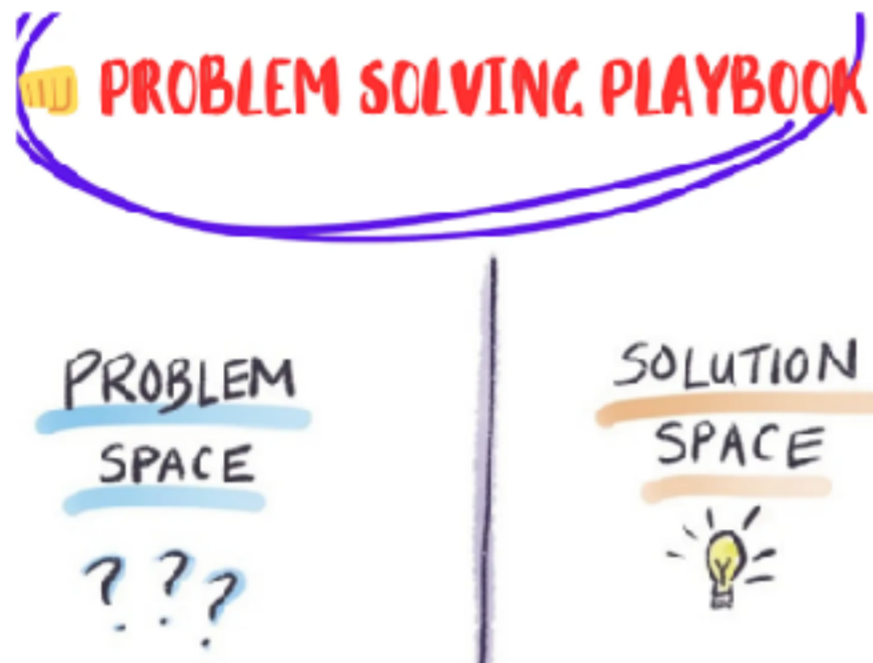


[Click here for short video on the forgetting curve.](#)

- * [How to Beat the Forgetting Curve](#)
- * [What Is the Learning Curve and How Can You Combat It?](#)

LESSON #3: Add Signature Touches

Style, quirks, voice, recognizable elements ... something you recognize immediately even before names are announced. Art by Georgia O'Keefe, a building by Gehry, a song by Bob Dylan, and Linda Ellerbee with her famous sign off: *"And so it goes."*



Sid Saladi at [Sid's Product Newsletter](#) (currently under a brand change to "The Product Channel" is a content-rich stack easily recognized by his simple, colorful graphics at the top of each post. He uses a lot of polls and his readers helped him validate his new branding direction.

Michael Estrin at [Situation Normal](#) starts a lot of his posts with eye-catching gifs. See example gif at his post: [The Lyft Driver's Guide to Divorce](#)



Missed opportunity or Challenge? I believe we have a missed opportunity here. Not many of the 175 Substacks I'm reviewing show unique signature items. **Maybe we should have a Challenge.** I just changed my Wordmark and accent color to purple and have begun ending my gratitude posts with a motivational sticker and the Substack Field Guide posts with an inspiring quote. ***What could you do to add your personality to your posts?***

Signature Touches

"What can we do now to restore hope to the future?"



Subscribe Widely

DO NOW #1: Subscribe Widely

A recent review of 50 Substack writers revealed that, on average, each of them subscribed to about 40 Substacks. **Why?**

Turns out that the more Substacks you see, the more you see beautiful examples and ideas to connect with your own readers. I currently review about 175 stacks and whenever I see someone interesting on Notes, Office Hours, or occasional subject searches, I add them to my list and freely borrow ideas and inspirations. Many are now “must reads” and budget stretchers.

Suggestion: Subscribe to 50 Substacks with at least a few in content areas outside your own interests. Look at their posts for format as well as how they handle content.

Here are 10 stacks to free subscribe to immediately (some of them will wind up in your paid category because of their value to YOU). You might want to save their welcome emails and posts to a “study file.” Read their About Pages and notice how they’ve organized their Home Page. ***What appeals to you and how could you incorporate that in your stack?***

[Cosmographia](#) ... Spotlight, page 23

[Everything Is Amazing](#) ... Trail Guide, page 6

[Kindness Magnet](#) ... Trail Guide, page 7

[Sarah Fay at Writers at Work](#) ... Substack coach/guide

[The Author Stack](#) ... Substack coach/guide

[Sparkle on Substack](#) ... Substack coach/guide

[Substack Soirée](#) ... Substack design guide

[PubStack Success](#) ... Substack guide

[Backstory Serial](#) ... Serialized fiction

[The Hungry Artist](#) ... Business of art and design

And, of course:

[gratitude mojo](#) ... Home of the Substack Field Guide

[Also, here is a list of 20 writing guides \(Substack and general\).](#)

DO NOW #2: Rethink Big 3

**Rethink
Big 3**

Title - Bio-profile - Brief Description: think of these as your advance team ... they should work together in harmony to invite **readers who want what you write about** into your world.

Imagine: The tour team for Dolly Parton puts up posters of lions and tigers and bears. **What might go wrong?** The people who know and love her will show up regardless. The people who *might* love her country music don't get the right message so they don't show up. The people who love lions and tigers and bears show up and are disappointed to find a country singer when they expected the *Wizard of Oz*.

**The Big 3 should TELEGRAPH who you are,
what you write about, and
the benefit you bring to your readers.**

Recently, we offered readers a Big 3 Challenge ([read here](#)) and 11 brave souls responded. I shared my opinions and invited them to resubmit. A few did, resulting in a back-and-forth. **Noha Beshir** stayed with it several rounds. Here is her before and **after**:

Original Title: Prone to Hyperbole

Bio: Noha shares thoughts on motherhood, faith, and the multi-generational immigrant experience. She writes to explore the questions and emotions that arise in her life, and to quiet the frantic, kinetic agitation within.

Brief Description: Introspections of a thoughtful hijabi in a volatile world

Revised Title: [Prone to Hyperbole by Noha Beshir](#)

Bio: Second generation Muslim Canadian Hijabi, writing my way through a volatile world.

Brief Description: Exploring the multi-generational, minority immigrant experience at the intersection of mental health, motherhood, and faith.

My insight: Rethinking the Big 3 clarifies thinking about what you want to write about as well as your benefits to readers.

**What question
do you need
to ask?**

Rework About Page

DO NOW #3: Rework Your About Page

While your Big 3 should *telegraph,* your About Page is where you and your readers meet over coffee ... a short coffee ... it's where you begin to build trust and make friends.

* Study these example About Pages for ideas.

[Cosmographia](#)

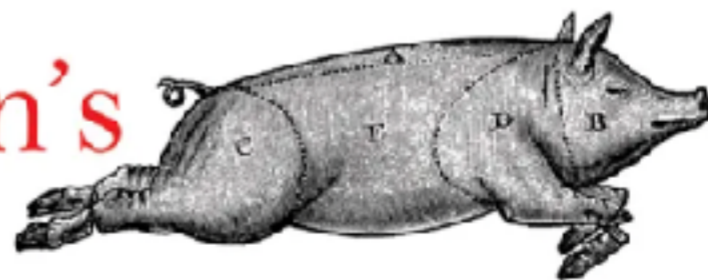


Join me on a journey to the faraway.

See more about [Cosmographia](#) on page 21

M.E. Rothwell's About Page for *Cosmographia* is a vision that required a lot of experimentation. Here's what he said about it: *I must have been through about 100 variations of my About Page, trying to distil what exactly it is that I want to write about, because as you noticed, the topics could be considered quite diffuse. Same with the design and aesthetic, and even the name Cosmographia is on its second iteration.*"

Poor Man's Feast



Check out: [Poor Man's Feast](#)

If you've earned it, share it.



Rework About Page (more)



Check out:

[Long Ago and Far Away](#)

Welcome to Long Ago & Far Away!

Do you crave historical fiction from off the beaten path? Are you searching for stories



Check out
the power
of one
key photo:

[Goatfury Writes](#)

Welcome In



Check out:
[Annika Is Dreaming](#)

The best way to introduce you to this newsletter is to first introduce myself. Hi, I'm Annika 🍷. I'm a Brooklyn based, West Coast born Black queer writer, designer, and social media technologist, with a deep love for dumplings and deep house records.

About Page

SHOW:

- who you are
- what you write
- why it's important for your readers

How could today
feel like play?

(C) Joyce Wycoff, 2023

Notes & Restacking

BEGIN #1: Notes & Restacking

Substack Notes is becoming the heart of our community and restacking is the pump that keeps it going. Tiptoe in and get a feel for how things work. Here's a strategy that could help: think grain of sand vs a pebble vs a boulder: **Be a pebble.**

Even though it looks like a simple click, there is an art to restacking ... and there is a prime directive: **be generous and avoid blatant self-promotion.** Restacking your own post is **being a boulder.** Occasional restacking with a snippet from your post is acceptable. Restacking someone else's post with a note of appreciation or expansion is you **being a pebble**, making a positive ripple in the Substack pond.

The art is in the note you add to the restack. Restacking sends a post you admire to the community Notes board ... a form of recommendation and advocacy attached to your name. It is you generously sharing your finds. While your name is attached to the restack, without a note attached, you're being a grain of sand, making little impact and missing a chance to be seen and make friends. **Be a positive pebble; don't boulder too often.**

Make your comments and notes generous, creative, and authentic. Here's a good example:



Sophia Efthimiadou 1h

Sophia · [Subscribe](#)

Shalom Auslander just launched a Substack! Come for the dark, stay for the humor

"So what are we going to do, folks? Lie on the floor, curled up in the fetal position and cry about it? No. We're going to lie on the floor, curled up in the fetal position and laugh about it."



Shalom Auslander

Welcome to The Fetal Position · [Subscribe](#)



BEGIN #2: Develop Calendar

“Consistent posting helps you build relationships with your subscribers and it is absolutely vital to success on Substack. Your readers won’t get to know you if you don’t show up in a predictable way in their inboxes.”

– Karen Cherry, Substack Coach

[\(Read full post here\)](#)

Frequency of your posts is one of the first decisions you will make. When I first began, I had a lot I wanted to say so I concocted a 4 times per week schedule. It didn’t take long for me to realize the error of my ways. Inboxes are full; people are busy; what I had to say wasn’t earth shattering enough to justify that many posts.

**Marketing guru Seth Godin posts EVERY DAY
But, he’s Seth Godin!**

Set the schedule that fits your writing style. The most common schedule is once or twice a week. I have two subjects: gratitude and Substack so I post one on each focus each week ... gratitude on Saturday, Substack on Wednesday.

Studies I’ve read state that the day and time you post is not as important as the value of what you post. Recommendations are that you think about your intended audience to see if there is a time and day that would be most convenient for them.

Once you’ve determined frequency, time, and place, make a calendar in whatever system you use. I use Scrivener and a white board. In Scrivener Binder, each subject is a chapter and the post dates are scenes under each chapter. That gives me a place to put ideas as they come up and have a sense of where I’m going. (Of course, I seldom go where I plan, but I can easily move things around.) The white board keeps me on track for the current week.

Having a calendar will help you deal with schedule variations and interruptions while maintaining trust with your readers.



**Develop
Calendar**

**How does what
you’re writing
feed you?**



BEGIN #3: Design Your Post Recipe

Posting once or twice a week requires discipline and organization. Having a fixed calendar for posts will help you develop discipline, and designing a pattern, a recipe for your posts, makes life easier.

What is a Post Recipe? It's your structure, the ingredients you want to use. It helps ensure a consistent result ... and makes your posts more effective. **Post Polishing** on page 23 also helps.

Chenell Basilio writes [Growth in Reverse](#), telling success stories that will make your bank account salivate. In a recent post she outlined the growth strategy of a newsletter writer and highlighted what I'm calling "the recipe" for the writer's posts. It's brilliant and the [entire post is worth reading](#). Here's a sample:

Building Consistency for Readers

Anne-Laure is very serious about the contract she has with her readers. She tells them they are going to get one email a week, and she makes sure that happens no matter what.

On the same token, **she doesn't email them more than once a week either.**

Every week, the **newsletter is structured in a similar format too.**

1. **Opening: Updates, etc.** – she gives some highlights about personal stuff, or timely events, like the Annual Review workshop she runs every year.
2. **Brain Food** – this section is the articles she has written that week, along with any from others who have published on [nesslabs.com](#).
3. **Brain Candy** – as she describes it "Little nuggets from my Twitter bookmarks this week. Click on the card to read the full tweet."
4. **Brain Picks** – this is essentially the sponsor area of her newsletter.
5. **Brain Trust** – this is a static section that promotes the Ness Labs community.
6. **Brain Waves** – this section is asking people to share the newsletter with someone who might enjoy it.

This gives her readers a **consistent format each week so they know what to expect.**

Reminder from Field Guide #1

When you press Publish on a post, it's done unless you decide to update it later. Unfortunately (or fortunately, if you look at it as a constant creative challenge) your Substack is never "done."

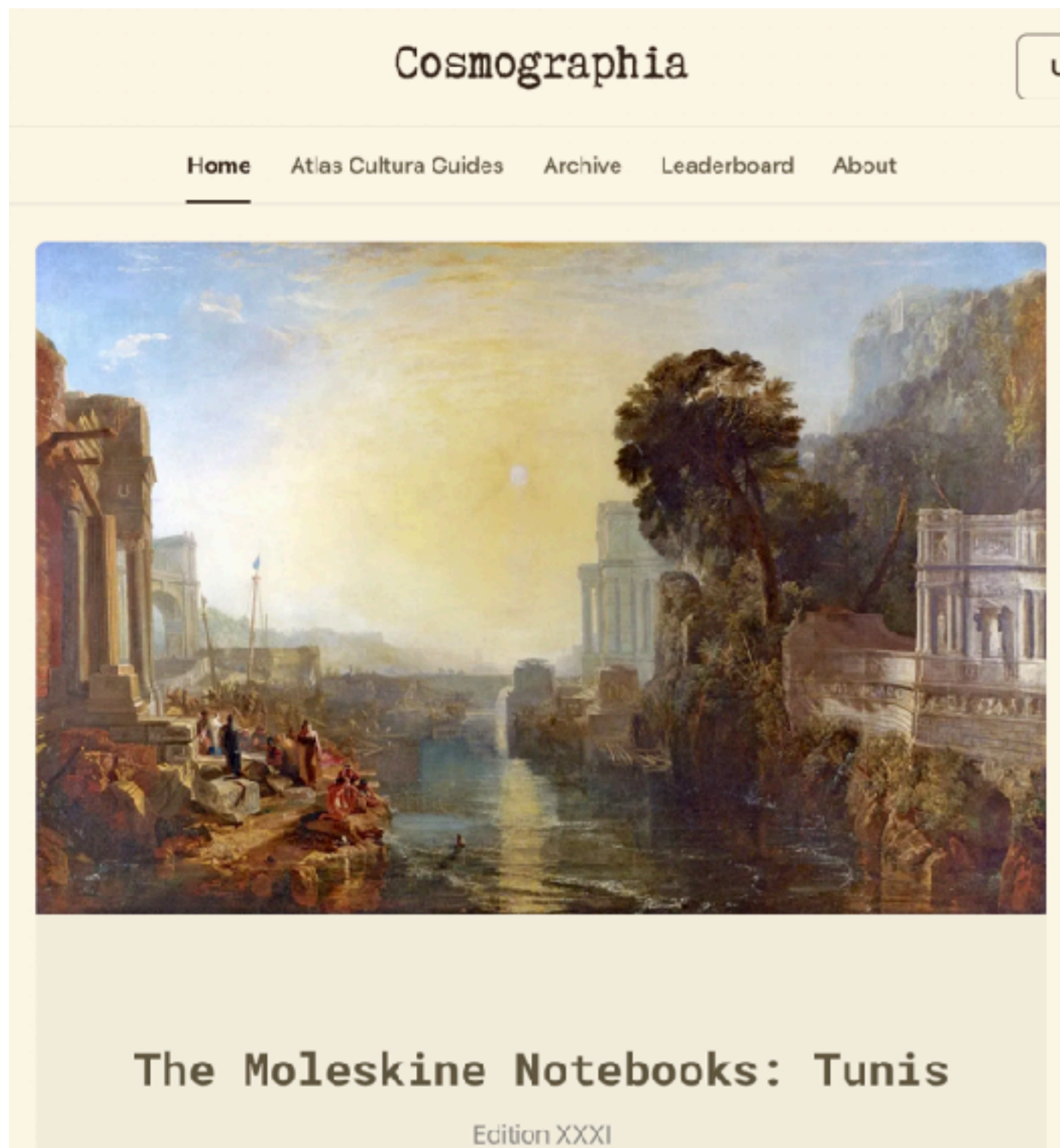
You will always be rethinking, tweaking, shifting strategy, discovering new ways, better ways to make what you want to give your readers more engaging, more relevant, more enticing.

Reviewing the past Field Guides will be part of that process.

Substack Field Guide #1		
Lessons	Do Now	Begin
Make Friends	Search Substack	Your Strategy
Be Consistent	Join Office Hours	Get to know your audience
Look for Collaboration	Use Notes	Create your identity

How many geniuses die undiscovered, not only by others, but, more sadly, by themselves?

SPOTLIGHT: *Artistic Vision*



Best Practice:
Be YOU!

Cosmographia by M.E. Rothwell: Take time to study this one ... notice all the details that build on each other... color, images, words, places ... it's clear this is not a tourist travel site. It's an experience of being in a faraway place ...somewhere inside reality ... but barely.

Studying this one, and other Substacks, is important, not because yours should look like his but because this is an example of a well developed vision, the result of a lot of experimentation and CONFIDENCE in that vision. ***What is your vision for your Substack?***

As you explore Substack, watch for examples that delight you, notice details of what catches your eye. Subscribe so you can see how they respond and how they handle each of the Substack elements as well as their weekly posts. *Connect or ask questions on Notes.*

Passion Sells ... *Specific* Passion Sells

Who are these 'unruly figures'?

This is about the rebels.

This is about the ne'er-do-wells.

This is about the mutineers, the agitators, the subversives.

Unruly Figures is a celebration of history's biggest rule-breakers.

Who wouldn't want to read about these folkss?

“Mike Sowden, [Everything Is Amazing](#), says it best: “**Valorie Clark's [Unruly Figures](#)** is a winning formula: fascinating stories beautifully told & meticulously researched, clearly a labour of love from start to finish, and all delivered with BBC-quality production values.”

everyone is entitled to my own opinion

The title of [Jeff Tiedrich's political rant](#) is just about the only part of his passionate publication that doesn't use two or more of Carlin's “7 words you can't use on television.” There is no doubting where he stands, and while two of his words are overused standards, the rest bubble up into the most amazing, LOL-funny descriptions of his targets. My guess is that there are few red dots among his 55,000 subscribers.



Sound the Crumpets!

Part 1: The Best British Biscuit Revealed

8 HRS AGO • MARISSA ROTHKOPF

♡ 25 💬 9 🔄 📌

[Marissa Rothkopf-Bakes: The Secret Life of Cookies](#) proves the point when a Substacker passionate about cookies (and crumpets) can entice 5,000 subscribers.

Are you writing what you want to read?

What Do Readers Want?



Abraham Maslow set the standard for thinking about human needs. Theoretically, everything we want or need is related to one of these levels. And, we don't move up to the next level until previous level needs are met.

Example: We won't take time to learn about how to be successful with our Substack if someone is pointing a gun at our heads.

Where on this chart does your Substack add value?

POWER READ:

[Top 15 Tips for Starting a Substack](#)

Great article focused on these tips:

1. Find Your Niche
2. Identify Your Target Audience
3. Name Your Publication
4. Create an Interesting About Page
5. Develop a Content Strategy
6. Use Engaging Headlines
7. Use Visuals
8. Optimize for Search
9. Engage with Your Readers
10. Collaborate with Other Substack Writers
11. Build an Email List
12. Monetize Your Publication
13. Experiment with Different Formats
14. Stay Consistent
15. Focus on Quality Writing



**Best Practice:
Create Value!**

Are You a “Pantser” or a “Plotter”?



Final Polish Checklist ...

In the fiction world, “plotters” sketch out the plot in some detail, while pantsers tend to start with an idea, an event or character and let the story emerge. In the newsletter world, I’m in the “pantser” division. I tend to get an idea, hear a story or something that calls to me, and go for it. As a result, I found myself forgetting things ... after pressing Publish, of course.

Creating a recipe helped (page 18), however, I still left things behind that I had intended to put in. What I needed was a checklist ... like a packing list before heading out the door for the airport. Here’s my list ... you may want to make your own.

Goals: Friendly - Value Focused - Readable - Beautiful

My Purpose: *Encourage readers to grow into abundance by being their unique, creative selves.*

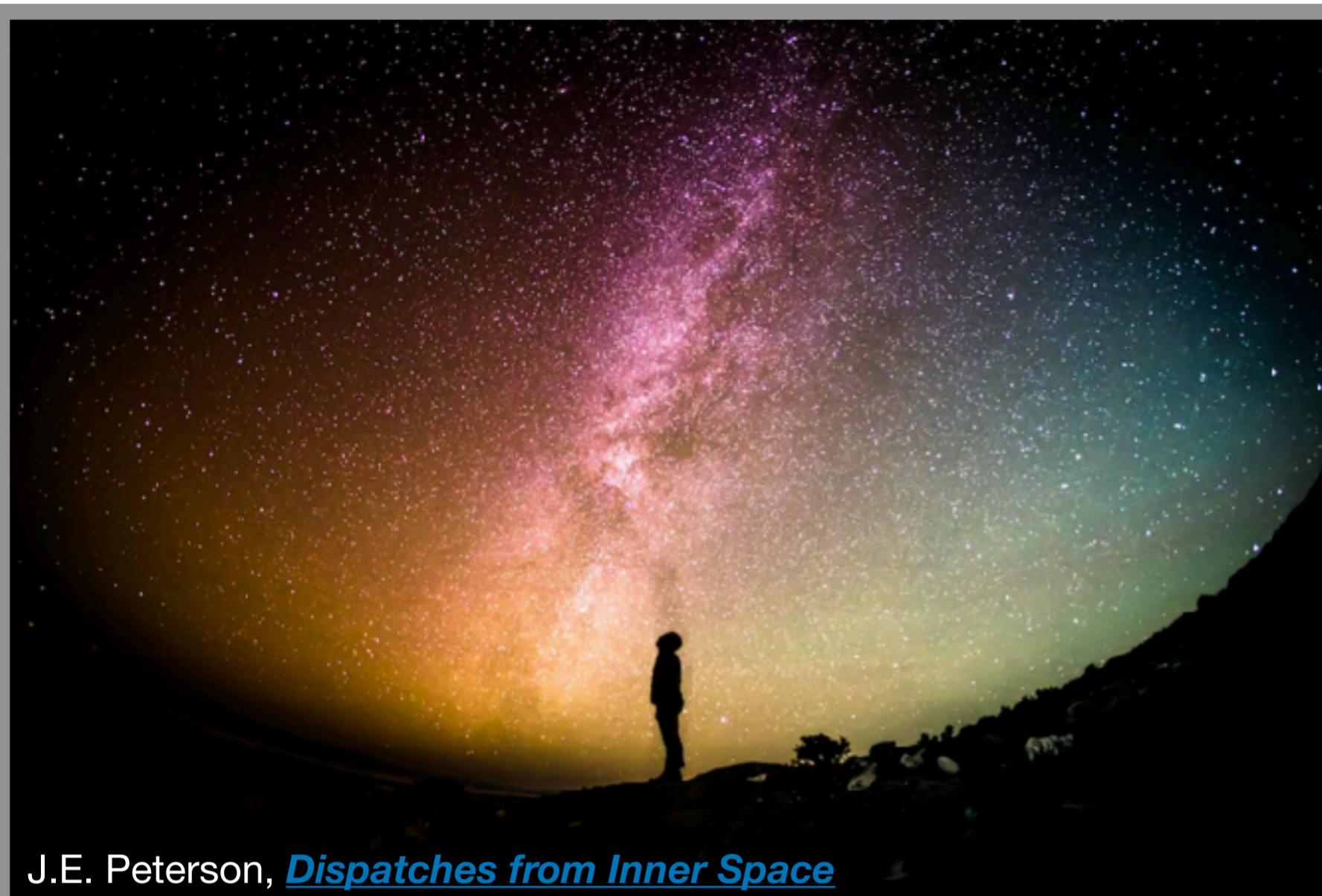
- What reader value am I delivering?
- Have I told a story or used a powerful metaphor?
- Is the tone and style friendly and generous?
- Do the graphics add impact?
- Is the post true and authentic?

- Is the title/subtitle grabbing and use search words?
- Does my first line capture attention?
- Have I used the email header space effectively?
- Is the text broken up to improve readability?
- Does it need an infographic?

- Have I recapped important points?
- Have I invited reader engagement?
- Have I included and credited further reading options?
- Have I included a call-to-action?
- Has the post rested for 48 hours before final edit?

What do you
help your
reader feel
or understand?

Images Make Impact

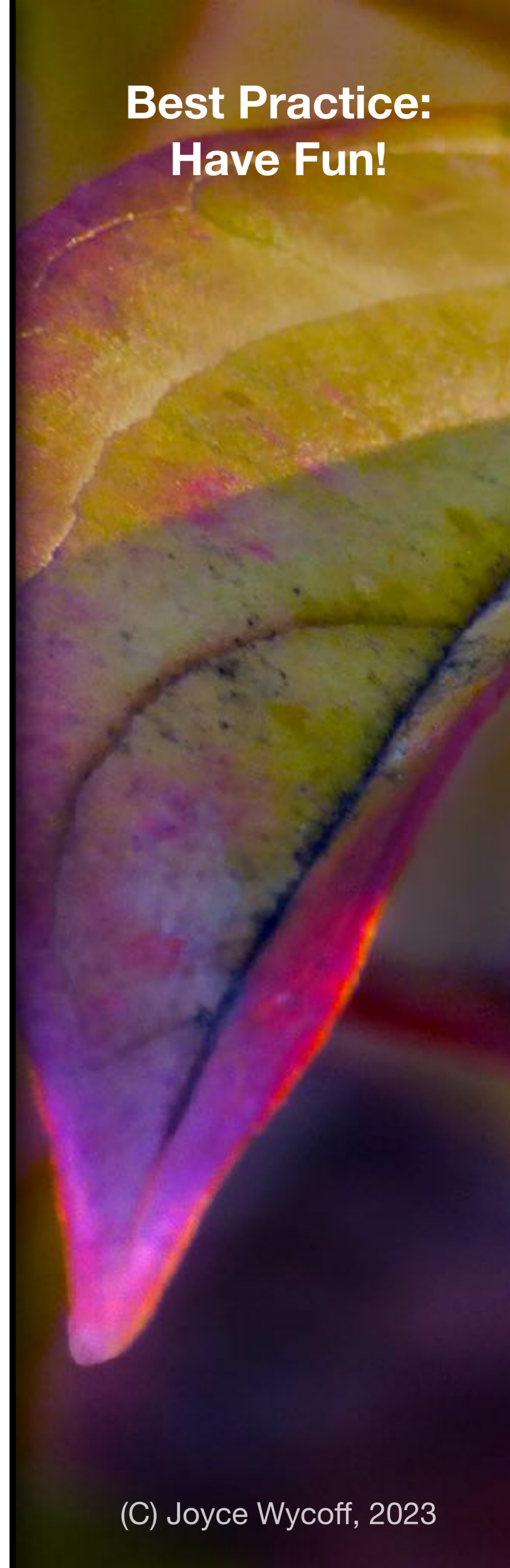


J.E. Peterson, [*Dispatches from Inner Space*](#)

Photo by [Greg Rakozy](#) on [Unsplash](#)



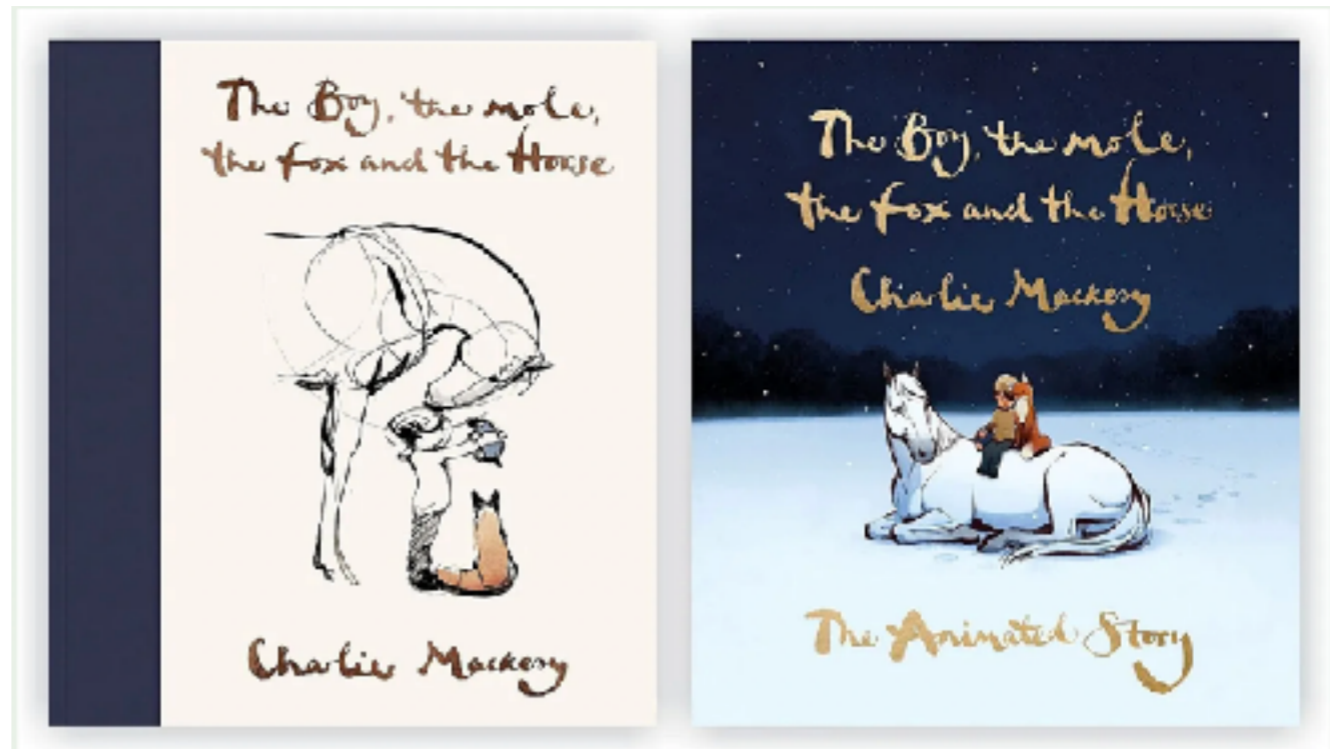
Beth Spencer,
[*Grandma Stories*](#)



**Best Practice:
Have Fun!**

What are
you learning?

How We Tell Readers Who We Are



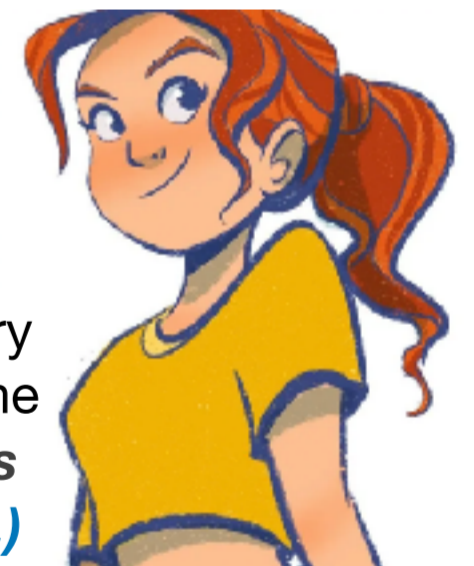
Tara Penry at [Enchanted in America](#) shares her love of an illustrated book and sparks an idea. Writing about the making of the movie for this unique book: Charlie Mackesy's ***The Boy, the Mole, the Fox, and the Horse***, she quotes Mackesy, “At the top of each page in the script I wrote why we were making the film – to create something that makes people feel a bit less alone and more themselves.”

What if we included a purpose statement on our Checklist?
(page 23)

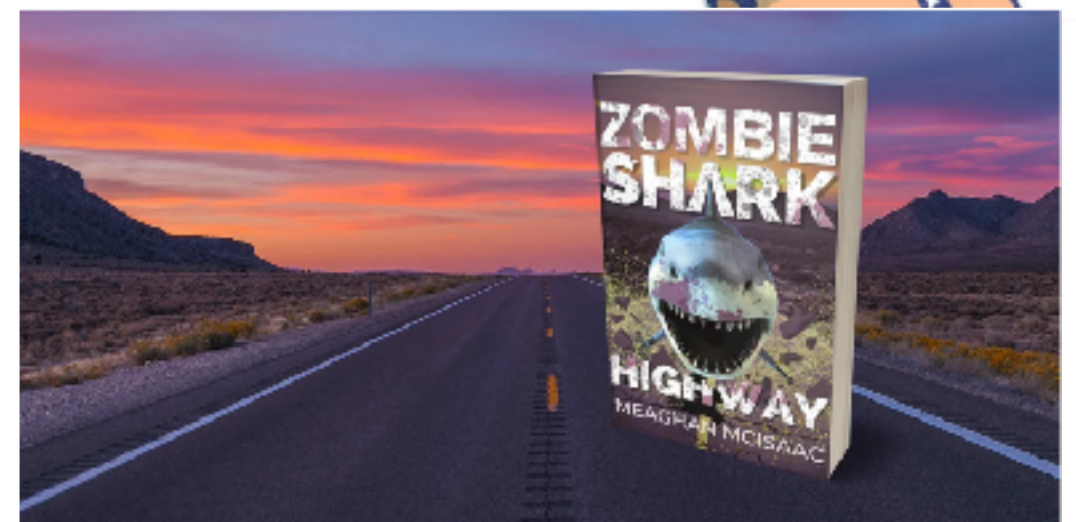
Meaghan McIsaac at [Authorstrator](#)

... writer of the briefest of Brief Descriptions:
Writing stuff. Drawing stuff. You know, a newsletter.

However, what caught my attention was her summary of learnings from her first year on Substack where she says: “**Take as much care with your about page as your posts - probably more.**” ([Read full post here.](#))



This is Substack:
where you can
learn from the
author of
Zombie Shark Highway!



How Do Readers Find You?

26 CATEGORIES:

Art & Illustration
Business
Climate & Environment
Comics
Crypto
Culture
Design
Education
Faith & Spirituality
Fashion & Beauty
Fiction
Finance
Food & Drink
Health & Wellness
History
Humor
International
Literature
Music
News
Parenting
Philosophy
Politics
Science
Sports
Travel

When you set up your Substack, you can choose two categories from the list of 26 shown on the left. These categories, *theoretically*, help readers find Substacks. However, after spending an inordinate amount of time doing searches, I'm not sure how effective these choices are.

For instance, I searched five categories without seeing Sari Botton's popular [Oldster Magazine](#) (22,000) show up in the searches. I don't know what categories she has chosen, but I've come to the conclusion that the categories you choose make little impact.

What IS Important?:

TITLE words
Brief Description words
Profile words

Searching for **Oldster** became a challenge since Sari does not use any typical descriptive words such as old, aging, elder, senior, etc., in any of these places:

Title: Oldster Magazine

Profile: Sari Botton is the author of the memoir "And You May Find Yourself." She edited two bestselling anthologies: "Goodbye to All That" and "Never Can Say Goodbye." She publishes Oldster Magazine, Memoir Monday, and Adventures in Journalism.

Brief Description: Exploring what it means to travel through time in a human body, at every phase of life. Edited by Sari Botton.

Obviously, the Substack search function has not kept Sari from having a successful magazine. **However, my recommendation** for the rest of us is to know what search terms readers might use and put them in our Big 3. Those terms should go in titles and subtitles, also.

**What are
3 words
your readers
might search on?**



Flip-flopping on Paywall Strategy



You have an emerging Substack.
Your strategy creates value.
You want to entice readers
and revenue.
And, then,
uncertainty raises doubts:

***Is it good enough?
Does anyone really want it?
Am I worth it?***

In your dreams, you write what you love for a receptive, adoring audience of readers who shower you with gifts of their appreciation.

My first newsletter hero was Maria Popova who wrote what she called at the time, ***Brain Pickings***, which inspired and delighted us with its beauty and wide-ranging scope. Funded only by donations, she did the literary equivalent of going viral and is now part of the Library of Congress Permanent Web Archive.

She is living our dream of writing what she wants with the money just rolling in ... now under the name of ***The Marginalian*** ... still existing (very well, BTW) on donations after 17 years.

She skirted the dreaded paywall ... but can WE?

I've been on a quest to figure this out. How to balance wanting everyone to read everything (which means free) with wanting to feel compensated for the work I'm doing to create value (i.e. being paid.)

Today I received a major clue from another Substacker, which involved the monster shown above. Not completely sure I've found the answer, but I feel it getting closer.

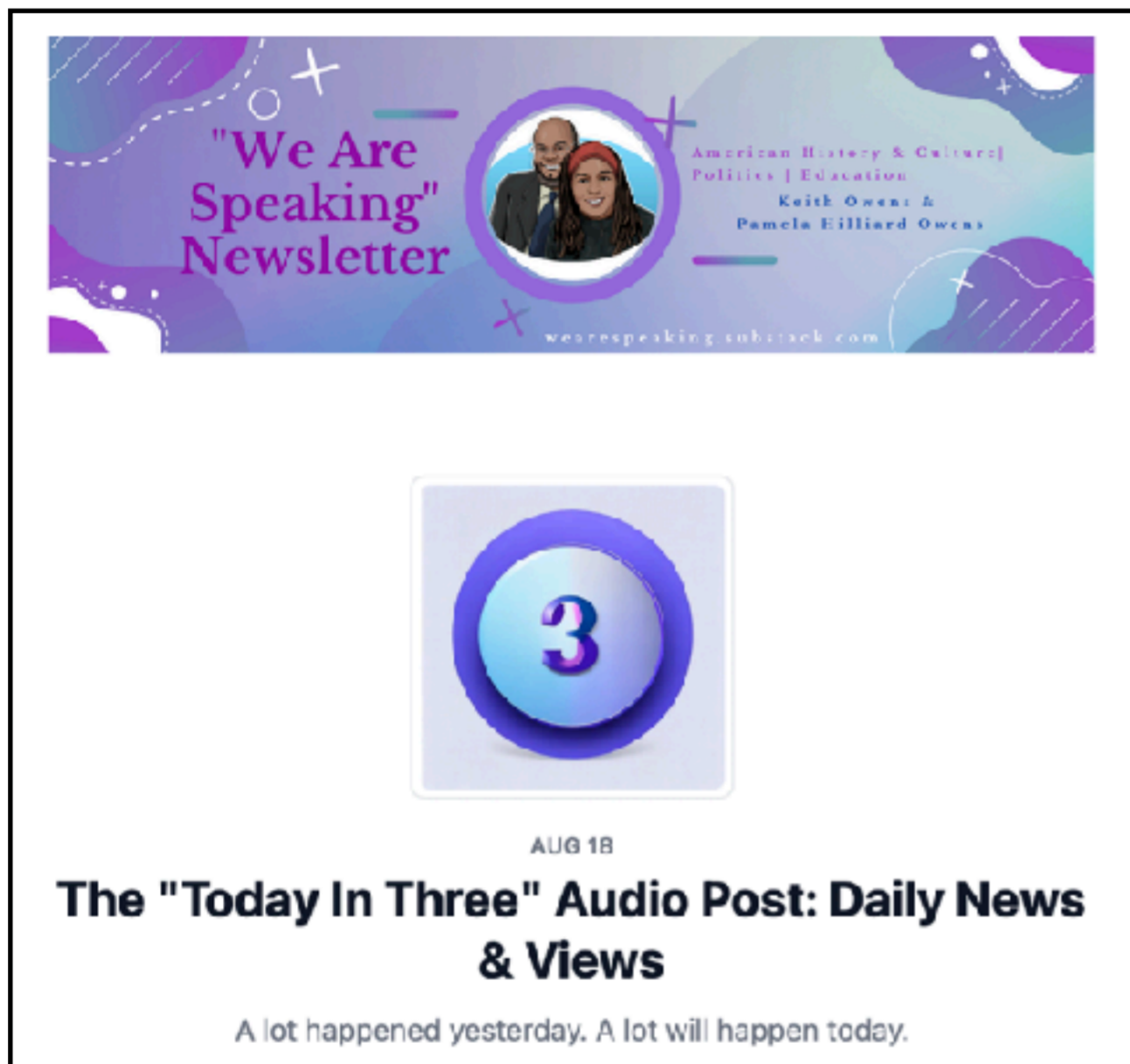
Will report out in a post on 8/30 ... 8/23.

**[Read More:](#)
Deep Dive:
Overcoming
imposter syndrome
by
Dr. Devika Bhushan**

IMHO: This could be better

***Substack writers are all different; readers are all different.
Therefore, this is simply my (should be humble) opinion.***

For quite sometime now, I've been subscribed to a Substack I've never opened. Every week I receive an email that looks like this:



There's no clue about what the 3 are and I don't do podcasts during my work hours, so I've never listened to find out. Also, I don't know who the "we" of "We Are Speaking" is.

Until today, when I decided to find out.

Turns out that [Pamela Hilliard Owens and Keith Owens](#) are a prolific couple (9 issues a week!) that I am aligned with politically and would probably benefit from listening to them.

If they provided a written brief about each of the three subjects they are focusing on, they might entice me in.

***"Life is trying things
to see if they work."
— Ray Bradbury***

Saving the best advice for the last ...



“Ponies helping ponies” that’s the caption used for this photo by Charlene Storey at [Haver & Sparrow](#) for her post about what she calls “comparisonitis.”

I was just finishing this issue of the **Field Guide** when her post arrived and reminded me that I may be dishing out too much “do better” and not enough “enjoy the process.”

Here are the beginnings of Charlene’s wise words:

“Do you ever compare your achievements to someone else’s and feel better about yourself as a result? No? Me neither. When we engage in comparisonitis (as it’s been recently called) we tend to look for examples of people who we perceive to be ahead of us, as though to confirm our suspicion that we’re behind and need to catch up.”

It’s close to impossible to resist “comparisonitis,” however, I hope you will look at every recommendation in this field guide with eyes of curiosity and self-compassion, with the understanding that we’re in this for the long haul. Do what makes sense today. but know this will always be a work-in-progress.

There are many race horses grazing here in the fields of Substack, bringing in the big bucks, however, we’re all just “ponies helping ponies” and that’s the beauty of this generous community of writers.

**Next Field Guide:
#3 ENTER -
First impressions
are critical
9/27/2023**



What idea is looking for you?

Joyce Wycoff
connecting through art