LEARNING WITH SDP

Q4 Holiday Sales Reference Guide

Key dates, rules, templates, and the gift line formula

Participant Handout | October 19, 2026 | Presenter: Jolene MacFadden

This is your look-it-up guide for the holiday season. Keep it open while you plan. Every date, price, and platform rule here was checked in October 2026; platforms change their rules often, so click the source link before you schedule anything. Handout 2 is the planner you fill in.

1. Key Dates for 2026

Date	What	Why it matters
Now to Oct. 31	Plan and book	Check accounts, order print copies, submit to promo sites.
About Oct. 27	BookBub window opens for a Dec. 26 deal	BookBub schedules Featured Deals up to 60 days ahead.
Early November	Order author and print copies	KDP author copies are not Prime-eligible and cannot be expedited.
Late November	Last safe price change for a Dec. 26 Countdown Deal	KDP requires 30 days of unchanged list price before a Countdown Deal.
Thu., Nov. 26	Thanksgiving	Shopping season officially starts.
Fri., Nov. 27	Black Friday	Peak competition for attention and ad space.
Sat., Nov. 28	Small Business Saturday and Indies First	Independent bookstores host authors. Ask your local store now.
Mon., Nov. 30	Cyber Monday	Online deal day. Good for an email to your list.
Tue., Dec. 1	Giving Tuesday	A giving day, not a selling day. Recommend other authors or donate copies.
Thu., Dec. 17	USPS Ground Advantage and First-Class send-by	Recommended date for Christmas delivery in the lower 48.
Fri., Dec. 18	USPS Priority Mail send-by	One more day if you pay for Priority.
Sat., Dec. 19	USPS Priority Mail Express send-by	Last resort, and expensive.
Fri., Dec. 25	Christmas	New e-readers and gift cards get unwrapped.
Dec. 26 to Jan. 3	The new-reader window	People with new devices go looking for books.
Fri., Jan. 1, 2027	New Year's Day	Reading resolutions; a natural time for a first-in-series deal.

USPS dates are for the contiguous U.S. Alaska, Hawaii, APO/FPO, and international dates are earlier; see the USPS link in Section 8.

2. Week-by-Week Q4 Calendar

Week of	Focus	Do this
Oct. 19	Plan	Check every account (Handout 2). Pick your three moves. Write your gift line.
Oct. 26	Book	Submit to BookBub and backup promo sites. Ask your local bookstore about Indies First.
Nov. 2	Stock up	Order print and author copies. Make a printable gift note for ebook gifts.

Nov. 9	Pitch	Send gift guide pitches to local papers, bloggers, and library Friends groups.
Nov. 16	Warm up	Send Email 1 (gift idea). Post one seasonal, non-sales post.
Nov. 23	Big week	Send Email 2 (Black Friday). Show up for Small Business Saturday if you can.
Nov. 30	Gift push	Cyber Monday reminder if you have a deal. Share other authors' books on Giving Tuesday.
Dec. 7	Last call	Send Email 3 (signed copies, ships by Dec. 17). Mail orders as they come in.
Dec. 14	Ship	Mail everything by Dec. 17. After that, point people to ebooks and gift notes.
Dec. 21	Rest	Light posting only. Schedule Emails 4 and 5 ahead of time.
Dec. 28	New readers	Email 4 goes out Dec. 26; Email 5 Dec. 30 or 31. Record your results.

3. The Gift Line Formula

The perfect gift for the reader who loves [a comparison, a trope, a setting, or a hobby].

Holiday shoppers are usually buying for someone else. They aren't asking what your book is about; they're asking whether the person on their list will like it. Your gift line answers that question in one sentence.

Book type	Example gift line
Steampunk mystery romance	For the reader who loves steampunk, a good mystery, and a little romance: Misadventures of Janie and Diane. Steam. Secrets. Scandal.
Cozy mystery	For the friend who has read every cozy mystery in the library.
Historical fiction	For the history buff who wants to know what the textbooks left out.
Gardening or how-to	For the gardener who reads in the potting shed.
Memoir	For anyone who grew up in a small Southern town and misses it.
Children's picture book	For the grandchild who always asks for one more story.

Where to use it:

- Your newsletter and email signature
- Social posts and profile bios for the season
- Your website or shop page
- A shelf card or table sign at fairs and markets
- Gift guide pitches (template in Section 6)

Do not add holiday wording to your Amazon A+ Content. Amazon's A+ Content guidelines prohibit references to holidays, pricing, and promotional words such as "free" or "on sale now."

4. Amazon in Q4: The Rules

Feature	The rule (as of October 2026)	Source
Kindle Countdown Deal	KDP Select for 30+ days. List price $2.99 to $24.99 on Amazon.com. Price unchanged 30 days before and 14 days after. Up to 7 days, one per Select term. Amazon.com and Amazon.co.uk only. On the 70% plan you keep 70% even below $2.99.	KDP Help: Kindle Countdown Deals
70% royalty price band	Effective July 7, 2026: $2.99 to $12.99 on Amazon.com. Useful for pricing box sets.	KDP Help: eBook List Price Requirements
Gifting Kindle books	"Buy for others" box on the book's page. Recipients must be in	Amazon Help: Buy

	the buyer's country.	Kindle Books for Others
A+ Content	No pricing, promo words, time-sensitive language, or references to holidays.	KDP Help: A+ Content Guidelines
Author and proof copies	Not eligible for Prime shipping; customer service cannot expedite.	KDP Help: Holiday Season FAQ

A KDP Select term lets you run either a Countdown Deal or a Free Book Promotion, not both.

5. BookBub and Other Promo Sites

- BookBub schedules Featured Deals up to 60 days in advance. For a deal on Dec. 26, submit starting about Oct. 27.
- Editorial decisions usually take two to three business days.
- BookBub is selective. A "no" is common; you can resubmit, and the form lets you mark your dates as flexible.
- Line up a backup. Options include Written Word Media (Freebooksy, Bargain Booksy), The Fussy Librarian, and others. Prices, requirements, and bundles change; check each site's current page before you budget.
- Goodreads lists (seasonal, gift, and Listopia) are created and voted on by readers. You cannot pay to be included. Ask your readers to shelve and review your book.
- Canva has free holiday templates for social graphics. Items marked with a crown are Pro.

6. Five Holiday Email Templates

Fill in the brackets. Keep each email short. Your email platform adds the unsubscribe link and mailing address if you use its templates; check that both appear.

Email 1 | Send about Nov. 19 | The gift idea

Subject: A gift idea for the [genre] lover on your list

Hi [first name],

If there's a reader on your list who loves [comp, trope, or setting], [Book Title] might be just right. [One sentence about the feeling of the book, not the plot.]

Here are two more books I'd happily wrap up this year: [Author A, Title] and [Author B, Title].

[Link to your book] Thanks for reading, [your name]

Email 2 | Black Friday week | The quiet deal

Subject: My Black Friday deal (and 3 books I'm buying)

Hi [first name],

From [date] to [date], [Book Title] is [price or offer]. No countdown timers, just a good book at a good price.

And because I'm a reader too, here are three books on my own gift list: [Title 1], [Title 2], [Title 3].

[Link] Happy Thanksgiving, [your name]

Email 3 | Send about Dec. 10 | Honest urgency

Subject: Last call for signed copies (ships by Dec. 17)

Hi [first name],

If you'd like a signed copy of [Book Title] to arrive before Christmas, order by [your cutoff date]. I'll sign it, add [bookmark or note], and mail it by December 17.

Missed the date? Kindle books can be gifted right up to Christmas morning, and I've made a printable gift note you can tuck in a card: [link].

[Order link] [your name]

Email 4 | Send Dec. 26 | New devices

Subject: New e-reader? Start here.

Hi [first name],

If you unwrapped a new e-reader or a gift card this week, here's where I'd start: [first book in series], [one-line hook]. [Optional: It's [price] through [date].]

[Link] Happy reading, [your name]

Email 5 | Send Dec. 30 or 31 | The thank-you

Subject: My year in books, and a thank-you

Hi [first name],

This year I [wrote / published / learned / finished something]. The best part was [one honest moment]. Next year I'm working on [what's coming].

Thank you for reading, for replying, and for being here. Hit reply and tell me the best book you read this year.

[your name] (No sales link in this one. That's the point.)

7. Gift Guide Pitch Template

For local newspapers, community bloggers, library Friends groups, and bookish newsletters. Many gift guides are put together in late October and early November, so pitch soon and ask about their deadline.

Pitch email

Subject: Local author gift idea for your holiday guide

Hi [name],

I enjoy your [column / blog / newsletter], especially [one specific thing you read]. I'm a [town or county] author, and I'd love for [Book Title] to be considered for your holiday gift guide.

The short version: [your gift line].

Details: [format, price, page count, age range if relevant]. Available at [local store if any] and [online link]. I can send a review copy, a cover image, and a signed copy for a giveaway if that helps.

Thank you for considering it. What's your deadline this year?

[Your name] [website] [phone]

Tips:

- Send one personal email per outlet, not a group email.
- Attach nothing on the first email unless their guidelines ask for it; offer instead.
- Follow up once, about a week later. Then let it go.

8. Holiday Email Rules in Plain Language

Not legal advice. Check the primary sources below.

CAN-SPAM (U.S.): every commercial email needs a working unsubscribe option and your valid physical postal address, and the subject line can't be misleading. Opt-out requests must be honored within 10 business days.

Gmail and Yahoo: senders mailing about 5,000 or more messages a day to Gmail accounts must support one-click unsubscribe; Yahoo expects unsubscribes honored within two days. Most small author lists are under the Gmail threshold, but these are good habits at any size.

Only email people who signed up. Buying or borrowing a list is the fastest way to land in spam.

9. Sources (checked October 2026)

- BookBub, How far in advance should I submit? support.bookbub.com/articles/how-far-in-advance-should-i-submit/
- KDP Help, Kindle Countdown Deals kdp.amazon.com/en_US/help/topic/G201293780
- KDP Help, eBook List Price Requirements kdp.amazon.com/help/topic/A301WJ6XCJ8KW0
- KDP Help, A+ Content Guidelines kdp.amazon.com/help/topic/G4WB7VPPEAREHAAD
- KDP Help, Holiday Season FAQ kdp.amazon.com/en_US/help/topic/GVJ42QHSM22EKM2J
- Amazon Help, Buy Kindle Books for Others amazon.com/gp/help/customer/display.html?nodeId=GVWGP284MQ6ZRM59

- USPS, 2026 Holiday Shipping Deadlines usps.com/holiday/holiday-shipping-dates.htm
- FTC, CAN-SPAM Act: A Compliance Guide for Business ftc.gov/business-guidance/resources/can-spam-act-compliance-guide-business
- Google, Email sender guidelines support.google.com/a/answer/81126
- American Booksellers Association, Indies First bookweb.org
- Written Word Media (Freebooksy, Bargain Booksy) writtenwordmedia.com