



Presentation for Brisbane Omega Showcase
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Introduction

Hi, I'm Beck from Beckon Creative. I'd like to thank Omega Writers for having me here today. Most of you won't have met me or heard of me ...

I'm one of the guest bloggers on Australasian Christian Writers.

I'm an author AND a graphic designer (and a singer and craftsperson).



I got into graphic design when I was a chaplain, did a diploma, and now this is my job!

Anne Hamilton hired me to work on her books, and since then, the majority of my clients have been authors. I LOVE IT.



Here are some of the client books I've worked on.



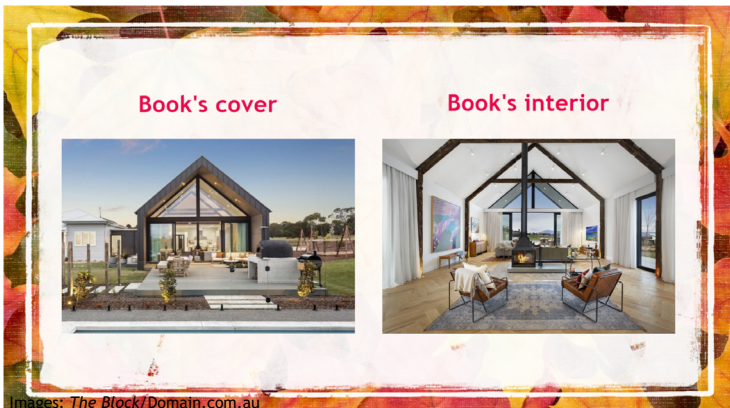


This is how you take a ridiculous obsession with 'matching things' and make it work for you! (Also how to become a financial disaster at Tupperware parties!)



I wrote a rider on the process of getting your book built, & I have a few takeaway copies here, but also, if you look in your Welcome Pack and find my postcard bookmark, there's a code you can scan to download the pdf from my website. I'll put this presentation on there too.

I love renovation shows, and building a book is a lot like building a house: a combination of street appeal, structure, and decor.





Or, it's like baking a cake: the main thing is how it tastes, but we've all picked out cakes based on nothing more than genre and how good they look.

Because EVERYBODY judges a book by its cover.

If you've got an amazing-looking cover, you want an amazing-looking book inside it. Ideally they should echo one another, like a matched set. It's a form of branding.

Stages

The most important thing I can highlight about this process is that **YOU MUST FINISH YOUR BOOK FIRST**. If you send me something that's 'nearly done' there's a good chance that by the time you're finished tinkering, and an editor's finished restructuring, we'll have to start again. And it will cost you a LOT of money to do it that way. I mean I'm happy to go along that journey, but I'm an expensive companion!



This cake has all of its yummy ingredients in it. It's a masterpiece of a recipe. But you don't want to put it in my oven until it's been taste-tested and adjusted ...



The editor makes sure you didn't put salt in instead of sugar, or baking soda instead of baking powder, or dump all the ingredients in in no particular order, with a lump of hard butter in one spot, and so on.

I'll start mixing up the icing - but you get the batter checked, before we bake errors in!

Teamwork

You actually need a TEAM. Teamwork really does make the dream work.

You write the book, get it edited, get it appraised, get an ISBN for it. (The editor emoji: that's not a frown of censure, it's a frown of concentration!)



I'm down here in the bottom & left – dreaming up the cover and making the type look good.

I work closely with the author to choose imagery and fonts, and make it all pop.

Why a team? I'm darn good at spelling, punctuation and grammar ... but syntactically, my long sentences can be a hot mess. And this is especially true of authors who write conversationally. So I need a team as well.

Editors – and it took me forever to learn this – are ON YOUR SIDE. They are not your adversary; they are your ALLY. They are not some mad scientist performing vivisection on your baby. They are the surgeon saving its life.

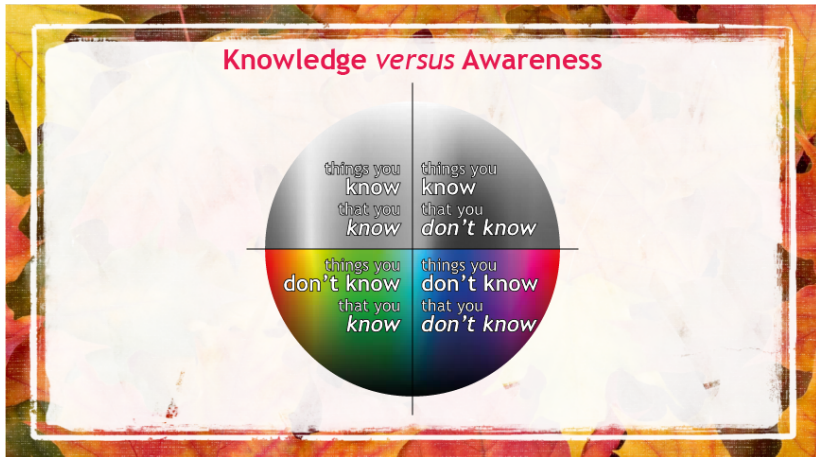
Book designers are on the same page. We aren't trying to squash your ideas; we're using our industry experience to give your book its best chance. It's really, really hard to be openminded to someone else's ideas when it's your baby on the line. So I get it. But yeah, listen :)



Let me strongly encourage an ethical mindset that brings honour to God. The photos and illustrations and typefaces we use – those have to be licensed (or freeware). Song lyrics need permission from the music publisher. We don't cut corners on integrity. If you're meant to give attribution, do – put it on the copyright page. It'll cost you 3mm of space.

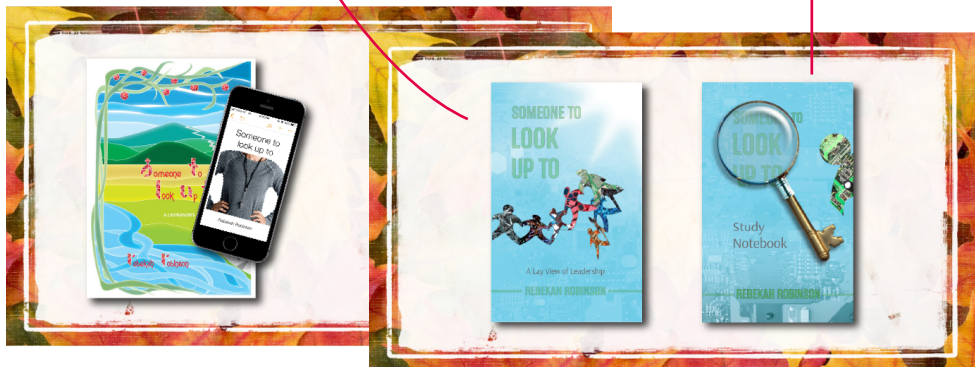
Be open with your designer. It's a partnership, and I'm learning too. For instance, this year I learned that when an author says, 'Here's an idea, but you're free to see what else you come up with,' what they actually mean is, 'THIS IS WHAT I WANT!' Very few people send me gummy ideas, but when they do, I have to be tactful and inspiring to move their book forward.





The trouble is that ‘creative in one direction’ does not equal ‘trained in other directions.’ And so we come to ‘things we don’t know that we don’t know.’ And I’m in the same boat! All of us learn from each other – ‘the knowledge is in the room.’ Believe me, when I finally start my novel I will be sitting at your feet.

With my first cover for *Someone to Look Up To*, I went with a beautiful digi Art Nouveau look, laden with symbolism. I mean, the fruits had nine facets! My brother said, ‘No one will see those details. It’s a book about *leadership*. You need something that says ‘leadership’ the instant you look at it.’ And he threw me this ... which wasn’t *me*, but got me thinking. I still wanted something conceptual. So I did *this* ... and then, some time later, *this*.

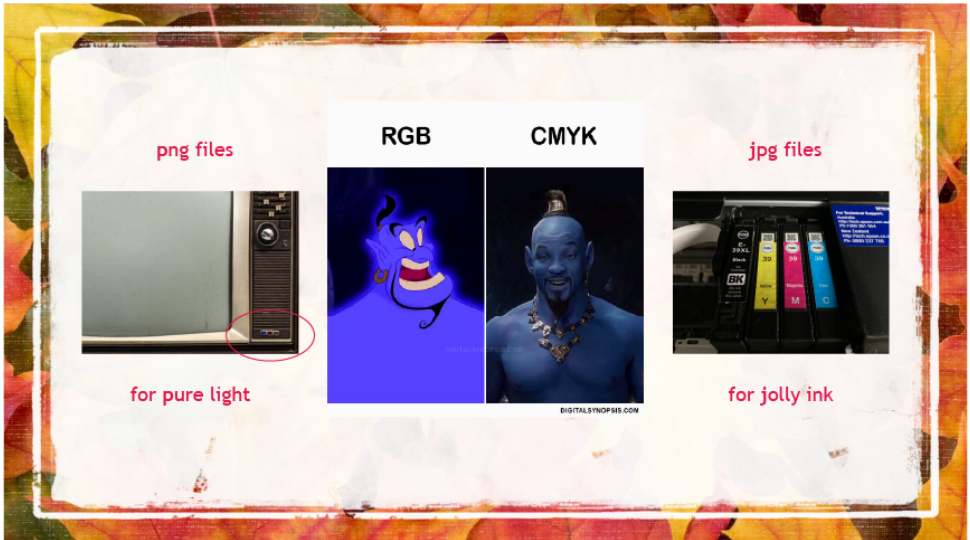


An editor friend in the US told me to always put the title in top half of the book, so that if a store displays books on a tiered shelf, your title isn't going to vanish behind other books. But this is a convention, not a rule.



Photoshop: Despite what you see on detective shows, there are limits to what can be done with it. If you send me a tiny image file, I can expand it to the DIMENSIONS of a big one, but there's no way I can make sharper than it is, so it will look terrible.





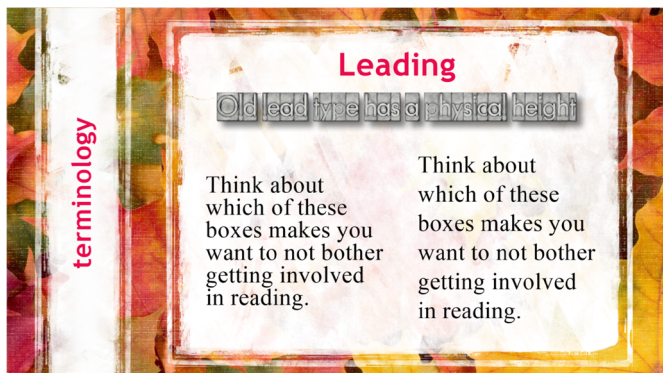
PNG versus JPG: a jpg is intended for *print*, while a png is intended for *screens*. Some colours, for the love of God, just *will not* come out the way you'd like, once the book goes to print. This is because we're all designing on screens, and **INK IS NOT LIGHT**, it only reflects a certain range of light. If you've ever scanned a page of text with highlighter on it, you may have been puzzled as to why the yellow comes out dirty and dull, not neon.



A lot of people wonder why they can't just upload a Word file (or its pdf) to IngramSpark. Probably you can. But the chances of its being 'at industry standard' are not great.

To begin with, even if you can get Word to disgorge a file that's in the correct page trim size, Word makes its own decisions about how your document will look. Most manuscripts I see, even from highly computer-literate people, are peppered with sections that for no discernible reason, are in a random font/size/alignment.

Or, the level 2 heading has been replaced by level 4 in several obviously-wrong places. And quite often, the default leading on the body text will be fine for one A4 sheet but really cramped for a whole book. Cramped or complex body text tells the eyes that this book will be hard work. It makes readers reluctant to engage.



What does a typesetter do?

I use Adobe Indesign - it's the best desktop publisher I've ever seen. We have an incredible amount of control over detail, and can customise all sorts of things, and achieve CONSISTENCY!

The author & I discuss how things will look – there's no point designing a book in a size no company prints! So I can either then send three samples for the author to choose between, or if they've given me free rein, just go ahead.

We choose a typeface for the body text, adjusting as necessary. Traditionally this is a serif font, which leads the eye, but it's not a hard-and-fast rule. We use a bigger version for headings, or one of the cover-art fonts.



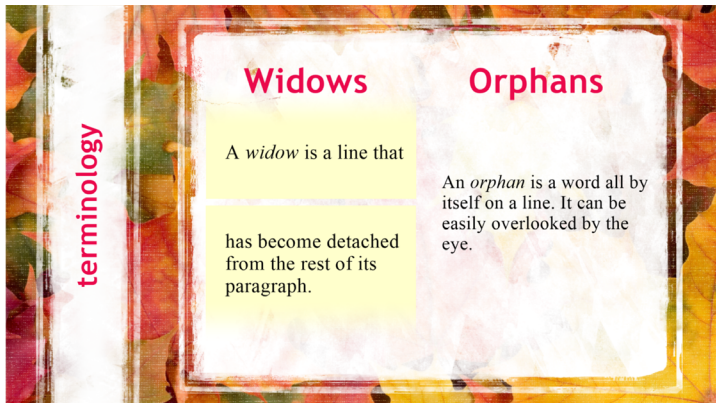
I convert all the images to grayscale (most books are black + white inside).

I set up the Indesign document with template 'parent pages' and paragraph/character styles, all with HTML tags. The design decisions are *how a chapter opening will look, where the numbers will go, will there be a top or bottom title header?*

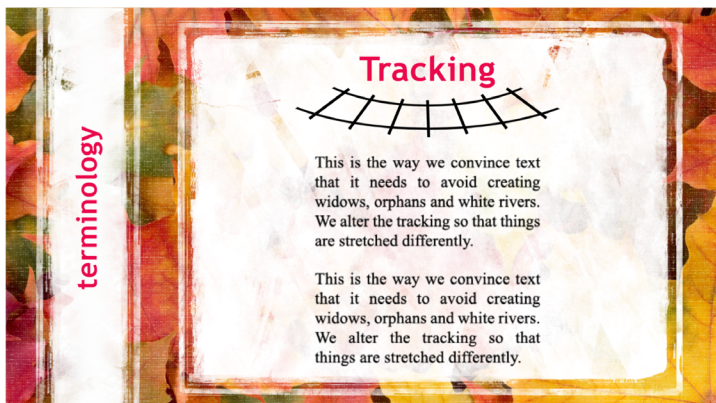
I lift the text from Word or whatever it's come in, and put it in Indesign, flowing it out across the pages.

I go through it and check that everything that should be italicised IS italicised, m- and n-dashes are looking right, chapters start on the right, Hebrew is reading in the correct direction, footnotes are formatted correctly, indents are consistent, text wrapping looks sane, there are no obvious ‘white rivers’ running through the text.

At this point, I Save As a copy to adapt into the ebook. (Another story.)



I check for widows - single lines that have lost their paragraph to another page - and orphans - single words all alone on a line. These are Fashion Don'ts. I adjust the tracking to stretch or squinch a little, to eliminate those.



I add page numbers to the Table of Contents.

I *can* do a basic copyedit - which is one of the lowest levels of editing: picking up spelling, grammar & punctuation errors - but I recommend getting a proper editor. There's far more skill in it - such as structure, pacing, tightness, advice, and 'sentencing good.' But if I do see something dodgy, I will query it or correct it for you.

I render the file into single-pages, high-quality pdf, ready for upload to IngramSpark.

By this stage, we have an exact page count, and you can order me an Indesign template (using that page count and the ISBN) to put the cover art on.

And then we come to the ebook.

I have to ensure that there are no breaks in the data flow: each text area overflows into the next seamlessly with a standard spacing between items, regardless of where the 'paper page' would have ended. There are no paper pages! This is where the HTML tags become important, and widows and orphans become irrelevant.

Anything not sitting inside the text flow box has to be anchored into it.

The special coded Table of Contents is created in place of the original.

I check the file in the Kindle Previewer.

I render the file as a 'reflowable epub' with certain settings. (I'll talk more about ebooks presently.)

I can typeset at around 5,300 words an hour, which means a regular-sized paperback is 7 hours minimum. But I can't work in blocks of hours; it's intensive, and my body stops working. So, I

need to work-rest, work-rest, and it all takes time. Also I have other clients & a family & church!

Can I edit a pdf for you? Yes ... but it's tricky. Some pdf makers format the text into chunks. You can alter something inside a chunk, but then you have to move all the other chunks to make room for the enlarged one. If it edges over the page ... shenanigans ensue.

When your designer has given you the final pdfs for Ingram, ask them to give you a packaged copy of the Indesign files. You won't be able to open them, but this way, if your designer is hit by a bus, you've got files you can hand on to another designer, for edits or sequels, without losing all the hard work you already paid for. Back these up.



In graphic design circles, *type empathy* is the term describing the ASSOCIATIONS a font generates in you. Some of these reactions are really obvious, and some are subtle. Some fonts are bland, safe choices, but even these speak a subconscious message. These are often ‘things you *don't* know you know.’

The general convention in design is ‘3 fonts max’.

① is sleek; ② is optimal; ③ is professional; ④ is a circus.

You either want to have them indistinguishable, or well-contrasted.



So on your cover, you'll have the ‘hero font’ for the title - unless you're a celebrity, in which case you put your NAME in the hero font.



It must be legible. For years, I thought my mother's favourite perfume was 'ILCAJA'. I wasn't disabused of this until one day in a magazine I saw the marketing strapline - 'ILC-editteranean Fire'! It was an *M*, *Maja*. Don't make people guess!

And incidentally don't make characters' names unpronounceable unless they are the villain and you are deliberately invoking dislike or perplexity.

Let's play a game that I've blatantly stolen from Lynne Stringer's Facebook page.

I'm going to give you a book title, **Amelia**, and I'd like you to tell me what springs to mind when you see the lettering. Who is Amelia, what kind of book is it? and so on.



Give me some genres!



1: Horror, crime, thriller

2: Retro romance, fairy fantasy

3: Techno-thriller

4: Bildungsroman, historical fiction, romance

It becomes even more crucial to not be misleading, if you have a title like *Amelia in Court*— where Amelia could be a barrister, a prisoner, a princess, an arranged fiancé, or a tennis player.



So while we've all read fabulous books with dire covers, and dire books with fabulous covers ... the takeaway is that covers *do* still sell books, and you want to put your best & least-ambiguous foot forward. If your cover designer tells you your font choice is a Fashion Don't ... listen to them.



Third metaphor for the day: A book is like a dress. The front is all-important— but you mustn't neglect the back!





There are several ways you can design the back to match the front. Practically, a lot hinges on the size of your cover image and how easily you can duplicate its background.

Sometimes, there's a lot of reconstruction involved. You can see here how the images I began with have been morphed into full covers.



Other times, you're blending different photos into one another. It's VERY time consuming, and you have to pay attention to things like: *which direction* the light's coming from, how much *resolution* each image has – they'll all have to be brought down to the lowest common denominator or they'll *look* superimposed.



On the back of the book, you typically have some or all of these: a strapline, a question, a blurb, a bio & author photo, perhaps a review quote from a famous person, and the barcode.

In an IngramSpark template you can move the barcode anywhere; in KDP it's fixed to bottom right.

The blurb can be either in one of the front cover fonts, if that font's simple enough, or the body text font from inside the book. This is the only place I break the 'three fonts' rule. You can't write a blurb in a display font!

A blurb is not a synopsis. It's a teaser. Don't give away too much of the plot, or people won't need to buy the book to find out what happens! Keep it shortish, keep them intrigued.



We want our cover and our interior to look like a matched set. Here are some examples of how we bring that cohesion.



- We match the fonts
- We pick up a motif from the story, like the garden + flower one here



- We make it interesting, but not out of character



- We can separate points of view or timelines with specific motifs



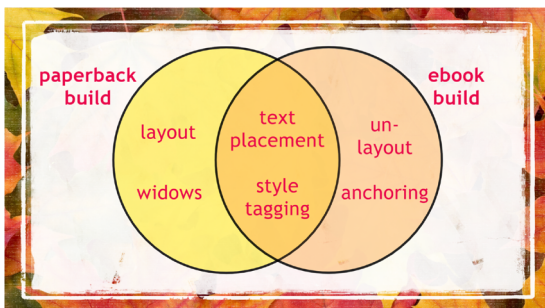
- Even an academic text can be made beautiful



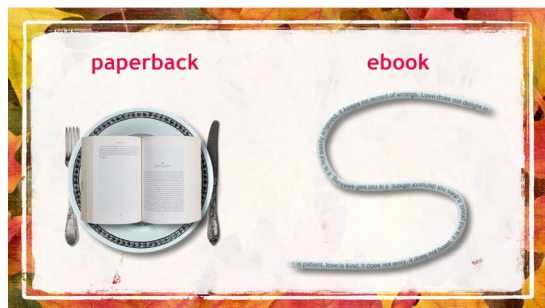
- When you're 'extra' the sky's the limit!



When you're wanting a paperback AND an ebook, the thing you need to know is that we are actually building TWO books – though there *is* significant overlap.



When we build a paperback, it's all about how it looks on a physical two-page spread. What you see on the screen in Indesign is what you're going to see on the paper pages in the book in front of you. It's like plating up a dish in Masterchef.



But when we build an ebook, it's more like a naso-gastric feeding tube. An ebook is not pages. It's one loooong screed, with little

bits of code embedded, to tell it when to force a new page for each chapter, and where to anchor the illustrations. You set it up with tags and links, but there's where the control ends. Any Kindle user can tell an ebook, 'No, I don't like that font, change it to Georgia, and make it a good deal bigger and less cramped; and come to think of it, let's have white text on a black background.' And suddenly it's no longer 185 pages long ... it's *300 screens* long. Widows and orphans have become totally irrelevant, because you've got no idea now how big or small the text is and whether there'll now be a word sitting by itself. The only things that are still where you left them, are things that have been tagged and anchored in the code to stay put.

My process is this: I set up the paperback first, and I do all the Paragraph & Character Styles nice and consistently, so that when I *Save As* that file to modify into the ebook version, all the HTML tags are already in place.

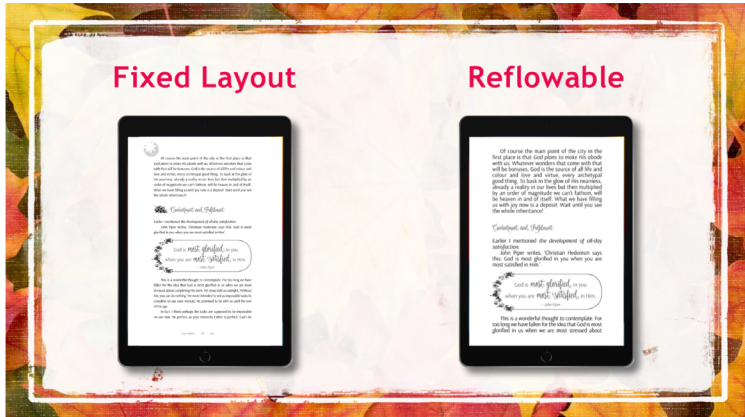
That way, when a reader says, 'Make the body text bigger,' all my chapter headings are still going to be just like I told them.

You *can* do fancypants things with wrapped-around illustrations if you know how to write code. It's way too hard for me - I use the default method, which is to centre each image.

The Table of Contents is set up so that when you ask the document to make an official TOC file and embed it, it automatically hyperlinks to the correct places.

Epub Types

There are two kinds of epub: Fixed Layout and Reflowable.
FLEPUB and **EPUB**.



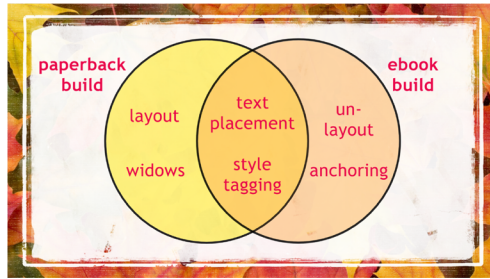
Fixed layout is best for children's picture books, where the text and the illustrations need to be balanced or intertwined, and where something is lost if they aren't displayed in a particular way.

But aside from children's books, Amazon won't take fixed layout - they want **REFLOWABLE**. This is because they want the Kindle machine to operate at its most flexible.

Last time I checked, Kobo and Apple Books were fine with either; but reflowable is the preferred file type. Some have limits on the size of your cover file.

Fixed Layout means that what you see on the printed page is what you see on your iPad screen.

Reflowable means that if you mess with something – like enlarging the font – the text will simply overflow to the next page, adding however many pages are now needed, bumping everything along with it automatically.



So, while there are 'set-up' ways to minimize the amount of faffing around between the paperback build and the ebook build, it really is two sets of overlapping tasks to produce two books.

Summary

So, in summary:

summary

- Finish your book first
- Respect your team's experience
- Be ethical
- Ebooks aren't paperbacks
- Fonts and images must *complement* your book
- Let the inside match the outside

Well ... I hope some of that was helpful. I'll be around to chat. Have a look at my wares, take a business card! Thank you for coming to hear me!

