

# The Write News

A Monthly Newsletter

Elisabeth Tuck, editor

March 2023

## BRANCH MEETING

### Workshop with AM Larks:

#### WHAT POINT OF VIEW CAN DO FOR YOU

**March 11, 2023 10:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m.**

**Zio Fraedo's Restaurant  
611 Gregory Lane, Pleasant Hill, CA**

#### SCHEDULE

9:30: Check-in

10:00 Workshop begins

12:00 Buffet Lunch

1:00 Workshop continues

2:00 Workshop ends

#### WORKSHOP FEES

Members \$45.00

Guests \$55.00

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*AM Larks will deep dive into point of view and all its forms.*

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#### Attendees will learn:

- Pitfalls and positives of each point of view
- Examples from well-known works from today's most popular authors.
- Workshop will include time for short draft exercises, as well as Q&A

**AM Larks** writes fiction, nonfiction, children's literature, and drama. Her writing has appeared in [NiftyLit](#), [Scoundrel Time](#), [Assay: A Journal of Nonfiction Studies](#), [Five on the Fifth](#), [Charge Magazine](#), and the [Zyzzyyva](#) and [Ploughshares](#) blogs. She has performed her stories at Lit Up at Town Hall Theatre in Lafayette, California. She is the current assistant managing editor and blog editor, as well as the former photography editor at [Kelp Journal](#), a multimedia literary revue, and the former [fiction editor](#) at [Please See Me](#) literary magazine as well as the former blog editor of [The Coachella Review](#).

AM Larks earned a Bachelor of Arts in English Literature, a Juris Doctorate, and most recently a Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing and Writing for the Performing Arts from the University California Riverside Palm Desert's low residency program. She is a longtime patron of the arts and enjoys stories that capture the complexities of life on the page or screen.

Scan the code for more information or to register online.

Registration opens February 13, 2023.

<https://cwcmtdiablo.org/>



REGISTER ONLINE AT <https://cwcmtdiablo.org/meetings-and-workshops/>



## *President's Message:* Barry Hampshire



Time keeps ticking along. It is one aspect of storytelling that exists in all of our writings, except some non-fiction.

How directly do we consider time in stories? Is it a central character, a theme, or just ignored?

For myself, I find I write sentences containing such phrases as “a day later,” “in the evening,” and “afterwards.” They move the story forward, but they are telling – not showing. Isn’t it interesting how so many discussions about writing come down to the old dictum of telling versus showing?

In my three earlier examples, I could have replaced them with “as the sun rose and they enjoyed their first cup of coffee,” “after turning on the lounge lights,” and “he spent several minutes checking his email.” None of these phrases directly speak to time, but they show that it has passed and gives an indication of the time at which the story continues.

I wish I’d thought about this kind of detail when I actually wrote my novels. Instead, I used the trusted “a short while later,” and “a moment after.” It is only now while I let my thoughts wander and coalesce into a message for the newsletter that I realize such insights.

But, having gained this shift in understanding, I will need another round of editing on my first novel. Will they ever end? The answer is only when I have had enough and am ready to abandon this particular creative project.

By showing time passing, rather than telling the reader that time has passed, time becomes more abstract and not as obvious in the words on the page. That is fine. I believe that to be true because when time is directly referenced in a story then time is emphasized and gains relevance in that particular circumstance.

Can time become a character in a story? It has no emotions, it has no way of communicating, and it will never change, as far as we know. But it has so much influence in our lives. Writers anthropomorphize inanimate objects. Why not Father Time? Is this the start of a new story??

No matter where we look, there are so many possible openings to new stories and new possibilities. Be creative, as Kevin Fisher-Paulsen encouraged us to do in his presentation, several weeks ago.

Have fun, let the imagination soar, and write.

Barry

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**FOR EXCELLENT TIPS ON WRITING WELL, check out what our past speakers have shared: <https://cwcmt Diablo.org/meeting-materials/>**

## Member Events, News, and Salutes



This section is regularly open members to writing and submitting a short announcement about milestones in their writing journey. Include a picture of yourself or your book. Publish something? Planning a reading at a bookstore or county fair? Speaking somewhere? Win an IPPY or other prize? Is your play being produced? The TV or movie version of your writing will be out soon? Let us know here.

<https://cwcmtdiablo.org/newsletter/>

### Bruce Lewis

Episodes 3 & 4 of my short story “There’s a Mouse in the House” have been released.

They’re free to read on Amazon. If you like them, smash on the Thumbs-Up Button. Enjoy. It’s kind of silly but was fun to write.

<https://www.amazon.com/kindle-vella/episode/B0BRX441TM>

<https://www.amazon.com/kindle-vella/episode/B0BRX5VK7B>



This Kindle Vella short story and a second I just published—and how our members can get theirs launched—will be the subject of the April 8 Writer’s Table.



Antioch novelist **John Tullis** will be interviewed on Ozcat Community Radio, 89.5 FM in Vallejo on Thursday, March 16th at 10:30 am.

(Note: To hear the station’s livestream, download the free version of the Tune/In Radio app and use it if you’re not located in the broadcast area around the City of Vallejo.)

Tullis will be talking about his writing process and reading passages from his recently published crime novel, *Ebony Bangs: A Richard Dake Noir*, which is set in San Francisco’s North Beach neighborhood in 1950. He may even read a teaser from the soon-to-be-published sequel, *Ebony Skies*!

## Five Steps to a Successful Book Launching Event

### Frances Stephenson

1. Remember, the author, rather than the bookseller, bears the greater responsibility for making the event a success.
2. Think like a retailer. The purpose of the event from the perspective of the bookstore owner is not only to sell the author’s book, but to build awareness of the store, generate foot traffic, and sell other books as well.
3. Help to generate traffic by inviting your friends to the event and asking them to buy your book at that time.
4. Make it easy and risk free for the bookstore to sell your book by offering copies for the event on a consignment basis where the publisher is paid after the book sells. A 60/40 split is standard. Offer to pay a minimal stocking or merchandising fee (\$30.00) to put one copy of your book in the store.
5. Select an appropriate bookstore where one would expect a book such as yours to be sold and anticipate a lead time in scheduling the book launching and signing. Bookstores may not schedule more than one event a month. Promote the launching of your book by contacting relevant book clubs, local newspapers, and blogs, and let them know the time and place. Lastly, help make the event festive by providing cookies, coffee, or another drink with cups and plates.



## Scholastic Arts and Writing Awards 2023 Report to the Board of Directors

By Linda Hartmann



### OVERVIEW

CWC Mt. Diablo Branch received their panels of assignments from our new Alliance Coordinator, Emir Webster on December 16<sup>th</sup>, with prior and pursuant Zooms and communications between Scholastic Coordinator Senait Mesfin Piccigallo, Scholastic Coordinator-in-training Quynh Trinh, and me. We completed the letter templates, made assignments, and sent the emails to individual branch readers. Linda made the assignments and Quynh put individual information into each template. All was ready on December 20<sup>th</sup> for judging to begin!

### TIMELINES

The jurors finished not only on time, but a day early! This is a built-in buffer to allow the chair to manage any last-minute issues. This year we had some partially duplicated panels which had to go back and forth for score redaction. One juror who had finished early offered to read and judge them within a tight timeframe, and was successful. We therefore qualify for the full \$2,500.00 honorarium once again.

### ISSUES:

The logistical issues we came across were manageable. Many were headed off up front by Quynh signing everyone into all of their assigned panels to reduce frustration for jurors and coordinators since this is the most counter-intuitive part of the process. Quynh's efforts helped enormously. Next year we will be working on an entirely new platform, and are not yet sure what to expect, but there were so many complaints to Scholastic about the difficulty for jurors to sign in that they promised a change that will be tested next year.

There were two serious concerns about students this year, one was thought to possibly be suicidal, another as possibly homicidal (or a really great writer; as the juror said – “even Stephen King had to start somewhere.”) The other concerns were not quite as serious, but some jurors wanted to ensure certain students had access to counseling.

### CURRENT ASSESSMENT:

Quynh, Senait, and I worked very well together with the jurors and were able to respond to them on the same day that issues arose. We could have used a few more jurors, as each year more and more students enter and the number of assignments we receive increases! I will work with Marlene to put a page on the website for this contest, so members are more aware of it year-round, and we have asked the jurors who enjoy reading to spread the word among our branch. We are in the unfortunate area of the country that does all of their work over the December and New Year holidays, but so far it has been manageable.

### TRANSITIONS:

Quynh has done a fabulous job coordinating this year and is willing to step into the chair role for the next round. I will support her but let her take the lead on communications with the Alliance Manager(s). We will review the contract together. Both Senait and I will help Quynh unless there is someone else who would like to help out with this role. I would be happy to help with training again as we will all need to learn a new system together. Much of the activity surrounding training, making assignments, and getting information out to each juror occurs in mid-December. This timing conflicts with Senait's family vacation. Thus we are recruiting an interested party to fill her role so she can be away then join as a juror after the New Year.

### DEBRIEFING:

A debriefing meeting was held over zoom and the phone to discuss what went well, the platform, sharing of experiences, what could improve the process (more jurors), and a summary has been written for the Alliance Young Artists and Writers.

## Scholastic Arts and Writing Awards 2023 Report to the Board of Directors (cont'd)

### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS:

I want to thank the coordinators who have been terrific to work with this year! Quynh's technical skills are a perfect match for this program. I want to also acknowledge the jurors, many who judged over the holidays and made the tight timelines! Our members set aside time during this festive time of year giving their time for this project, have always finished on time, and had great team collaboration, communication, and fun. Thank you for another successful year, and to the newcomers I hope to see them again next year. I also want to acknowledge Elisabeth Tuck, who used her eagle editorial eye to pull some interesting mistakes we can all learn from, and put the list in the February Newsletter! Well-done and rather humorous, too. We all need to learn to read our work out loud and let others take a second look before we submit our work! With gratitude, we can now look forward to a well-funded Young Writers Contest, already in full swing.

### EKPHRASIS PROJECT REPORT to the BOARD

By Linda Hartmann

The Ekphrasis Project has continued to gain interest and enthusiasm throughout the three organizations participating: CWC Mt. Diablo Branch, Lamorinda Arts Alliance (LAA), and the Lamorinda Arts Council (LAC).

Mount Diablo had a slight overage in numbers of members interested, but fortunately LAC welcomed a few of our members to fill slots they had open. LAC was scheduled to close their registration on 31 Jan 2023 with all slots full.

### WORKSHOPS / SEMINARS:

Many attendees of the five workshops/seminars we held have requested either a copy of the slide deck or for them to be added to the website.

### NUMBERS:

Registration is closed in all three groups. Each has filled all slots with 17 Initiators and 17 Responders, sometimes a single member has signed up for both roles as allowed. The pairing between CWC-Mt. Diablo and LAA is complete. The final date for responder submissions is March 15, 2023, however we are beginning to see a few early responses.

### ORGANIZATIONAL UPDATES:

The Art Gallery of the Orinda Library requested that we change the exhibit installation from April 29<sup>th</sup> to May 1, 2023. We obliged as we are receiving use of the space for free. This change does not affect any financials, or any timelines for our writers. The visual artists will be asked to bring their original work between 9:00 – 9:30 AM on May 1, 2023.

### FINANCIAL AGREEMENT:

The Ekphrasis collaboration financial agreement is in its final stages, and will be looked at by Bill Stong, Barry Hampshire, and David George for any additional changes prior to presenting it to the organizational boards of LAA and LAC for approval or any further required changes. Another meeting is scheduled for Feb. 21, 2023. We plan to move into the collaborative board sign-offs as soon as possible.

## Looking for a Critique Group Member?

Our branch critique group coordinator is hoping to help a new member find a home in a critique group that is looking for another member. Although the form at the link below is for members looking for a group, if your group has an opening, please go to <https://cwcmt Diablo.org/critique-groups/> and use the form to help you define any requirements you have. Some groups feel comfortable reading all genres, some restrict themselves to certain genres. Chloe is looking for an opening for a new member. (I've met her and find her bright and enthusiastic. If I had an opening, I'd ask her to join!)

### *Members' (Short) Works*

Members, See your writing in print!

Send your **short** works to be included in the Mt Diablo branch newsletter to:  
<https://cwcmt Diablo.org/newsletter/>



### **Actions have Consequences**

**Robert Poirier**

The phone call came as Libby Newhouse was leaving for work.

"Mom," her daughter Gail sobbed. "Something terrible has happened. Can you come to college and get me?"

"What is it, Gail?" Her daughter was not prone to hysterics.

"I can't talk about it. I'm at the Student Health and Wellness Center."

The drive to UC Davis took the better part of an hour. Libby immediately went to the center and found Gail's recovery room. As soon as she saw her mother Gail began sobbing.

"It isn't fair, Mom. He drugged me and assaulted me. I would never have agreed to sex."

"Wait, wait," Libby said. "Start from the beginning."

"He seemed like a nice guy. He's in my English Lit class and asked if we could study together. He brought over a six-pack of beer for himself and a six-pack of Pepsi for me. He brought the Pepsi to me in a glass.

"He started getting handsy, so I stopped him and said I didn't know him that well. He muttered something about rejection and said, 'Actions have Consequences.' About 15 minutes later, I felt disoriented. I woke up naked three hours later in the hallway with my underpants on my head. The doctor says I have not had intercourse, but there is evidence of rough activity."

A UC Davis Police Department detective knocked then entered the room.

"I'm Detective Ken Meehan," he said, addressing Gail. "I'm sorry, but I have to ask some questions. First, what was the student's name?"

"His name's Scot Kelly," Gail said. "He's a senior in my English Lit class."

"Tell me what happened," Meehan said.

Gail reiterated what she had told her Mother.

Meehan turned to Libby, "May I talk with you outside?"

## *Members' (Short) Works (cont'd)*

"We know him," Meehan said. "I know this sounds lame, but I don't want you to get your hopes up that he'll be punished. His father's a big-time lawyer and a major donor to the school. I'll take her statement and proceed with the case, but the Kelly kid will lawyer up immediately. My sergeant will probably close this tomorrow with a he-said-she-said argument."

Gail insisted on going home with Libby, who helped her pack everything from her dorm room into the minivan.

Libby called her ex-husband at work the next day.

"This is Jack," he answered.

"Jack, a boy sexually assaulted Gail at school, and she doesn't want to go back."

"That's terrible," he said. "What can I do?"

"Gail will survive," Libby said. "But the boy likely won't be punished. The police can't do anything. So I want you to help me punish him."

"Aw, geez, Libby. You have to let it go. There's nothing you can do."

"She's your daughter. I want you to steal her iPhone at lunch tomorrow and give it to me. Then, I'll have her file a police report that the phone was stolen."

"All right, all right," he said.

The next day, Libby took Gail to lunch. When Gail left her bag on the table to use the restroom, Jack walked by, took the bag off the table, and walked outside. He removed the iPhone then dropped the bag into a trash can near the restaurant. Jack used Gail's phone to call the restaurant to tell them the bag was in the trash can. That evening he met Libby outside her house and gave her the phone.

On Saturday, Libby drove to Sacramento and bought an inexpensive blonde wig and a pay-as-you-go phone. That evening she used the Friend Finders app on Gail's phone to track Scot Kelly to a bar on Main Street in Woodland.

She sat next to Kelly on a barstool and ordered a double Martini. When she reached for the drink, she accidentally bumped into Kelly's arm spilling his beer.

"I'm awfully sorry," she said, slurring her words. She used the little napkin to wipe away the spilled drink and briefly brushed her hand over his crotch. He took notice.

"I'm Sharon," she smiled. "I'd like to make it up to you. I can make you feel good."

"That sounds interesting," Kelly said. "Why don't you buy me another beer while I visit the john?"

Libby eye-dropped two doses of liquid Valium into his replacement beer and dumped the contents of her Martini into a nearby empty glass.

"You're one behind," she slurred and ordered another drink for both of them. Kelly chugged the beer without noticing the Valium. In about 10 minutes he started slurring his words. She added three drops of Visine into the next beer when he went to the restroom again.

After the last beer, he was loopy. "Let's go someplace quiet," Libby said as her hand brushed his crotch again.

"Okay," he said. "But, you'd better drive. I'm feeling a little screwed up."

"Okay," she slurred. "Give me your keys."

## Members' (Short) Works (cont'd)

They stumbled out to his truck. Libby put him in the passenger seat, climbed into the driver's seat, drove the truck to the Woodland CHP office, and parked it a few hundred feet from the CHP entrance.

Libby turned off the lights and manhandled him into the driver's seat. She turned on the engine using Kelly's finger on the start button. Finally, she buckled his seat belt and left the engine running while she walked to the Starbucks a few hundred feet away. She used the pay-as-you-go phone to call 9-1-1.

"I think there is a drunk driver on Andrew Stevens Drive outside the CHP entrance. It's a red Ford F-250 pickup, the engine is running, and the driver is slumped over the steering wheel."

Libby removed the blonde wig and put it in the Starbucks garbage bin. She paid cash for a cab to a café near her car, a few blocks from the lounge where she met Kelly. She removed the SIM card from Gail's phone, put the phone under the rear wheel, and drove over it as she left the parking lot.

A few days later, she received a call at home. "This is Ken Meehan from the UC Davis police." He had a pleasant phone voice.

"Yes, detective," she said.

"I just wanted to give you an update," he continued. "The CHP arrested the Kelly kid on a DUI. He passed out in his truck in front of the CHP station. It was Kelly's second DUI. He was on probation from the first one. When the CHP tried to remove Kelly from the truck, he projectile vomited in the cab and over the officers. They impounded his vehicle, and he spent the night in the Woodland jail, sicker than a dog. A note pinned to his chest read, 'Actions have consequences. Please forgive me for assaulting girls.' He dropped out of school, and the rumor is that he'll be shipped off to Colorado, where his mother lives. My sergeant has closed the case."




"A witness said he left the bar," Meehan said, "with a very nice-looking, middle-aged blonde woman. You wouldn't know anything about that, would you?"

"Very nice looking," she said softly. "Why, Detective Meehan, are you flirting with me?"

Meehan chuckled.

## Upcoming Programs

2023

 <b>Apr 8</b>	<b>Andrea A. Firth</b>	Flash fiction and non-fiction. Writer, editor, educator co-founder, Diablo Writers' Workshop, editor at the <i>Brevity</i> blog
 <b>May 13</b>	Joey Garcia	marketing
 <b>June 10</b>	Laurie McLean the genius behind the SFWC	finding agents

If you've heard a great speaker on writing/publishing/editing, email our speaker chair, Mark Clifford, at [programs@cwcmtdiablo.org](mailto:programs@cwcmtdiablo.org)

## Things to Do

### Napa Valley Writers Presents: "CROTCHES, CRUCKS, AND CRUTCHES"

Napa Valley Writers will feature **A. L. Kucherenko**, the author of *Knight's Pawn*, published in 2022. A.L.'s interest in the Middle Ages began with a personal challenge to learn about something she disliked. Soon, she discovered a more complicated history than what she had seen from afar. After several years of research and travel along Roman roads and waterways now nearly extinct, A. L. developed a profound respect for the resilient people who came before her and began writing a fictional account of the era to explore the human story omitted from the sparse lines of medieval documents. She lives in the San Francisco Bay area.



**Marilyn Campbell** will be March's Member Reader.

**WHEN** Wednesday, March 8, 7-9 p.m.

**WHERE** Napa Valley Unitarian Universalists, 1625 Salvador Ave. Napa

**Napa Valley Writers**, a non-profit organization, is a branch of the California Writers Club and holds monthly meetings. Cost is \$5 for members, \$7 for non-members. Students with ID, free. For more information, contact [lenorehirsch@att.net](mailto:lenorehirsch@att.net) or see [napavalleywriters.online](http://napavalleywriters.online) **Always open to the public**

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### A Workshop with Kevin Fisher-Paulson

#### "Editing: Not with an Ax but a Trowel"



Join this popular weekly columnist for *The San Francisco Chronicle* for an energetic session on the craft of writing. Editing is the stuff we love. The stuff we hate. We don't want to throw away a single darling, and yet we want to be brilliant. We don't want to throw it all out and start again. We want to be brilliant on the first pass. A good author knows that editing is a necessary part of the process, and this workshop will teach you:

- When to stop writing and start editing
- How to edit yourself outside of the echo chamber
- How to tuck away what you still love but no longer belongs in the piece
- How to take it all apart, then put it back together
- When to stop editing



Kevin's memoir, *A Song for Lost Angels*, about the challenges he and his husband faced in adopting special needs children, was a finalist for both the Benjamin Franklin Award and the Independent Book Publishers award. His second book, *How We Keep Spinning*, is a collection of his *SF Chronicle* columns that highlight his beloved family stories. Kevin lives in the mysterious outer, outer, outer, outer Excelsior with two sons who have adopted him, two dogs who adore him, and a husband who endures him.

**WHEN** Saturday, March 25, 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.

**WHERE** Napa Valley College, Community Room #1731  
2277 Napa-Vallejo Highway, Napa

**COST** \$45 for members of the CWC, \$55 for non-members, \$25 for students

Space is limited. For more info or to register, write to [lenorehirsch@att.net](mailto:lenorehirsch@att.net).

Napa Valley Writers, a non-profit organization, is a branch of the California Writers Club. [napavalleywriters.online](http://napavalleywriters.online)

## *Don't Write Like This*

**Copied from NextDoor** (when you write, reread what you've written before you hit enter.)

One was in plane site

Fuller a police report is my only advice.

We are looking for a handyman who do small jobs around our home periodically and as needed. Anyone with recommendations?

Him and his dad own a construction business

Police said that instead of getting help, Kennedy **claimed** into a storm drain pipe. ...Kennedy was eventually **recused** after a nearby neighbor heard her yelling for help.

from the Belle v poque to the present day, (you cannot blame a typesetter today.)

The shiny new silver vehicle pulled onto our cludesac (aside from the spelling, why onto? Was it elevated?)



## *Do Write Like This*

RANDOM THOUGHTS FROM AN EDITOR

(I ran this several years ago. I have since read even more books on editing and revised this to be less pedantic!)

After you've worked and reworked your material, you probably have it memorized. You know the story, where you intend the emphasis to be, what's important, and who the reader should care about. But, **is all of that on the page?** A writing buddy, a critique group, or an editor brings the fresh eyes of a reader and will give you feedback on how the work may be read and understood, i.e.: What is the experience of reading this work with fresh eyes? Can I see what the author meant me to see? Do I know/care for the characters? Is the story interesting? Clear? Do I want to turn the page? Are there places where I'd rather drift off to sleep?

**Every time there's something that stops a reader, the risk is they'll put your work down and never pick it up again without really knowing why.**

The least important part of what an editor does is find redundancies or correct spelling, grammar, and punctuation. Of course those details are essential when you're ready to submit, but you're not ready to submit until the following important issues have been addressed.

Have you researched the genre in which you intended to write? Have you used the elements of that genre?

**Story:** Don't count on a preface, dust jacket, chapter headings, or back-of-the-book praise to inform the reader. First chapters, first lines even, are **crucial to setting the story.**

Is your story compelling? What is the climax/tension/goal of this story or book? Is the story, clear to the reader early on? Is the setting clear? Is/Are the character(s) clear?

What drives the reader to turn pages? What are the subplots or mini-stories that appear along the way? What kind of tension do they create? How are they resolved? What is the arc of the story? Does the end of the story "inform the beginning?" In other words, is the story wrapped up at the end or has it drifted off somewhere else?

**Scene:** *Where* are we? *When* does this take place? If I live in Iowa, do I know what summer weather is like in the Bay Area? Ensure that what you see in your head is on the page. If your readers imagine something, then later you mention a detail that conflicts with what they imagined, that causes dissonance. They may stop reading

**Characters:** Early on, establish who's seeing/telling this story. Gender? Age? Size? And anything that's important for reader understanding, but don't present a string of description.

Characters need to be introduced to the reader with characteristics that make them memorable. What quirks, distinguishing features, malevolent looks, or kindnesses will each character have? Help us see each character. Are your characters realistic? Do they do things normal people do--or abnormal people if that's who they are?! What's unusual about them? Why are they interesting?

Include the characters' emotions. People think and feel whether or not they express it out loud. Human emotions bring characters alive and make readers want to follow them. Characters become real. Most of all, do the characters change and grow as the story develops? Are there extraneous characters who distract from the story?

**Scene:** *Where* are we? *When* does this take place? If I live in Iowa, do I know what summer weather is like in the Bay Area? Ensure that what you see in your head is on the page. If your readers imagine something, then later you mention a detail that conflicts with what they imagined, that causes dissonance. They may stop reading.

**Detail/description:** Use detail sparingly peppered throughout. Let me see the woman hiding behind the tree, one sandal on the exposed tree root, the other on the dusty ground. Think "unexpected detail" such as "feeling the pebbly surface of the avocado."

**Dialogue** is a great place to add detail that reveals story/character/scene. The human brain has a fantastic capacity to think of many things at once. Our five senses are active. We feel the heat in the room, smell the brownies baking, hear the airplane rumble overhead, see people twitching, and taste our coffee, all while conversing with others. Using the senses helps the reader to participate in the scene and is an opportunity to reveal character and/or plot. Is that bill paid? My foot hurts. Does that person have a gun in his pocket? Did she give me an odd look? Will he ever stop talking?

-Include action in the midst of conversations. Otherwise you have talking heads which isn't interesting. ". . .she said, smoothing her frizzy hair."

-Start a new paragraph when a new person speaks.

-Use tags when writing conversation. Because our minds are so active and tend to wander, don't make your reader struggle to figure out who's talking. If a reader's dog barks and they look up wondering why then return to the written conversation, let them easily pick up where they were, clearly knowing who's speaking because of tags. The brain won't trip on "he said, she said." If a question is asked, it's redundant to say, "she asked." We will have seen that she asked. Use "said." The brain slides over it. An occasional diversion from "said" is fine.

**Point of view** (POV): Whose story is it? From what point of view will you tell the story? Are you consistent? The British love *omniscient narrators*: "It was the best of times. It was the worst of times. . ." Charles Dickens, Ian McEwan, Louise Penny (actually a Canadian.) If you use this point of view, ensure you establish it clearly in the beginning. Describe a place where characters live, introduce more than one character so we don't follow just one. Penny does an excellent job with her Inspector Gamache series showing us the locations, the events, and the different characters and their quirks. Each book has a theme, artistic painting, a leveraged buyout, a wealthy family of haters, all the while there's an enticing atmosphere.

The most common POV in this country is *close third* (he, she.) With this POV, the camera is on the narrator's shoulder. The narrator can only relate what he sees, hears, and knows. That's an excellent way to draw readers close to a character who they care about and want to follow.

Less popular and sometimes more difficult for author and reader is *first person*: I, or even more seldom, we. If you can pull it off, and the story calls for it, it's fine.

It is possible to have more than one narrator but only with very clear scene changes. The changes can take up a large portion of the book and don't leave as much time for action and for caring about characters. Be judicious. Good example: *House of Sand and Fog* by Andre Dubus III because the characters were distinct. Bad example in my never-to-be-humble opinion: *Change of Heart* by Jodi Picoult because there weren't clues as to which character was narrating and although the changes were by chapter, they didn't work well.

Verbs: Use interesting ones. Yes, someone can "walk over" to the table but surely they have other ways of moving around. They shuffle, saunter, lope, rush, limp, etc. Verbs choices can show the character.

Verb tense: The easiest tense for the reader is simple past. He ran, she swam, he claimed, they loved. Less easy for both writer and reader is present tense. I walk; the trees bend in the fierce wind, etc. Whatever tense you use, be consistent. Past perfect: I **had** run, occurs before something mentioned: I had learned to drive well before my parents thought I was ready.

Show, don't tell: Instead of saying "He was impatient," show him jingling the change in his pocket, shifting from foot to foot, or cutting someone off in conversation. Don't tell us a date, show us an era.

Chronological order: Write actions in the order they happen. Instead of "He spoke up after he entered the room," show him striding into the room then speaking.

Write more active sentences than passive ones. Instead of "The letter was sent to her," write "The letter arrived in her mailbox." This also illustrates ways to use nouns as the subjects so your sentences don't all begin with pronouns or the characters' names.

Back-story Stories have a forward momentum. Readers wonder, "What happens next?" If you interrupt that forward momentum to tell us what happened before, it stops the reader. Sprinkle in back story **if** it is crucial and if it is relevant to current action. For example, if the main character is a woman with an abusive childhood, let her remember her past in short moments when she witnesses something that triggers the memory such as seeing a mother slap a young child.

Try not to be repetitive. Try not to use clichés. But don't let this stop you writing the story! Just go back after you finish, and fix those things.

### **Keep a list to remind yourself of words to avoid.**

Every author has quirks regarding words they use frequently. As you see them repeated in your manuscript, add them to your list and try to find better ways to write. Examples of words clients have overused are: back, just, sometimes, something, suddenly, get, got, gotten

Go find a more interesting verb

Start/begin to Once you start, you are already doing. "He started to smoke." becomes "He smoked."

Was You'll find better ways to write if you rarely use "was." He was singing, becomes he sang. He was determined to fix the car, becomes He gathered his tools, determined to fix the car.

As If a character does something **AS** something else is happening, which is the important activity that the reader should absorb? "S returned to the room as R related their adventure." I missed S's return and was surprised to see him light someone's cigarette later. I thought he was still out of the room!

Grammar issues:

Learn the basics of punctuation. Grammar has its own language just as any profession does.

Vary your sentence types. Remember your early reading books in first grade? They were all **simple sentences**. Jack went up the hill. Jill followed Jack. They carried pails.

**Compound sentences** can be more interesting: Jack rolled down the hill, and Jill came tumbling after.

**Conjunctions** combine two complete sentences making a compound sentence. She sewed, and he read the paper.

The conjunctions can be remembered with the mnemonic FANBOYS: for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so.

Conjunctions connect complete sentences to make a compound sentence.

*Compound sentences* Don't lose good writing by rushing with a lot of compound sentences. Sometimes they're valid, sometimes they need to be separated for emphasis, or so the reader can stop for a second to absorb what's happening before they read the next action or idea.

*Conjunctions* Microsoft grammar checker encourages the use of "and then." I vote against it. Each word may indicate a different situation. How does using both enhance understanding?

*Pronouns* Make sure it's absolutely clear who or what you are referring to. "A single-lane bridge that crossed a riverbed ahead appeared to lead into the town's narrow main street. **It** offered the lone evidence of repairs." What had been repaired? The street or the bridge?

Don't start every sentence with a character. Sometimes inanimate objects make good sentence starters: The knife sliced carrot circles while Mary contemplated the phone call she overheard.

*Adverbs* I acknowledge that limiting adverbs gives people fits. However, in most cases you can produce much better writing by eliminating the adverb. They:

--are often redundant. "He whispered softly." Softly is redundant.

--tell, rather than show: "The curtain gracefully covered the window." Was it swagged? Was it sheer? What does "gracefully" mean here? What am I supposed to see?

-- can be a sign of rushing your writing. "The teacher carefully explained." Did she talk for a long time? Did she bore the class with detail? Think about slowing down whenever you come across an adverb in your writing.

Try making the adverb into the verb. Instead of "the Victrola scratchily sang" try the Victrola scratched out the song"

Don't become a fanatic. I've seen writers use incorrect grammar in an attempt to not use an adverb or make the sentence awkward to avoid using one.

***Definite and indefinite articles (the/a)*** Small words make a difference: "He moved **the** chair." The reader should know which one or maybe that there's only one available.

"He moved **a** chair." Any chair will do.

*Prepositions* Some aren't necessary. "He narrowed down his eyes." Narrow is a fine verb that says all we need to know. Down is redundant.

*Superlatives/absolutes* (best, greatest, most, never, all, always, etc) can be overused and are rarely true: That was **all** of the money she had on her, **except** for

"He introduced all the other officers." Then later on we read, "He introduced Officer Watkins." What? I'm confused. All the officers have been introduced. Now I've stopped reading to figure something out.

*Leading dependent clauses (LDC)* A long introductory clause may lead the reader in one direction then the rest of the sentence goes elsewhere: “Hearing his screams, and seeing the blood spurt, and the entrails of his arm displayed as though in a medical textbook, I felt faint with a mixture of nausea, repulsion and fear.”

I’d like to wager that each reader expects something different after reading that underlined LDC. If we’re following a character, the important point is how he felt: “I felt faint with a mixture of nausea, repulsion and fear hearing his screams, seeing the blood spurt . . .” The rewrite puts you with the character feeling faint while looking at the injury.

Don’t use words that you don’t know or that feel weird, but don’t let that stop you looking up synonyms. You may find a common one you forgot that you could use.

In a tense scene, use shorter sentences and eliminate unnecessary words. Focus on the action or the fear or whatever is causing the tension.

She waved at a (familiar) couple ~~she knew~~ who had owned a downtown store

She closed her eyes as the faces of those she had lost appeared unbidden ~~in her mind~~.

there’ll be vs they’ll be

~~The tune~~ “Jingle Bells”

then she leaned **over** and kissed him on the lips. Annie rushed **over** and threw herself on top of her father, begging God to bring him back. Liam walked **over**, How would you rewrite this?

Writing is a discipline. Writing is HARD work and it amazes me that people stick to it. I feel a bit guilty editing because it creates more work for the writer! But the intention is to improve.

PS. I’ve used a lot of exclamation marks in this—don’t do that in your first novel. Write the most excellent literary novel you can. Let your words make the meaning clear, not your punctuation. When you’re an established author, write whatever your publisher directs or allows you to write!

This is an excellent article debunking some writing rules. Take it with a grain of salt.

<https://www.merriam-webster.com/words-at-play/5-writing-rules-destroyed-by-the-dictionary>

When I was in fourth grade our looming teacher wrote in giant letters on the front and side blackboards “it’s” and “its” then railed at our 9- and 10-year-old selves the meaning of each.

**It’s:** In this pronoun the apostrophe takes the place of **I**: **it’s means it is**.

**Its:** In this **possessive** pronoun, possession is intended as with his, hers, yours, theirs

All other possessive nouns use an apostrophe: the rat’s nose, Nancy’s hat, the desk’s legs

Plurals do NOT use an apostrophe: banks, keys, vegetables, many desks, 6 trees

There (the opposite of here)

They’re (they are)

Their (possessive, their hats)

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Please consider joining one of the following donor clubs to benefit our programs in support of young writers. Your tax-deductible gift will appear in the contest program in May, and in the Mount Diablo CWC newsletter every month in the year you donate. Or remain anonymous if you prefer!

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In May the Mt. Diablo Branch hosts an awards ceremony to honor the students--if there's no pandemic! All program expenses are supported by individual donations and grants.

\*\*\*\*\*

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