

Stet

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THE NEWSLETTER OF THE INDEPENDENT WRITERS OF CHICAGO

JULY MEETING

A Twofer for July: Tips on Breaking into the Humor Market and Children's Literature

BY JAMES L. HODL

Have you ever considered writing for the humor market? They say writing drama is much easier than writing humor as the sense of "funny" varies widely among the populous. Yet humorous books and novels remain popular choices among consumers. So how does one break into this type of writing and get published?

The answer to these and other questions will be offered by Wendy McClure, author of two humorous books, in her presentation "Why I'm Not the New Me" at the next IWOC meeting on Tuesday, July 11.

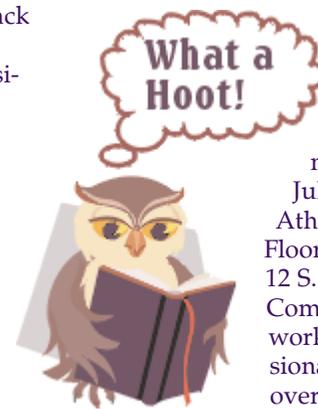
A native of Oak Park (which Wendy notes has been the setting for a surprising number of television sitcoms), McClure has for years worked as an editor of children's books for the age 4-10 set at Albert Whitman & Co., Morton Grove. But her career as a humor writer began almost by accident in cyberspace.

"I began contributing to the e-magazine *Television without Pity* in 1999. Intrigued by the potential of the Internet, I started an online journal called *Pound*, which often chronicled my somewhat reluctant efforts to lose weight," McClure

said. "Feedback from readers was very positive. They found my writing funny and wondered why I didn't put it all in a book. So I did."

The result was *I'm Not the New Me*, a humorous memoir spoofing diet and self-help books that was published in 2004. McClure followed with a second book in a similar vein last May called *The Amazing Mackerel Pudding Plan*.

During her presentation, McClure will share her writing and tips on how to write for the humor market, often in humorous fashion. She also will touch on writing for the children's book market, and other types of writing she has produced during her career. She writes a column for *BUST* magazine, and is a regular contributor to *The New York Times Magazine*. She has had essays published in various anthologies, and has had poetry published in *Sulfur*, *Volt*, and *New American Writing*.



To meet the author and learn "Why I'm Not the New Me," attend the IWOC meeting on Tuesday, July 11 at the Chicago Athletic Club's 7th Floor Lakeshore Room, 12 S. Michigan Ave. Come at 5 p.m. to network with other professional freelance writers over gourmet cookies, coffee, tea or soft drinks. The program begins at 6 p.m. Admission is free to IWOC members, whether professional or associate members (see box below), and \$15 to nonmembers.

Attendees are invited to continue discussing the presentation or simply network with other writers after the meeting at a nearby restaurant during a buy-your-own dinner. Plan to join us. It's always a lively discussion. ♦♦

Associate Members Now Get Free Admission

The \$5 admission fee to monthly programs has been eliminated for associate members. Now admission is free to all members!

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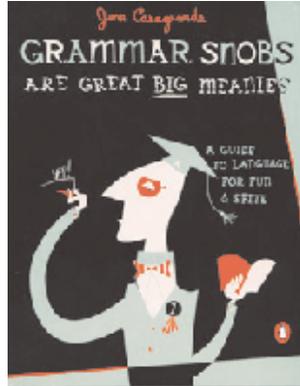
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Language "Lessons" Styled the L.A. Way

BY RICHARD L. EASTLINE

THIS IS YET ANOTHER REVIEW IN AN IRREGULAR SERIES DEVOTED TO BOOKS AND INTERNET SITES THAT ARE POPULARLY CLASSIFIED AS REFERENCE SOURCE MATERIAL

Grammar Snobs (Are Great Big Meanies) / Jane Casagrande / 200 pp. incl. source list / Penguin Books, 2006 (small format paperback) / \$14.00 list / ISBN 0-14-303683-1.



If you ever entertained thoughts that Los Angeles operates in a different, but parallel universe from our own, this new twist on a language guide will help to confirm your acuity. So, how can a book devoted to grammar and (especially) punctuation be so different from others already on the shelf? Actually, it can't inasmuch as it covers the same blueprints of writing construction as have so many others. Keep in mind, though, that language rules are somewhat constant. It's the authors who aren't. Jane Casagrande writes a column about words out there on the West Coast where nothing is ever as it seems to be.

So, then, in true Hollywood style, there must be a gimmick, a different slant on the vernacular. In this case, we meet up with an approach that is possibly tailored to the "like," "sucks," and "yuck" generation. Lord knows, this is the generation that truly is lost when it must navigate the choppy waters of grammatical construction. The problem is so many of its constituents don't even try. To ignore is a comfortable disguise for ignorance.

Whatever the circumstance, the author plays her role as a mentor to this audience without missing a beat (or rap) throughout more than three dozen short chapters. Her content is organized with logic and presented in a very self-effacing delivery. No insults, no threats, but lots of *mea culpa*. The exposition is at all times valid and conventional with the exception of some slight rule-bending or discarding that will annoy purists and even those a notch below.

The guide abounds in samples of tortured grammar that make one recall the choice examples in that runaway British bestseller, *Eats, Shoots, and Leaves*, proving perhaps that exposing literary idiocy is a treat savored on both sides of the Atlantic. Casagrande also finds special delight in exposing the chinks in the grammatical armor worn by Establishment experts such as William Safire and James Kilpatrick. She does this in her opening chapter so as to inform her readers right from the beginning that she's not part of *that* crowd (understandable, considering the geographic separation).

From there on, things tone down and she's up and running with a full list of tasty items, all clearly defined explanations (nothing wishy-washy here) for appropriate usage of punctuation as well as avoiding a number of terrors residing in word choice. The chapter content ranges from pronouns to prepositions; commas, colons, and conjunctions; short cuts for Internet usage; words conjoined and verbs conjugated; along with several instances of really troublesome oddballs — double possessives, mishaps with quotation marks, and the hyphen/dash rivalry.

The author also ventures into that expansive area of misused words, those that seem to be equal alternatives but aren't, including several of the "problematic pairs" — "advisor" vs "adviser" or "titled" vs "entitled." They're classics but, regretfully, are only a sampling of wonders in this category.

Reasonably thorough as it is, this compact volume doesn't offer any new insights into the topics, other than revealing the personal stance of the author. And, to a degree, there is an annoyance factor in some of the writing itself. Most of all, it's the combination of "with it" text phrasing and low-grade TV zingers for chapter titles that make you wince. While not a reference book intended for posterity, it's a useful guide for any who wouldn't come near the *Chicago Manual of Style* or the classic *Elements of Style*. One needs to believe that Casagrande is chuckling to herself as she removes her role-playing makeup after the tutoring ends. Still, this is Los Angeles. ♦♦

Want to Try Adjunct Teaching? Here's How to Get Started

BY MARLA KRUGLIK

If you're a writer but think you also may be a teacher at heart, Kurt Wise was talking to you at IWOC's June 13 meeting. Wise, an assistant professor of public relations at DePaul University, told us how to test the waters of academia by guest lecturing or teaching a course or two before deciding whether or not to seriously pursue the adjunct route as an add-on to your writing career.

To begin, said

Wise, find out online what courses local institutions offer in communications.

Perhaps a particular course could use a guest lecturer. Or

a department could use a whole course you can design and teach. Since no one knows this but you, your next move is to research whom to contact—the course professor in your area of interest, department chair, or adjunct staff director. Then e-mail your credentials and ideas for a course or lecture.

Your lecture could be on your specialty, such as science, medical, or business writing.

Keep in mind that professors enjoy having a guest give a relevant lecture. The course is that much less work for them to prepare. And experience as a guest lecturer is an excellent credential when you later want to teach an entire course. Staffing decisions for the

fall are usually made in March and April, so the time to start applying is in January or February. To guest lecture, start looking now at the courses that will be offered in the fall.

You don't always need an advanced degree to teach undergraduates, though an M.A. (in any subject, no matter how unrelated, Wise insists) always looks good to an institution and is needed to teach a graduate course.

The more selective a school, the more likely it will require its teachers to have advanced degrees. Wise took the time, mid-career, to earn a Ph.D. in public relations but says that PR is the only communications area where the degree is really

useful. (Well, he qualified his remark, maybe, sometimes, it helps in advertising, or even journalism...)

Wise estimates that a typical course will take an adjunct professor 6 to 12 hours of effort a week. Writing courses take less preparation but more grading time; lecture classes are the opposite. The pay is low, typically from \$2500 to \$3500 per course, with no health benefits. But you do get to use the institution's library, gym or other facilities; write to publishers for free "review copies" of books; and have a chance to influence the future of your field through the students you teach.

Another perk: as a professor or even a part-time lecturer, you're your own boss,

says Wise. "You run the ship." You invent the course, choose the readings, make the assignments, tests, and rules. And no one oversees you in the classroom. When this reporter later told him about the army of adjunct freshman English teachers, who comprise the vast majority of adjunct communications professors and who have little or no say over the format of their classes, he admitted to having no experience with freshman English teaching.

Should you go for it? You'll know after one or two semesters whether you want to get really involved in teaching. The bottom line is personal fulfillment (even with freshman English, this reporter concedes).

"Teach," Wise concludes. "My guess is, you will love it."♦♦



IWOC on the Airwaves

BY ROGER RUEFF

Coming soon to a set of computer speakers near you — it's IWOC on the air! The web-streaming air, that is.

As part of an effort to increase our exposure to the Chicago business community, IWOC has joined the WBBM Business Network and will soon start airing 60-second commercials on the WBBM (AM 780) web-streaming broadcast. The broadcast currently reaches over 70,000 unique registered listeners—and that number is growing fast. And 65% of those listeners tune in at work.

Each commercial will be professionally produced using WBBM on-air talent, and we can change the commercial as often as we like. That way, we can tailor its message to reach a specific audience and/or potential members or even to advertise an upcoming IWOC event. The first commercial has been designed to introduce IWOC to the web-streaming audience and to drive potential clients to our web site.

Unlike the WBBM radio broadcast, the streaming broadcast does not have specific time slots for its commercials. On the downside, that means we can't target a day of the week or time of day for our ads. On the upside, it means that neither can anyone else! The playing field is completely even.

To hear the WBBM streaming broadcast and listen in for the IWOC commercial, simply navigate your browser to www.wbbm780.com and click the "Live Radio Through Your Computer" link. Then follow the onscreen instructions to open a pop-up window with the special WBBM radio player interface. It's that easy!

IWOC on the Internet airwaves — it's an idea whose time has come!♦♦

IWOC Joins Evanston C. of C.

BY DIXIE WATTERSON

To help members market their services, IWOC has joined the Evanston Chamber of Commerce. IWOC will be listed in the online and print directories and all IWOCers can participate in the events and other benefits that the Chamber sponsors.

One of the most popular events is Business after Hours - wine and snacks held monthly at interesting sites around town. Everyone is friendly, it's a chance to see a new or renovated restaurant, and it's possible to come away with a lead for new business. The next one is July 19 at the Davis Street Fishmarket.

Other regular events are networking breakfasts, home-based business meetings, and business seminars. The Chamber also sponsors annual events honoring community leaders and legislators as well as a golf outing.

As an IWOC member of the Evanston Chamber, you can take advantage of a raft of discounts. Both the YMCA and Evanston Athletic Club offer reduced pricing. So do copy shops, accountants, framing services, car rental agencies, caterers, computer repair experts, photographers and beauty shops and more.

If you get to a Chamber event, be sure to say hi to Jonathan Perman, the director. He is a friendly guy and an advocate for small business owners. He is always happy to provide a referral to a Chamber member. And that, dear IWOC member, is you.

Web site is www.evchamber.com. You can request the email newsletter at info@evchamber.com. ♦♦

More Business Opportunities through Local Chambers

We're on a networking roll! Besides the Evanston Chamber (see above), IWOC is also joining the Greater Oakbrook Chamber of Commerce and the Northwest Suburban Alliance for Commerce and Industry (NSACI). Both these groups will give our members a chance to rub shoulders with business people who use writers for all sorts of projects.

Besides the opportunity to network in person at meetings, membership in the Oakbrook Chamber gives us a listing in their 2006 Business Guide and Membership Directory, distributed to over 4000 Oakbrook businesses, ongoing referrals for business exchange opportunities, promotion of IWOC and its services on their website, and more. Our contact there says there's a big need for writers among their membership.

The NSACI serves about 70 communities in the northwest suburbs. The chamber itself is located in Rolling Meadows, and they have events all the time. Our contact there is Tina Dunn. Call her at 847-923-5239 to find out about events. We'll have more info on both groups in the next issue or possibly online. ♦♦

Calendar

July 11

"Why I'm Not the New Me," IWOC monthly meeting. Wendy McClure will tell how to crack both the children's lit and humor markets. Chicago Athletic Association, 12 S. Michigan Ave., Chicago. Ample parking and the El nearby. Buy-your-own dinner follows at Miller's Pub. Networking at 5 PM, program at 6 PM. Professional members free, associates free, nonmembers \$15.

August 8

IWOCFest. IWOC's grand summer party on the rooftop at Pegasus restaurant in Greentown. More food than you can possibly eat, lively conversation, libations, and just plain fun. Save the date, get the babysitter, and bring friends. More details coming soon.

The monthly food and networking get-togethers listed below usually meet at the same time and place each month unless otherwise noted, but it's best to call ahead in case of cancellation. The groups welcome nonmembers. If there's no group in your area, why not start one? Contact webmaster@iwoc.org for info.

July 27 (4th Thursday)

IWOOP monthly lunch. Join near-west suburbanites at noon for an outdoor lunch at Poor Phil's, 139 S. Marion St., Oak Park (summer location). For more info, call Barb Dillard at 312/642-3065.

August 3 (1st Thursday)

IWORP monthly breakfast. Join the Rogers Park IWOC contingent for breakfast at 9 AM at the A&T Grill, 7036 N. Clark St., Chicago. For more info, call Esther Manewith at 773/274-6215.

IWOC WELCOMES RETURNING MEMBER

Danielle Schultz

It's Happening on the Web!

Check Out Writers' Line

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See What's Doing in IWOC Events

WWW.IWOC.ORG