

FEBRUARY MEETING

Get the Scoop on Freelance Writing & Blogging Opportunities at Pioneer Press

BY STEWART TRUELSEN

Pioneer Press is looking for freelance writers, but don't take our word for it. Come to the Feb. 8, meeting of the Independent Writers of Chicago (IWOC) and hear for yourself. The monthly program features Carol Goddard, senior editor for news at Pioneer Press, a community newspaper chain that is part of Sun-Times Media Group, Inc.

"We rely a great deal on freelancers, both freelancers who provide features for us and freelancers who cover meetings for us or pitch us stories," said Goddard. She'll talk about the opportunities for freelancers at the IWOC meeting.

Freelancers hired by Pioneer Press range from college students to seasoned reporters who may have been let go by other newspapers and are looking for ways to supplement their income and maintain their skills.

Goddard started her journalism career as a sports writer. She joined Pioneer Press in 1986 as managing

editor of Oak Leaves, the weekly serving the Oak Park community, and is now the news editor for all the Pioneer papers, overseeing news content for both print and web.

In the past, community newspapers focused on covering the meetings and actions of various governmental bodies, but that is changing. "Now we are more of a 24/7 operation,"

said Goddard. "Breaking news is a major part of our coverage. In-depth features are something we are doing a lot more of than when I first started."

At one time Pioneer Press had 59 publications, but Goddard said it has scaled back to 32. "The ones that we dropped were ones that weren't getting much advertising support and sadly that's the most important thing in the balance sheet of community newspapers," she said.

While the press runs may be lighter, Pioneer Press makes up for it by having an advertising-supported website (www.pioneerlocal.com). Breaking news is covered on the website, so the papers can become more feature-

oriented and explanatory in their news coverage. In addition to the extensive rundown of local news, the website contains a number of blogs and entertainment news. "We'd love to provide more blogs for people," said Goddard.

If you haven't written for a newspaper lately, don't worry. Goddard assured us that not much has changed from the "Five Ws and H" (Who, What, When, Where, Why and How) that we all learned. Those of us already writing news releases or articles for trade publications could make a smooth transition. If your recent experience, however, is limited to writing inflammatory "letters to the editor," you'll need to leave that behind. "Writing news and news features is much different from opinion pieces," added Goddard.

Join us on Tuesday, February 8, for a program about freelance opportunities at Pioneer Press and its future as part of the Sun-Times Media Group. With the aftershocks of the recession affecting all of our neighborhoods and suburbs, there couldn't be a much more exciting time to be involved in covering community news.

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PRESIDENT'S COLUMN/ROGER RUEFF

Our esteemed president and his wife, Jennifer Lyng, have just returned from a very successful business/pleasure trip to Italy, and thus we have no president's column this month. Instead I offer you a word-usage rant from the Grumpy Grammarian (aka your editor). Some of the documentation comes from an extremely useful book called *The Wrong Word Dictionary* by David Dowling.

Last year I had the extreme misfortune of having attempted to teach Business Writing to a group of hapless college seniors who hadn't yet mastered eighth grade grammar. It was a long semester. So I have few illusions about the state of English grammar. However, I expect that you-all will know everything I'm about to say, but on the off chance that there's just the tiniest gap — maybe when you were out with the mumps — in your grade school background, here are some grammar gaffes and comments on other word usage.

I've said this before, but tops on my all-time hate list is to hear someone say, "I couldn't be there because I was *nauseous*." No, you weren't unless you mean you thought you'd make other people sick. "I was *nauseated* because there was a *nauseous* smell in the room." Get it? I hope so.

Here's one that separates the wheat from the chaff: What's the difference between *disinterested* and *uninterested*? *Disinterested* means that you're impartial or you have no opinion. "A *disinterested* person mediated the dispute."

Uninterested simply means you have no liking for the subject. "Rachel is *uninterested* in football."

How about *discreet* and *discrete*? If you haven't told anyone your best friend is having an affair with a married lion tamer, you're *discreet*. (Also insane. That's juicy.) *Discrete* means separate or distinct, as in "There

are five *discrete* steps to the process."

Hence, thence, whence. (Try saying *that* three times.) *Hence* means "thus, from here, or from now on." *Thence* means "from that time or place." *Whence* means "from what place, source, or cause." "There was a blizzard, *hence* we couldn't go to a movie and *thence* to dinner. From *whence* came the storm that left us starving and unentertained?" (If you're so smart, just try to put all three of those in one intelligible sentence.)

Did you know that a *fable* has to have animal characters in it, and it has to reinforce some useful truth or moral? (I'm an animal-rights person, but who knew my cats are part of a cartel that controls the fable market?)

On a similar topic, what's a *legend* or a *myth* for that matter? According to my book, a *legend* is an unverified story handed down from earlier times. Does that mean that all our so-called sports or political "legends" possibly never existed? I can think of some about whom I devoutly wish it were true. Ronald Reagan springs to mind instantly.

I have a similar question about Dowling's definition of *myth*. He says a *myth* is "a story usually dealing with a superhuman being and events that have no natural explanation." Okay, that takes care of the Sirens of classic Greek fame, but what about the myth that says toads cause warts? Last time I met up with a toad, I didn't glimpse a single



superhuman characteristic. I think Brother Dowling is a bit short on alternate definitions in this category. But I digress. This is supposed to be a usage discussion, not a book review.

Here's a hair-splitter we all have to watch out for if we're going to star on the grammar gridiron: When should we say *a while* and when *awhile*? Simple, but easily forgettable, unfortunately. *A while* is the object of the prepositions "for" and "in," as in, "In a while, I'll stop writing this." *Awhile* is an adverb that means "for a time." "Come in and stay *awhile*."

Now for some words and phrases that should never have esses on them: *a long way* (not "ways"), *afterward*, *anyway*, *anywhere*, *downward*, *eastward* (*westward*, etc.). There are more, but this gives you the idea.

Have you ever wondered what constitutes *flotsam and jetsam*, or who are your *kith and kin*? A couple of rock bands maybe? I wouldn't bet there aren't any such, but the original meaning of *flotsam* is "floating cargo or wreckage following a shipwreck," while *jetsam* is "something thrown overboard to lighten a ship in distress."

In *kith and kin*, you might think your *kith* were Uncle Charlie whom you never discuss because he spent some time in the slam for molesting a goat, and your *kin* were those relatives you do acknowledge, like Cousin James who's a bank president. (Well, these days

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Self-Publishing and Distribution: What an Author Needs to Know

BY DAVE EPSTEIN

The IWOC audience got a lively overview of self-publishing and 40 years of changes in bookselling from Randall McKenzie, who has sold to many bookstore buyers, including Kroch's and Stuart Brent. McKenzie is Vice President of Sales for The BookMasters Group, which provides a broad range of book production and distribution services. He explained how changes in bookselling and production technology encouraged the current rise in self-publishing.

RISE OF SELF-PUBLISHING

Forty years ago, the book market was controlled by independent booksellers "who loved books and wanted to educate the reading public." Then along came the big chain bookstores, Barnes & Noble being the biggest; Borders the second largest—but now approaching bankruptcy; and Books-A-Million ranking third. By the 1990s these chains and big box retailers had narrowed the market to easy-to-sell titles by "name" authors. Emergence of less costly electronic production and printing methods followed by online bookselling and publishing of e-Books opened up self-publishing opportunities for unknown or little-known authors writing for specific niche audiences.

STATISTICS

In 2009, out of 1,000,000 published titles, only about 289,000 came from tradi-

tional publishers, a 1 percent drop for that category, but 764,448 new titles were self-published. A publisher's representative gets 15 minutes to present 5 titles to major bookstore buyers. An author must make a clear, simple case to convince buyers that a given book will sell. The successful author also has to build a platform by talking to readers interested in his subject, creating an "echo effect" that builds sales by word of mouth.

WHY SELF-PUBLISH?

McKenzie gave five principal reasons to self-publish: (1) rejection by conventional publishers, (2) control, (3) money, (4) publication timing, and (5) quality.

MAINSTREAM REJECTION

Authors rejected by mainstream publishers can prove their sales appeal by self-publishing. James Redfield gave away the whole first printing of his New Age philosophical novel, *The Celestine Prophecy*, and then sold 100,000 copies himself. When Warner Books republished it, it became a *New York Times* Best Seller for an astonishing 165 weeks.

CONTROL

Self-publishers control how and when their books are released, priced, promoted, and marketed. Little-known authors have no clout with traditional publishers over title, cover design, or quality of editing, all of which are crucial to a book's success.

ROYALTIES

Self-published authors bear all the upfront costs and risk but can make far more per copy than they can from a standard publisher's royalties. Trade publishers pay royalties of 6-8 percent after the typical trade (bookstore) discount of 50 percent. On an average 200-page paperback priced at \$14.95, the publisher gets \$7.50 per copy, and the author may get 45-60 cents. Reserves for return copies and bulk sales at deeper discounts to book clubs or specialty retailers like Home Depot further reduce the author's earnings.

With Print on Demand (POD) services, the author gets 10 percent royalty of the net price, or 75 cents on a \$14.95 book, and gets paid sooner, usually in 60 days.

COSTS

Self-published authors have to pay all upfront costs (perhaps \$3-6 per copy or more), plus about 18 percent of cover price to a distributor for warehousing and fulfillment. However, they typically keep 35-40 percent of the net cover price, or \$2.60-3.00 per copy on a \$14.95 book.

TIME TO PUBLICATION

Timing and production quality are the other two major advantages of self-publishing. Conventional publishers take about 18 months from manuscript completion to publication. Self-publishing takes only 4-6 months, and the author controls the release date.



QUALITY

As for quality, conventional publishers generally use cheap paper, binding, and cover materials that can harm a book's sales appeal.

PRINTING OPTIONS

Self-publishing options include traditional printing, POD, and e-Books. It's wise to do a small first printing, then do larger reprints only after demand builds up. Although conventional offset printing requires print runs of several thousand and up, digital offset printing (no plates needed) allows affordable print runs as low as 500 copies. It's best to plan on a paperback: price points are lower, as are unit production costs for small print runs, and even libraries now order paperbacks.

Print on Demand or POD bases printing on existing orders, avoiding the storage cost and risk of unsold copies. However, sales are through the POD service's website only, and there is no retail distribution. Don't let POD vendors assign your ISBN. They will control it and, if you ever want to shift to another publisher, POD services can refuse to release your work as long as they claim to have even one pending order.

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Self-Publishing and Distribution: What an Author Needs to Know

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CREDIBILITY

For credibility with booksellers, choose a name for your publishing company that sounds like a regular publisher. Do not call yourself a self-publisher under your own name. Instead identify your business as a small publisher or independent publisher. Register for your ISBN under that publisher name and use it for any future books.

E-Books

McKenzie suggests e-Books are a great way to test the market, as costs are low and you can give away sample chapters. The e-Book publishing trend is rising fast. They already represent about 9 percent of the total market, which will grow as e-Books are now starting to include applications and online links. However, an e-Book's sales typically amount to only about 30 percent of sales one might expect from a printed book.

BOOKSTORE MARKET

Do not ignore the bookstore market. McKenzie estimates that fewer than 5 percent of self-published books get into bookstores, often because most authors print without determining whether there really is a market for their work. While the book is in production, a distributor's sales reps can get comments from major buyers, so it's best not to print until you have this feedback, so you can fine-tune the book for your intended market.

The strongest self-publishing categories are religion, New Age, and certain business subjects. The hardest to sell are fiction, children's books, and, perhaps surprisingly, self-help.

HOMEWORK

Start with a clear goal, know your market, study your competition, and presell to build up demand. Research price points by checking bestsellers on Amazon.com

and survey bookstores for titles like yours (noting their prices, cover designs and titles that stand out) and how books are displayed. It's worth paying for professional editing and cover design. Covers and titles are key selling points.

COPYCAT

To win credibility with major bookstore buyers, your book should look like titles from major publishers. You need a distributor who has national account relationships with the large bookstore chains and major retailers like

Costco, Target, Walgreen's, and Wal-Mart. The distributor's sales force will talk up your book to large account buyers.

SALES REPS

McKenzie says, "The job of the distributor's sales rep is to get your books on bookstore shelves. The author's job is to get them off the shelves." This job begins 6-8 months before the actual release date, as publishers and booksellers work that far in advance. Any author, whether self-published or not, needs to presell a new book by such tactics as building a platform by speaking to interested groups, maybe blogging on the subject, and sending advance review copies (ARCs) to key reviewers. Companies that provide a broad range of publishing services, such as BookMasters, can help a self-publishing author with these important promotional and PR steps, as well as the rest of the publishing process. ♦



Robert Shoemaker Feb 1, 1924 – Jan 16, 2011



Longtime IWOC friends will be saddened to hear of the death of Robert Shoemaker, who remained a member of IWOC until his death. Best known as our beloved Santa at the Holiday Party, Robert performed as the jolly old elf until 2005, when he moved to a retirement home in Portland, Oregon, to be near his son, Rob.

After his retirement from university teaching, Robert turned his hobby of photography into a second career. His photograph of the Chicago Water Tower attained iconic status: millions of visitors to Chicago saw it as a glass mural, and thousands bought it as a poster.

Robert was also an avid writer who had books and articles published in every decade from the 1950s through the 2000s on a wide variety of subjects ranging from church history to the metric system. He loved to talk about the metric system in particular, and he often explained it to IWOCers bewildered by the system. Robert served on the IWOC board, and he faithfully attended almost every monthly meeting.

A service will be held at St. John's Episcopal Church, 750 W. Aurora Ave, Naperville, IL 60540 (630) 355-0467. Date and time are pending.

January Meeting, Continued from Page 1.

The IWOC program begins at 6 p.m. at National Louis University, 122 S. Michigan Ave., across the street from the Art Institute. We are meeting on the 4th floor this year, Room 4020. Come at 5 p.m. for networking and refreshments. Stay afterwards for a buy-your-own dinner at a nearby restaurant. The program is free to IWOC members and \$15 for nonmembers (\$10 with website preregistration). Don't miss it! 🐥

President's Column. Continued from Page 2.

you might not want to talk about him either.) In any event, you'd be wrong. Your *kith* are just your friends, and your *kin* are just your relatives. Tell it to your kith. They'll be glad to know.

This is a pet peeve of mine. Although there is actually a brand with this name, it is *not* "duck tape," it is *duct tape*. Has anyone ever tried to wrap tape around a thrashing, flapping duck? And what would be the point? It boggles the mind. On the other hand, it makes perfect sense to tape up a duct that is leaking. From *whence* came that misnomer? (A little reinforcement here.) Did someone try to stuff a duck into a dripping duct to stop the leak? I don't know, but I assure you that is not a good solution, even if you've got a duck you're not using.

A hideous error has crept into medical jargon, and it seems to be spreading throughout the land. I fear for the republic. I refer, of course, to the ubiquitous use of the odious pseudo-word "preventative." *There is no such word.* It is *preventive* pure and simple. As a preventive measure, I urge you to take the "ta" out of any such text if you don't want grammar sticklers to get raging cases of apoplexy.

There seems to be some confusion over the word *literally*. Some folks seem to think they should use it when they want to convey heavy emphasis, as in, "I literally jumped out of my skin when the robber broke

down the door." Wow! While that sounds like an excellent deterrent to crime — I guess that robber would think twice before breaking down another door — it isn't grammatically or factually true.

Literally means it happened exactly as you said. The word you want in extravagant descriptions such as this is *figurately*, which means "metaphorically or symbolically." Grammarians literally wince and figuratively jump off tall buildings when they hear this misuse.

Moving down my pet peeve list, I wish more people knew the difference between *fewer* and *less*. *Fewer* refers to items that are individually countable, while *less* applies to items that can't be counted individually. You wouldn't say, "I have fewer sand than I need," for example. You would say, I have *less* sand, but you could say, "I have *fewer* grains of sand than I need, since you could count the grains individually if your obsessive-compulsive disorder has gotten the better of you.

Should it occur to you to remark that this column itself smacks of OCD, tape your mouth shut with a duck. 🐥

IWOC
WELCOMES
NEW MEMBER
PHILLIP
ANDRES

Calendar

February 8

IWOC Monthly Meeting. Speaker Carol Goddard will discuss freelance opportunities at Pioneer Press. The meeting will be held at National-Louis University, Room 4020, 122 S. Michigan Ave., Chicago. Program at 6 p.m. Networking at 5 p.m. Nonmembers, \$15 at the door, \$10 with online preregistration; IWOC members free. Buy-your-own dinner follows. Nonmembers welcome. For more information, call 800/804-4962 or visit www.iwoc.org.

March 8

IWOC Monthly Meeting. Check the website for details that are coming soon.

The monthly food and networking get-togethers listed below meet at the same time and place each month unless otherwise noted, but 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.

February 22 (4th Tuesday)

IWOOP Monthly Lunch. Join near-west suburbanites for a noon lunch at Poor Phil's, 139 S. Marion St., Oak Park. For more info, call Barb Dillard at 312/642-3065. Check before you come. This lunch is monthly only if there are enough people who can attend. Note: The lunch is now on the 4th Tuesday, not the 4th Thursday as it had been in the past.

March 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.

It's Happening on the Web!

Check Out Writers' Line
Browse Resources
See What's Doing in Coming Events

WWW.IWOC.ORG