

CREATIVE WRITING AND PUBLISHING

THE WRITE ADVICE

SPECIAL EDITION

UNIVERSITY OF WEST FLORIDA'S WRITING LAB

WWW.UWF.EDU/WRITELAB

This edition is dedicated posthumously to Dr. Laurie O'Brien, Director of the Creative Writing Program at the University of West Florida, Department of English and Foreign Languages, from 1992 to 2004. From 1995 to 1999, she was the West Florida Literary Federation's Poet Laureate.

THE CREATIVE WRITER IN YOU

Yesterday

i found
my voice

Today

i'm here
to shout
about
it

Sharon Simpson Joseph, Esq.
Author of *And How My Spirit Soars* (2000)

How do you write a novel?

First and foremost, there is no recipe. But a good start is to have already read a number of novels yourself from Joyce, Dickens, Hawthorne, Wright, Hurston, and Twain to Morrison, Fitzgerald, Faulkner, Hemingway, Bragg, and Ellison. Be familiar with the range - from popular fiction to classics.

INSIDE FAMOUS WRITERS' STUDIOS

Zora Neale Hurston, novelist and folklorist, wrote *Their Eyes Were Watching God* in seven weeks while she was in Haiti in 1937.

Emily Dickinson, poet, wrote notes on envelopes and pieces of paper, which she kept in a drawer.

Walter Mosley, mystery writer, writes in the nude.

John Grisham, legal thriller writer, received over one hundred rejections before his first novel became a bestseller.

Playwright August Wilson writes on the backs of napkins at restaurants.

One of Amy Tan's college professors told her she would never make it as a writer.

1993 Nobel Laureate Toni Morrison revises her manuscripts about thirty-six times.

WRITERS ON WRITING

"What the finger writes, the soul can read."

Alice Walker

"Writing really helps you heal yourself."

Alice Walker

"Everybody writes badly sometime."

Toni Morrison

"A poem should not mean / But be"

**"Ars Poetica,"
Archibald MacLeish**

"Tomorrow may be hell, but today was a good writing day, and on the good writing days nothing else matters."

Neil Gaiman

"The skill of writing is to create a context in which other people can think."

Edwin Schlossberg

"The cure for writer's cramp is writer's block."

Inigo DeLeon

"You must keep sending work out; you must never let a manuscript do nothing but eat its head off in a drawer. You send that work out again and again, while you're working on another one. If you have talent, you will receive some measure of success—but only if you persist."

Isaac Asimov

"Inspiration is wonderful when it happens, but the writer must develop an approach for the rest of the time...The wait is simply too long."

Leonard Bernstein

"And lo, though I walk through the valley of the archetypes, I shall fear no evil, for I know that the author can't kill me off for at least another 150 pages, no matter how stupid or trite I become, or he ruins the book."

Chuq von Rospach

"A writer is someone for whom writing is more difficult than it is for other people."

Thomas Mann

"Being a real writer means being able to do the work on a bad day."

Norman Mailer

"I write the way women have babies. You don't know it's going to be like that. If you did, there's no way you would go through with it."

Toni Morrison

HOW TO WRITE GOOD POETRY

By Reginald Shepherd

Visiting Assistant Professor of Creative Writing, Department of English
University of West Florida

The first step to writing good poetry is reading poetry, as much and as widely as you can, both older poetry and contemporary poetry. You can't expect others to want to read your poetry if you don't read poetry, and more is to be learned about writing poetry from other poems than from a thousand handbooks. Read poems, think about them, figure out how they work, and use what you have learned in your own poems.

The second step to writing good poetry is actually writing. As in any other endeavor, the best way to improve as a writer is to practice constantly. Write all the time; give yourself exercises and assignments. Write when you feel like writing and when you don't. Even if what you come up with isn't always wonderful, it can provide raw material for later use.

The third step to writing good poetry is revising. Half or more of writing is rewriting. Very little that one writes is going to come out perfectly, or even close to perfect, in the first draft. You have to be willing to rework and polish what you've written, sometimes to the point of giving up your initial idea if the poem has gone in a different direction than you had originally intended.

When writing poems, show; don't tell. Don't explain what you mean: find concrete objects and particular language that will embody and enact what you want to convey. Think of the poem as an experience that you want the reader to have: when we have an experience, we know what happened, even if we don't know what the experience "means." In life, our thoughts and feelings arise out of our experiences. So, too, in poems, statements and abstractions should be situated in concrete contexts and specific language.

Because poems tend to be short and highly condensed, every word in a poem counts. There's no room for wasted words. Don't use words that don't actively contribute to the effect of the poem; everything should be there for a reason.

A heightened sense of how words and phrases sound, and of how sound makes sense, is something that distinguishes poetry from prose. Poetry should have its own rhythm, an audible shape that takes the reader from the beginning of the poem to the end. The music of language is crucial to all good poems.

If you take this advice to heart, you will be well on your way to writing good poems, and the experience that you gain will improve all your writing.

CREATIVE WRITING TIPS

Contributed by Chris Bui and Chris Yow

From the Late Dr. O'Brien's Creative Writing Lectures

Drop the semicolon and replace it with a period.

It's okay to contract.

Have a catchy title.

The first line or sentence should hook the reader.

It's okay to use bad grammar in the dialogue of your script in order to make a character's speech realistically represent him or her.

Use more meat, less loaf; that is, create balance in your writing: the meat is the details, concrete nouns, verbs, story, etc. The bread crumbs are clever phrases, exposition, etc. It takes the right amount of meat and bread crumbs to make a meatloaf. Overbalance either, and it becomes just meat or just loaf.

Be a good, informed, dedicated reader as a means of being a good writer.

Always, always, read what you want to write.

Find out what the current trends are, so your own writing style is not outdated or so you can challenge current conventions.

POETRY VERSUS PROSE

Poetry and prose differ from each other generally in the way they appear on the printed page and in their style and form, with poetry generally being in rhymed or unrhymed verse/stanza form and prose in paragraph form. Prose appears as it is read – from left to right, horizontally, while poetry is read line by line, vertically and horizontally, usually emphasizing the rhythm and rhyme. Both poetry and prose may appear in the vernacular.

POETRY

I Dream a World Langston Hughes

I dream a world where man
No other man will scorn,
Where love will bless the earth
And peace its paths adorn
I dream a world where all
Will know sweet freedom's way,
Where greed no longer saps the soul
Nor avarice blights our day.
A world I dream where black or white,
Whatever race you be,
Will share the bounties of the earth
And every man is free,
Where wretchedness will hang its head
And joy, like a pearl,
Attends the needs of all mankind-
Of such I dream, my world!

in Just- e.e. cummings

in Just-
spring when the world is mud-
luscious the little
lame balloonman
whistles far and wee

and eddieandbill come
running from marbles and
piracies and it's
spring

when the world is puddle-wonderful

the queer
old balloonman whistles
far and wee

Housecleaning

Nikki Giovanni

From *Selected Poems of Nikki Giovanni* (1996)

i always liked house cleaning
even as a child
i dug straightening
the cabinets
putting new paper on
the shelves

and bettyandisbel come dancing
from hop-scotch and jump-rope and

it's
spring

and

the

goat-footed

balloonMan
far

whistles

and
wee

washing the refrigerator
inside out
and unfortunately this habit has
carried over and i find
i must remove you
from my life

PROSE

This is not an important book. It is only the story of a strong woman, a tortured man and three sons who lived hemmed in by thin cotton and ragged history in northeastern Alabama, in a time when blacks and whites found reason to hate each other and a whole lot of people could not stand themselves.

**From the Prologue of
All Over But the Shoutin'
A Memoir by Rick Bragg (1997)**

He reproached his wife with her inattention, her habitual neglect of the children. If it was not a mother's place to look after children, whose on earth was it? He himself had his hands full with his brokerage business. He could not be in two places at once, making a living for his family on the street, and staying at home to see that no harm befell them. He talked in a monotonous, insistent way.

**From The Awakening
A Novel by Kate Chopin (1899)**

WRITER CREDIBILITY

You undermine your own credibility when you submit a letter (such as the one below) or manuscript laced with errors.

i have redefined the word " Writing " in my new book " Writing With Style " , and i wanted to enlist the help of the writing lab to help me to get the attention of websters dictionary to imput the revised version into their publications worldwide. this is a time when creative writer's have considerable influense and i think it would be wise to change a few needed things such as this.

resond, please

Jane Err

Where we live is not a big town like some and not a little town like some, but somewhere in the middle, like a big little town. Things don't happen here very much like other places, but on the other hand, I guess they do. Just ever once in awhile, you really pay tention to what is going on around you. I seen something here really was something! Let me tell you!

**From "\$100 and Nothing"
A Short Story in A Piece of Mine (1984)
By J. California Cooper**
Note that the story is written in the vernacular.

PLAYS

Plays are presented in dialogue format.

Mama (still quietly): Walter, what is the matter with you?
Walter: Matter with me? Ain't nothing the matter with me!
Mama: Yes there is. Something eating you up like a crazy man. Something more than me not giving you this money. The past few years I been watching it happen to you. You get all nervous acting and kind of wild in the eyes - *(Walter jumps up impatiently at her words.)* I said sit there now, I'm talking to you!
Walter: Mama - I don't need no nagging at me today.

**From A Raisin in the Sun (1959)
A Play by Lorraine Hansberry**

Writing requires devotion and a bit of arrogance
-Buchi Emecheta, c. 1982

Poetry is the way we help give name to the nameless so it can be thought.
-Audre Lorde

STANDARD EDITING SYMBOLS

Symbol	Explanation of Meaning	Example of Use
^	Caret: Insert letters or words at point indicated	six ^{point} elements
o	Delete: Eliminate words or punctuation indicated	temperature (°C)
)	Close up, no space	mock up
)o	Delete and close up	non-destructible
stet	Stet: Latin for "Let it stand." Restore elements deleted, or retain elements indicated.	The power was
#	Insert space	U # 10 Mo
~	Transpose	(U) increase of power
:	Make lower case	Sodium Reactor
=	Make upper case (capitalize)	Janet greyston
//	Initial caps	INITIAL CAPS
ITAL	Italicize (underscope in typewriter composition)	an (off) position
T	Move right to the position indicated	The final design —
L	Move left to the position indicated	There has been
↑	Raise to the position indicated	the word
↓	Lower to the position indicated	the word
¶	New paragraph	completed. Work has
.	Insert period	test loop One run has
o	Move to point indicated	to determine
o	Write out or abbreviate	36-inch pipes
	Center]Heading[
<	Superscript	106 ^{255U}
>	Subscript	H ₂ O

THE PUBLISHING PROCESS: FROM WRITING TO PRINTING

By **ToniAnn Guadagnoli**

taguad@hotmail.com

What Did I Write?

- Novel
- Short Story
- Article
- Poem
- Screenplay
- Research Piece
- List
- Nonfiction
- Fiction
- Autobiography
- Biography
- Educational Document
- Religious Document
- Children's Story
- Novelty Book
- Textbook

Where Do I Find Publishers?

- Books
2005 *Writer's Market* Books (Novel & Short Story, Poets, Children's Writers & Illustrators)
Literary Marketplace (LMP) - (It's HUGE - go to the library.)
Jeff Herman's *Writer's Guide to Book Editors, Publishers, and Literary Agents*
- Bookstores
Look for books similar to yours. Who published them?
- Internet
publishersmarketplace.com freelancewriting.com
authorlink.com writing-world.com
everywriter.com writers.net
literarymarketplace.com achieve-the-dream.net
- Magazines
The Writer
Writer's Digest
Publisher's Weekly

Create a List of Publications for Your Manuscript

- Which publishers want to publish your genre?
- Do they accept unsolicited/unagented material?
- Make a list of addresses, phone numbers, web addresses, and contact names, if possible.
- Check websites for submission guidelines.
- Look at books the publishers have done to see if yours could fit into their line.
- Narrow down list by deleting those whose products are very different from yours.

Submission Guidelines

Guidelines vary, but most publishers have similar requests:

- Use 1" margins around 8 1/2" x 11" WHITE paper.
- Type and double space.
- Print on only ONE side of paper.
- Check what publishers will accept (i.e., full manuscript, one chapter, query letter only, sample with cover letter, etc.).
- On the top left side of first page, include your name, address, email, and phone number.
- On the top right side of first page, include word count.
- Include name, title, and page number on each page.
- Check binding requests (some publishers say staple; others say don't).
- Include SASE.

Sample First Page

Ima Goodwriter
P. O. Box 1234
Pensacola, FL 32591
author@hotmail.com
(850) 555-5555

Word Count: 754

Title of Your Story
by
Your Name

Skip 2 lines; then start your manuscript here...

Sample Manuscript Page

Title of your manuscript

Last Name—Page #

Make sure the text of your manuscript is typed using a regular type and size font such as Times Roman or Courier (12 pt.).

Put your title, last name, and page number at the top of each page as shown above. Most companies prefer a manuscript that is entirely double spaced.

Getting My Manuscript Ready

DO:

- Read, Edit, Read, Edit.
- Change manuscript to fit submission guidelines.
- Prepare SASEs.
- Find out correct postage (esp. if mailing complete MS).
- Keep track of the *who's*, *where's* and *when's*.
- Send out your manuscript with no heart strings attached.

DON'T:

- Use loud colored paper/envelopes.
- Stress out if you don't have a contact name.
- Send to a company which doesn't publish your genre.
- Send to a company which doesn't accept unsolicited material.
- Include someone's illustrations.
- Include your resume.
- Say your family members or friends loved your story (in your cover letter).

A Cover Letter

- Write a one-page letter using business letter format.
- Grab interest in the first paragraph.
- Give the title, word count, and brief synopsis in title paragraph.
- Tell about your qualifications /previous publishing credits in second paragraph.
- Give contact information in the third paragraph.

Sample Cover Letter

Dear Editor:

Have you ever heard animals talk to each other? Did you ever wonder what they are saying? I am pleased to submit the enclosed manuscript, "Chitter Chatter" (150 words), for your review. It is a story about animals, and it invites the reader to understand what some animals may be chattering about.

Because your company indicates an interest in publishing animal stories for children, I have chosen to submit my manuscript to you. I am no stranger to the world of publishing. With a B.A. in English and an M.S. degree in education, I worked as an editor for an educational publishing company for four years. In that time, I received editorial credit in over 25 books. When my company relocated, I began working as a freelance editor and recently started writing children's stories.

Should you be interested in publishing "Chitter Chatter," I would be happy to work with your editorial staff on any revisions as required. Please contact me via phone at (850) 555-1234 or by email at taguad@hotmail.com if you'd like to discuss my story or my qualifications.

I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

Continued from page 4

Ready to Send It Out?

Have you

- Edited your manuscript to perfection?
- Made sure it fits the submission guidelines?
- Prepared an appropriate cover letter?
- Recorded the date you are sending it, the contact name, and phone number?
- Included an SASE?
- Put appropriate postage on envelope?
- Sealed the envelope without putting your heart inside?

Now What?

- Remember that the majority of publishers respond within 4 to 6 months.
- Call contact name after 6 months.
- Record the names of those who never respond.
- Don't check the mail waiting for a response. Instead, use the time to write another manuscript.
- If you receive a non-standard reject, call to see if you can resubmit with changes.

What's Happening in There?

No matter whom your cover/query letter is addressed to, the mail is received by the editorial assistant. Some of these editorial assistants send an acknowledgement of receipt letter.

The Editorial Assistant gets to see your manuscript first!!!

- Approx. 10% wrong subject
- Approx. 80% poorly done, amateurish, old-fashioned
- Approx. 5% well written, just not needed at the time
- Only about 5% of submissions get serious consideration for contract (Some authors are asked to do rewrites to make their book a better fit for the company's needs.)

FINAL NOTE

Jerry Spinelli was awarded the 2003 Golden Kite Award for Children's Fiction for his book, *Milkweed*. At a recent Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators (SCBWI) conference, he shared a discussion he likes to have when doing school visits. He asked the children what they would do if they had taken three years to write a book and had submitted it to every publishing house, all which had rejected the book. He said at least one child always gets the right answer: "Write another one."

Sometimes you have to do the craziest thing of all; sometimes you have to start all over again.

That's what Spinelli did FOUR TIMES before his book *Space Station Seventh Grade* was published.

GETTING STARTED

By Diane Gaines Jackson

Author and Retired English Professor, Pensacola Junior College

Become a friend of the post office, copy shop, and office supply store - you'll be spending a lot of time at these places.

Save everything on disk and keep a hard copy.

Keep a supply of large envelopes.

Do these statements sound familiar to you? If so, you have probably already begun the creative writing and publishing process.

If this is your first time getting started, then you should get a copy of *Writer's Market*, purchasable for about \$50.00. This resource contains everything a writer, whether a beginning or seasoned one, needs to know: writing tips, sample query letters, a list of agents, a list of publishers, etc.

Once you get started and now have a manuscript, determine what the publishing company's guidelines for submission are.

Edit your manuscript, or get a professional to edit it for you. Regarding the latter, be sure to check on the legitimacy of agencies and people who claim to have expertise in editing. Write a query letter, which both your potential agent and publisher will accept.

Follow the publisher's guidelines to the letter. If you don't, your manuscript will likely be trashed.

Send the query letter along with your manuscript (according to the publisher's guidelines) and an SASE - a self-addressed, stamped envelope - to the publisher.

Most publishing houses do not tell you about how to package your manuscript, but they prefer that you not fold, paper clip, or staple it. For very large manuscripts, you can use a rubberband. If the publisher accepts electronic copies, then follow the specifications for electronic submissions.

The principal keys to getting started are doing the necessary research, submitting specified paperwork in the required format, and using common sense.

Finally, don't expect that this publishing venture is going to make you rich. In fact, the process can prove to be rather costly because of the numerous expenses incurred from generating and sending manuscripts.

Meet Sally Q., Successful Writer by Shannon Lord

Sally Q. is a writer. We can all learn from Sally. This is how Sally became a writer.

- Sally made up her mind that she wanted to be a writer and vowed to work hard at achieving her goal.
- Sally took writing classes. She learned how to structure a story for different print mediums, including newspapers, magazines and literature. She also learned grammar.
- Sally bought a copy of the latest *Writer's Market* at her local bookstore and read it from cover to cover.
- Sally did some research and found several small publications that were printed locally or regionally.
- Sally contacted the editors of these publications by following the writers' guidelines on the publications' Web sites or in the publications themselves.
- Sally sent query letters to these editors along with some samples of her writing. **
- Sally called the editors. She left a message for them, letting them know that she had

sent an email and that if they did not receive it, could they let her know so she could send it again? If they had received it, she hoped to hear from them soon.

- Sally waited to hear back from the editors. Meanwhile, she queried editors from other small publications she found in *Writer's Market*.
- Sally got a job offer from a local editor, a 500-word write-up about a festival in her area. The editor offered to pay a \$15.00 flat fee. Knowing that everyone has to start somewhere, Sally accepted.
- Sally sent out more queries to editors of local magazines and newspapers, this time attaching a .pdf of her printed story. ***
- Sally received more job offers for more money from different editors she had contacted.
- Sally began sending queries to bigger publishing companies, who would now look at her work because she had been published previously.
- Sally now works regularly as a freelancer.
- Sally may decide to get an agent and go after the big fish: popular national magazines or book publishing houses. Or, she may apply to work full-time for a newspaper.
- Sally is happy.

(Article continued on p. 8)

THE CREATIVE WRITER'S DICTIONARY GLOSSARY OF CREATIVE WRITING AND PUBLISHING TERMS

Some paraphrased definitions taken from *American Heritage Dictionary*
Quoted definitions from *A Handbook to Literature*, Ninth Edition, by William Harmon
(Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 2003)

Compiled by Mamie Webb Hixon and D.P. Watkins III

academic writing - writing aimed toward a knowledgeable readership, typically in a scholastic arena

anthology - a book that consists of essays, stories, or poems by different authors

agent - a person who aids the writer with legal aspects of the profession and labors to find a publisher for the writer's manuscript

authorial license - the writer's right to create regardless of realism or accuracy; liberties with the normal rules of fact, style, or grammar taken by a writer in order to achieve a particular effect (See **poetic license**)

autobiography - a book about someone's life authored by that person

bar code - information (a sequence of numbers and vertical lines identifying a publication and often its price) that is depicted visually and deciphered by machines; required by most bookstores of books to be sold

biography - a book about someone's life

blank verse - unrhymed poetry that has a regular rhythm and line length

business writing - writing which may be composed for either internal or external usage, typically in a business arena

canon - "[...] the accepted list of books of any author, such as Shakespeare.... More recently, the idea of a general literary canon has received attention from a critical viewpoint, and the process of canon-formation has been interpreted as the work of one part of society to make its own labors central and to reduce the work of others to marginal or trivial status outside the canon" (A Handbook to Literature 77).

chapbook - presently refers to low budget, hardcopy collections of writings (poems, ballads, or stories), many times created by individuals expressly for their work

classic - "a piece of literature that by common consent has achieved a recognized superior status in literary history; also an author of similar standing" (A Handbook to Literature 95)

colophon - insignia of a publisher which may appear at the front or back of a book (or at the end of a shorter work - like a short story - within a larger work), also sometimes refers to more in-depth publication information

copy editor - one who is responsible for ensuring that a text conforms to publication needs and is free of errors

copyright - the legal right of authors or publishers to control the use and reproduction of their original works; writers and publishers use this symbol to indicate that the material is copyrighted: ©

creative nonfiction - nonfiction writing which may follow the conventions of fiction writing in order to spark reader interest

creative writing - the writing of fiction, poetry, or drama; writing composed of content

chosen for its contribution to a greater effect; each element in creative writing is present because it serves a purpose in the work

dialogue - the speech between and among the characters of a literary work

editor - the person who may be involved in a variety of tasks related to book publishing, for example recruiting authors and compiling anthologies

essay - a prose work of varying lengths which discusses a topic

fiction - writing comprised of imagined elements - people and events; narrative writing drawn from imagination rather than from history or fact and is most frequently associated with novels and short stories

free verse - verse without a fixed metrical pattern, usually having unrhymed lines of varying length

galley proof - a first test copy of a publication on which corrections are marked; a proof done before type has been split into individual pages

genre - a specific type of art with its unique traits based on form, style, or subject matter; for instance, poetry and fiction are genres; and mysteries, legal thrillers, and science fiction are genres of fiction.

haiku - three-lined, unrhymed poem composed of 5, 7, and 5 syllables

historical narrative - a written account of history organized chronologically

ISBN number - the ten-digit International Standard Book Number (usually found on the back cover of a book) which identifies books on the commercial market; must be acquired at the time of publication

journalistic writing - writing focused on the unique concerns of journalistic work such as who, why, where, and how

ms, MS, or manuscript - an author's text for a book or other piece of written work as it is submitted for publication

market - to offer something - your publication - for sale, or sell something, especially by using advertising and other techniques to attract buyers

memoir - a type of biography which typically focuses solely on specific episodes from a person's life

mystery - a novel that makes great use of suspense, especially about an unsolved crime

narrative - a literary work whose aim is to tell a story

Nobel Prize for Literature - "The highest honor in the literary world. The Swedish chemist and engineer Alfred Bernhard Nobel (1833 - 1896) willed the income from practically his entire estate for the establishment of annual prizes in literature and other fields. The Nobel Prize for Literature rewards a recipient's total career. Many great writers have received it, and many just as great have not. The 2002 prize was reported to carry an award of about \$1.1 million" (A Handbook to Literature 339).

nonfiction - writing composed of facts instead of imaginative elements

novel - lengthy fictional prose work of fiction

perfect binding - a binding created by trimming pages at the bound edge and gluing them to a cover as opposed to stitching them uncut; binding used in softback and hardback books

play - "A literary composition of any length, ordinarily written to be performed by actors who impersonate the characters, speak the dialogue, and enact the appropriate actions. A play usually, but not always, assumes that this enactment will be on a stage before an audience" (A Handbook to Literature 385).

playwright - somebody who writes plays

plot - the sequence of events in a novel or play

poet laureate - established in the seventeenth century in England (John Dryden was the first officially appointed one) and in the United States in 1985, an appointee serving for a renewable one-year term; this title is assigned to a poet regarded for his or her poetic distinction. Up to 1999, the Poets Laureate of the United States had been Robert Penn Warren, Richard Wilbur, Howard Nemerov, Mark Strand, Joseph Brodsky, Mona Van Duyn, Rita Dove (the first African-American), Robert Hass, Robert Pinsky, and Billy Collins (A Handbook to Literature 389-390).

poetic license - a poet's freedom to break conventions and defy rules in order to achieve an artistic effect: "the privilege, sometimes claimed by poets, of departing from normal order, diction, rhyme, or pronunciation [or even spelling]" (A Handbook to Literature 389)

poetry - writing which uses specific words for their rhythmic, aesthetic, and artistic qualities, may involve meter and rhyme but is often unrhymed

popular literature - writing in one of the commercially viable modes, especially prose fiction. "This literature is valued on a strictly quantitative basis: number of copies sold. It is both creature and creator of popular taste, and it may be a more reliable index of what the majority of people really have on their minds" (Handbook to Literature 394).

print run - term referring to the printing of multiple copies of a book during one publishing cycle

proofreader - one who peruses a text in order to find and eliminate errors

prose - writing which is associated with the ordinary manuscript (a series of paragraphs) and is not limited by meter, rhyme, or rhythmic requirements; in its broadest sense, "this term is applied to all forms of written or spoken expression not having a regular rhythmic pattern" (A Handbook to Literature 406).

prospectus - usually a document detailing the principal characteristics of a publication and presented to a publisher for consideration

publisher - company or person who publishes a printed work

Pulitzer Prize for Literature - "Annual prize for literature, awarded annually since 1917 by the School of Journalism and the Board of Trustees of Columbia University. The prizes are supported by a bequest from Joseph Pulitzer. An Advisory Board selects works published in the United States during the preceding year and recommends recipients to the Board of Trustees, who make the awards.... Six awards are given for books: novel, play, American history, biography or autobiography, verse, and general nonfiction. Pulitzer Prize recipients have included Willa Cather, Pearl Buck, Margaret Mitchell, John Steinbeck, Robert Penn Warren, Ernest Hemingway, Harper Lee, Saul Bellow, Alice Walker, Toni Morrison, John Updike, and Phillip Roth for fiction; Carl Sandburg, Robert Frost, Amy Lowell, Archibald MacLeish, Karl Shapiro, Gwendolyn Brooks, Wallace Stevens, Robert Lowell, Sylvia Plath, Rita Dove, Yusef Komunyakaa, and Mark Strand for poetry; and Eugene O'Neill, Robert Sherwood, Thornton Wilder, Tennessee Williams, Edward Albee,

August Wilson, Neil Simon, Horton Foote, and Suzan-Lori Parks for drama" (A Handbook to Literature 410-411, 613-629).

query letter - a letter in which the prospective author inquires as to whether or not an editor will be interested in examining or publishing a manuscript

reviewer - the person who reviews manuscripts and sometimes creates written reviews

royalty - money paid to the creator of a work of art for the use of his/her art

SASE - self-addressed, stamped envelope

sci-fi - a form of fiction, usually set in the future, that deals with scientific and technological developments and contact with other worlds

short story - a work of prose fiction that is shorter than a novel

sonnet - poem of 14 lines which conforms to various metrical and poetic conventions

synopsis - a condensed version of a text, usually a summary of the plot of a novel

vanity press/publisher - a publishing house that publishes an author's work in return for payment from the author. Vanity presses do not typically market or distribute their publications.

vernacular - the everyday language of people as opposed to official or formal language

vignette - a short, descriptive piece of literary writing

writer's block - an inability on the part of a writer to start a new piece of writing or continue an existing one

Plagiarism

Plagiarism is academic dishonesty—willfully copying someone else's work without acknowledging the source(s) or pretending that the work of a "ghost writer" is your own. Plagiarism, especially copying born of intent to deceive, is a very serious offense; and publishing companies have stringent policies for handling offenders.

Do not submit for publication something written by another person; a portion of a written work that has been copied from a book, newspaper, magazine, or journal; or a work downloaded from a paper writing website.

Copyright Law

- Copyright protects original works that have been expressed in tangible form (written down, etc).
- According to the fair use clause, part of a person's work may be used for scholarship, commentary, news, reporting, and criticism without the owner's permission. Specific length limitations are not defined in the statute; it is dependent upon the circumstances.
- Permission to use a person's work may be obtained directly from the person.
- It is impossible to copyright another's work, regardless of how much it has been changed because the original copyright holder is the only one qualified to make/authorize changes to the work.
- Use of a person's work without his or her permission may be grounds for the owner to bring an infringement suit. When in doubt, seek the owner's permission.
- Detailed, step-by-step guidelines for registering one's literary work may be found at the US Copyright Office web page (<http://www.copyright.gov/register/literary.html>).

GETTING PUBLISHED (Continued from page 5)

By Shannon Lord

Editor, Ballinger Publishing Company

*Sally did not hound the editor. She did not go to his or her office and demand to see him or her or call the editor daily. These days, most editors prefer a query letter sent via email with samples attached.

**Query letter: This can be the body of the email. Keep it short! After 3 paragraphs, editors put it aside. Be friendly and concise. Tell what you want to write and why you should be the one to write it. Give contact information. If you do not have a certain topic you are selling to the editor, simply let the editor know that you are a local freelancer and are available for assignments. Letting the editor know your areas of interest or expertise also helps. For instance, if you were a business minor, the editor would think of you first when assigning business-related stories.

***Samples: Always attach samples! If you've had works printed, send those. If not, it is acceptable to send short pieces, two at the most, that have not been printed. The editor just wants to see if your writing is solid. Attach samples as .rtf files.

***.pdf: When your stories are printed, request a .pdf from the publisher. If this is not possible, scan the hard copy into your computer and make a .pdf (using Adobe Acrobat). That way, editors can read your story in its layout.

Fiction writers, including short story writers, poets and novelists; journalists who wish to write for newspapers; and other non-fiction writers, those that prefer magazine writing for instance, can all use these basic principles to begin or further their career.

Black poetry is like a razor: it's sharp and will cut deep.
—Mark Medhurst

A black poet is a preacher.
—Henry Dumas

BREAKING ALL THE RULES!

An Illicit Guide to Getting Published (for Beginning Writers)

By Regina Sakalarios-Rogers

Adjunct Professor of Creative Writing, University of West Florida

Any good writer's resource or guide to publishing will give you the polite rules to getting published, those that editors of magazines and journals want you to follow. Read these rules so that you recognize which can and should be broken. The current publishing market is so competitive that adhering strictly to these polite rules can throw beginning writers right out of the race. There are three of these polite rules that you can generally break in safety.

One of the polite rules is to always read the magazine or journal to which you want to submit your best (and only your best) creative work. Instead, here's what you do: read the publishing guidelines carefully from the publication's website, from the back of a *Writer's Market* book, or a *Writer's Digest* or *Poets and Writers* or *The Writer's Chronicle* or one of the multiplicity of publications for writers that are out there. The best place for beginning writers to get published is on the Internet. There is a webzine cornucopia on the Internet, and many print publications have e-versions as well. If you are hesitant to break the read-before-you-submit rule, then the web is the best way to go.

The next polite rule you can break is the no simultaneous submissions request. Do it anyway. How are they going to know? The simultaneous submission is the beginning writer's best weapon. You have a story, you love the story, it is the best thing you have ever written, so naturally you want to give that story the best possible chance for publication. Send it to as many publications you can reasonably keep track of; the worst thing you can do is simultaneously submit the same work to the same publication. They'll

never know, unless of course you are lucky enough to have written the world's greatest story and all ten of the publications you have submitted to want your work. In that case, rejoice! You are in demand.

The final polite rule you can safely break is the cover letter rule. Unless a publication's guidelines specifically request a cover letter, then you do not have to write one. They do not have some mystical power to sway an editor to love your work; only your work can do that. This cover letter rule is one that writer's resources like to promote. It looks professional, but professionalism doesn't make up for substandard or unexciting or sloppy writing, so spend the time they want you to spend on polite cover letters on your writing instead.

The breakable rules are out of the way now, so here is a point-by-point guide to follow for giving your work the best possible chance at getting past an editor and into publication:

1. Do your research. Find the most suitable publication for your work. Look at the calls for submissions in the back of writer's magazines or in the *Writer's Market* or online.
2. Read the guidelines carefully. Don't submit work that a publication's editor specifically states he or she will not read.
3. Send out as many copies of your work to as many places as possible. Don't limit your chances by sending one poem to one publication, send it to as many as you can.
4. Keep track of your submissions. Devise a system of keeping track of where you have submitted your work. This way you know where it is and how long it has been out. If a story is turned down by one publication, send it to another until you get it published.
5. Don't leave your work in limbo. Just because you have sent your poem out doesn't mean you can't keep working on it. Very few editors have the time to comment on how to improve a work they have turned down. Don't wait on this kind of feedback.
6. Be professional. Follow all of the requests made in guidelines (except the breakable ones). No handwritten submissions. No unedited submissions. Grammar matters!
7. Send a self-addressed stamped envelope (SASE). No SASE, no way for the editor to contact you.
8. Read.
9. Write. Write. Write. Write something every day.
10. Do not get discouraged. Be confident.

Now you are ready to creatively market your work - go break some rules!

AGENTS

By Diane Gaines Jackson

Author and Retired English Professor, Pensacola Junior College

Your agent is the person who will do your submissions for you. Searching for an agent is a job within itself, but if you find a good agent, the hours spent will have been well worth your time. Start with the same source you used for locating names of publishers: *Writer's Market Place*. With poetry, you can submit straight to the publisher, but with novels, it is best to get an agent because most publishers won't accept unagented materials.

Your agent is not the same person as your editor, though your agent will likely give you editorial suggestions. You should edit your manuscript (or get it edited) before you send it to an agent.

Your agent is not necessarily someone you'll meet face to face, but a person with whom you'll be in constant contact; therefore, he or she should be someone with whom you can communicate comfortably.

Your agent will receive a percentage of your earnings when she or he is successful in getting your book published. Remember, your agent works FOR YOU.

SELF-PUBLISHING: WRITE FROM YOUR HEART, EDIT FROM YOUR HEAD

By Melody Neal, Author of *Vanilla Syrup, the Flavors of Life*
A Book of Poems

As a self-published author, I am often approached by people who tell me that they have always wanted to write a book. My initial response is to begin inquiring about where they are in the process of making their publishing dreams a reality. More often than not, I will get the response "Well, I have pages and pages of manuscript."

Also, I have discovered poets who have notebooks filled with poems. In reality, they have written a book.

What the person really wants to know is "How do I publish my work?" The following steps will get you from the notebook to the book signing:

1. Writing Skills: In order for you to write a book, sometimes "Less can mean more." The less writing talent you have, the better writing you do. Little or no writing experience can easily result in your writing an outstanding book. If you rely too heavily on professional skills, you are going to waste too much time correcting errors instead of actually writing. My first advice to anyone who wants to write a book is simply "Write, Write, Write." It is important, at this stage, not to worry about spelling, punctuation, or format - where one paragraph end or begins. This technique will free you from trying to achieve perfection, and you will find out that you already have what it takes to write . . . honestly! Ok. Say it with me: "I write from my heart and edit from my head."

2. Time: Let's not pretend. As busy professionals, we don't have many spare moments; time is of the essence . . . You've probably been told that it takes years to write a good book. This statement is not necessarily true. Zora Neale Hurston wrote *Their Eyes Were Watching God* in seven weeks. Condition yourself to work at Level Seven on a daily basis. The formula is simple: A Level One is sitting on the sofa daydreaming about transforming your manuscript in the drawer into a bestseller. A level Ten is being too overwhelmed to get anything accomplished. A Level Seven is getting at least one thing done every day toward completing your book. Set a goal to write the dedication page one day, number the pages, or edit a chapter. How useful is this technique? My company is Level Seven Publishing!

3. Editing: This step will take the greatest amount of time. This is the point where you will need to get assistance. There are several layers to editing the book. The first steps are as easy as pressing the spell check or grammar check button. Next, have a colleague or friends read your manuscript for understanding and clarity. As a writer, you may think that the message you are trying to convey is clear, but a reader may need more clarity. Finally, be prepared to hire a professional to complete the final stage of the editing process. An editor working from a publishing company can charge up to \$9.00 per page, so this stage is a good time to do some networking.

3. Layout and Design: This is not the stage to express creativity. You want to produce a product that will be marketable. Visit a local library or bookstore, or browse through your personal collection for books of a similar genre or with a similar subject matter. Pay close attention to the layout as well as cover design. What kind of font is used? Is the book illustrated? Does it have an introduction, dedication page, or a preface?

3. Printing: Selecting a printing company will be determined by your needs. Some writers want to maintain a hands-on approach. Therefore, they might seek out a local printing company. If price is a factor, chances are you will have to solicit the service of a larger company in another area. Get recommendations from other self-published authors in your area.

4. Patience: You must have patience, patience, patience. The mantra I live and publish by is **When it is time for something to Happen . . . It Does.**

5. Marketing: How to market your book is another article.

"Write when you write; revise when you revise. Never mix the two."

-Author Unknown

"Anon, I believe, was a woman."

-Virginia Woolf

MARKETING YOUR OWN BOOK

By Mamie Webb Hixon
Writing Lab Director and Author

Popular fiction writer Terry McMillan became a "novel" sensation in 1987 with the publication of her first book, *Mama*.

Unlike many prolific writers of our time who allow their agents and publishers to get the word out about their works, Terry, according to media sources, marketed her own books by writing letters to bookstores and black organizations and universities asking them to promote her book. "This unique marketing approach proved highly successful; McMillan received several offers for book readings, and six weeks after *Mama* was published, it went into its third printing" (<http://www.thehistorymakers.com/biography/biography.asp?bioindex=166&category=artMakers>).

Terry McMillan had something marketable - it didn't make *Bloom's Canon* and probably won't become a classic, but it had mass appeal and became a bestseller. Your book may not make the *New York Times* bestsellers list or *Bloom's Canon*, but, assuming that your book meets readable criteria (it's well written, carefully edited, and reputedly published) you too can make your book marketable. Further, you can market your book yourself, for you are your best salesperson and customer.

Particularly if you self-publish or if you use a vanity press, you'll want to know how to sell your product.

First, you must have a good product to market. Your yardstick? Other books. As an author, if you have written one book, then the content of that book should reflect the fact that you have read several other books - from popular fiction to classics to textbooks.

Your book should be professionally typeset, formatted, and printed, not a homemade, unbound, paper-clipped or stapled set of fifty pages or more that you're calling a book. Professional printers and publishers provide this service in the form of hard-back and soft-back (paperback) covers and perfect binding. Keep the "Oprah Factor" in mind - what if you want to send your book to Oprah's Book Club staff for consideration? Just look at the presentation and visual quality of not only Oprah's but also books that line the shelves of locally owned bookstores and franchise booksellers such as Barnes & Noble, Books-A-Million, and Borders.

- Make contact with your local bookstores about their store's policy for selling books by local authors; then complete the necessary paperwork to start this process, which usually requires you to have a bar code as well as an ISBN number for your book. Provide the bookstore with an examination copy of your book. I strongly recommend that you initiate the request in person, usually through the store's Events Coordinator, who typically might set up a booksigning for you.
- Request a booksigning, particularly at neighborhood bookstores, where you're likely to get the support of your own community, even if your book never receives national recognition.
- Be willing to provide individuals, organizations, and institutions with complimentary examination copies of your publication with a view toward someone in one of these groups advertising your book by word of mouth.
- Contact your local media, including print and broadcast media, about publicizing the release of your new publication. Give them an examination copy too. Along with an examination copy (free, of course), you may want to give the television station or radio station a copy of your media profile, which typically includes your resume focusing on your writing and publications, samples of your writing, and copies of articles previously released about you (articles about your writing or publications).
- Your book may not qualify as a PSA - public service announcement - so be prepared to incur expenses associated with advertising.
- Seek endorsements or praise statements from professionals who have read your book and find merit in it. If these statements are not printed in the book or on its back cover, then include them in an insert (a letter or flyer) accompanying each book.

- Send thank-you letters to at least your first 100 customers.
- Give your customers a good read and perhaps a bonus – a keepsake related to your book.
- Arrange book signings and booktalks with not only bookstores but with organizations as well.
- Invest in costs associated with participating in book fairs, film festivals, business expositions, or any event where you can be a vendor and set up displays to market your book. Set up an aesthetically and visually appealing display to attract people to your table, to your product.
- Be available to both sign your book and to read from it.
- Provide copies to organizations for door prizes, especially when the organization is sponsoring an event for a large number of people.
- Don't limit your marketing to just the local area. Arrange for all of the above in other cities where you have friends, relatives, and professional connections.
- Create a website; send emails about your book.
- Create attractive flyers and either mass mail or distribute them in person. It's time now to invest in bulk mailing postage.
- Business cards work; after all, you're in business now, in the business of selling a book – your book.
- Make your book affordable. After all, you don't have name recognition; that's why you're marketing your own book in the first place.

Remember, everybody with a computer and fingers is writing books now, so what distinguishes your book? You're among the many unknown, unrecognized, first-time-never-been-published-before authors, so what appeal does your book have? Why should readers buy your book?

It's all in the marketing. Market your book so well that Tom Joyner, C-SPAN's Brian Lamb, and Oprah will hear about it, read about it, and interview you on their shows.

WRITERS IN THE GALLERY

The UWF Readers' Series called Writers in the Gallery was conceived in 1997-98 by the late Gail McKinney, Art Gallery Director at UWF, and the late Laurie O'Brien, Director of Creative Writing. Their idea was to provide a way for the community as well as UWF students, faculty, and staff to attend and appreciate the verbal and visual arts in one artistic setting. Since its inception, the series has attracted SRO crowds and has featured nationally known artists, poets, and novelists. Among them have been Brad Watson, a finalist for the National Book Award; our own graduate, Victor Gischler, author of two novels; Reginald Shepherd, winner of numerous national poetry awards; and Allan Peterson, recent recipient of the Juniper Prize for poetry. UWF faculty and student writers and artists are featured once a year. It is an event that fulfills the University's mission to offer interdisciplinary programs of excellence that serve the community in extraordinary ways.

LOCAL CREATIVE WRITING OPPORTUNITIES

West Florida Literary Federation
The Pensacola Cultural Center
400 Jefferson Street, Suite 210
Pensacola, FL 32502
(904) 435-6242

READERS & WRITERS, INC.

Membership in this reading and writing group is limited. Open to new members when vacancies are available.

Contact: (904) 433-3324 or (904) 477-6502

HEAVEN IS A WRITING RETREAT (If You Are a Writer)

By Rosalind Fisher

Instructor, Department of Sociology, and Writer

I have had the opportunity to attend writing residencies in four different states. A writing residency is a gift for any writer who receives one: it is the gift of time and space to create. Each of the residencies I attended provided beautiful accommodations, wonderful meals, privacy, and camaraderie with other writers and, in some cases, artists as well.

My favorite residency was at Hedgebrook which is a retreat for women writers only. It was my favorite because I am a tree lover. Hedgebrook is located on Whidbey Island in Washington State, on a working farm, among some of America's most beautiful trees.

Each resident of Hedgebrook is assigned to her own cottage with a loft bedroom, a small combination living room-kitchen area, and a writing area. Each afternoon, lunch is delivered to each resident's cottage in a basket, based on a list of preferences she has provided the staff; dinner is a communal affair in the big red farmhouse where all the writers gather and share whatever they wish to share about their work and life. There is always good conversation and good food. Gloria Steinem has long been one of my heroes; so, as you can imagine, I almost fainted when I realized that my three-week residency would overlap one week of Gloria Steinem's stay and two weeks of Hattie Gossett's residency. Each of these women has been a voice against sexism and racism in America. It was my pleasure to spend evenings talking with and listening to them and their work.

The grounds at Hedgebrook were so beautiful, private, and safe until napping under a tree or walking alone at night was a pleasure that became a habit. Fresh flowers were available for picking, and rainy afternoons were wonderful times to write and read until my heart was content. I felt like a goddess of words, while I was at Hedgebrook, where my talent and creativity were appreciated and validated.

You can have a similar experience to bring out the creative writer in you. Here are some places you might want to apply to. Each of these retreats accepts both emerging and experienced writers after a competitive screening process.

The Millay Colony of the Arts (The deadline for residency in 2006 will be Oct. 1, 2005)
P. O. Box 3
Austerlitz, NY 12017

Writer's Colony at Dairy Hollow

515 Spring Street
Eureka Springs, AR 72632
479-253-7444
email: director@writerscolony.org

Hedgebrook

(The application deadline for residency in 2006 is Oct. 1, 2005)
Writers-in-Residence Program
2197 Millman Road
Langley, WA 98260

The Anderson Center at Tower View

Application of Residencies
P. O. Box 406
Red Wing, MN 55066
651-388-2009
E-mail: info@andersoncenter.com Website: www.AndersonCenter.org

If you are a writer who would like to experience the feeling of being a god or goddess of words in a kingdom built just for you, the application process usually involves completing a form, paying a small fee, attaching samples of your work, and soliciting a couple of well-chosen reference letters. So apply – nothing beats a failure but a try, and the rewards are heavenly.

I am a writer perhaps *because* I am not a talker.

—Gwendolyn Brooks

A FEW "QUICK" TIPS FOR FIRST-TIME WRITERS OF SHORT FICTION

By Doug Moon

Creative Writing Major, Writing Lab Assistant, UWF

I was once a first-time writer attending UWF, and the following tips were at one time or another presented to me in writing workshops by peers and professors, explicitly or otherwise:

- **Emulation.** If you've ever looked through a shelf of books on writing, it might occur to you that they appear more like anthologies than textbooks. The reason for this is that there is a consensus in the writing community that good writing is often developed through emulation. That is, a good writer's strength is often evident in a foundation of what he's read.

Consider your own bookshelf before you start writing. Whose writing do you really appreciate? What have you read that is in the same style or genre in which you wish to write? These are helpful starting points for any first-time writer.

- **Avoid Broad Strokes.** Some ideas don't fit seamlessly into every medium. When the adaptation of Tolkien's *The Return of the King* arrived in movie theaters, the result was right around three hours, and elements of the book were still excised from the film. Now imagine transposing the novel into a short story of 5 to 7 pages. You'd end up with a synopsis rather than a short story.

The presentation of short fiction is simply not the same as that of a novel or of any other kind of writing. You should consider what ideas are adaptable to the scope of your forthcoming effort, and one of these considerations is, of course, length. Short fiction of five pages is probably not the best place to write about the interplanetary hero John Nebulous if his adventures consist of traveling from Mercury to Neptune and include an epic, socially disastrous encounter with the inhabitants of Saturn and their beautiful princess.

If you look at an anthology of contemporary short fiction, you might notice that a majority of the stories seem to begin in what seems like the middle of the story. Constructing the background of characters and describing the scene for the reader don't have to be seen as prerequisites for the story to begin; these writer's tasks can be accomplished as the story progresses. Short fiction is almost like working against a clock.

- **Revision.** Revision is a necessary step after you finish with any writing. It is not only important to clean up grammatical mistakes and identify problems with clarity, but it is also important to revise the content of your writing. Ask yourself those deep questions about your writing: Does Angelica's hesitation further my theme of cultural paralysis? But ask yourself the superficial ones, too: How many arms are too many on a sewer-dwelling monster?
- **Those in writing workshops—enjoy yourself.** This seems like a silly consideration for those already writing for their own enjoyment, but it may be an obstacle for those in a writing workshop class. Although you may be writing an assignment for a class in a workshop, writing should be just as much an enjoyable experience as it is a sometimes stressful and self-destructive one. Even with a specific assignment, the creative aspect of creative writing should allow you to steer that assignment to something absolutely enjoyable and interesting for you. Although in a writing workshop your audience is required to read what you write, I don't think that writing for your own enjoyment negates consideration of that audience. When you are reading, the enjoyment of a piece of writing that reflects that writer's passion far exceeds that of a piece going through the motions until the writer hit that minimum page count.

EXPLORING CREATIVE NONFICTION

By Meghan Burroughs

Writing Lab Assistant, Creative Writing Major, and
an Editor of *Troubadour*

Many college students, particularly English majors, think that they write nothing but term papers criticizing and analyzing works that may seem unimportant to them. If they are creative writing majors, they may like to write poetry or fiction, but we mustn't forget a new genre that many writers seem to enjoy exploring within their own writing: creative nonfiction, a technique that offers fact with a poetic twist. This isn't a research paper in which you deliver straight facts of information that you would find in a book in the library; this genre is digging deeply within yourself to produce something beautifully written.

But what is "creative nonfiction"? Bill Roorbach, author of *Contemporary Creative Nonfiction: The Art of Truth*, says that most people believe it has no definition, but let it "be the widest sort of umbrella, with room underneath it for nonfiction writing across a spectrum of written work that has in common humanity, and just one thing more: all creative nonfiction, like all literature, aspires to art." Don't try to identify it; just hunt for the creativity that lies within facts.

Much of the nonfiction genre is designated to finding the writer's perspective. A popular type of creative nonfiction is a memoir, a technique which captures something particular in the writer's life that holds some important meaning that he or she wishes to allow an audience to explore. As a creative nonfiction writer, don't be scared to write about yourself. Why was your relationship with your pet rock in grade school so important? Why is it that you love a particular movie, a certain place, a sound? You may feel apprehensive about tackling subjects like these, but don't. You will find that you will have a creative piece that allows your readers to join you inside your mind and its history. Write creative nonfiction to have your readers share your sentiment in the memoir.

Other creative pieces within this genre include writing about your culture. How exactly did the re-election of Bush affect you? Where would you be without that cell phone? Try choosing some off-the-wall topic to explore, and make it as fun as you want.

"In writing your essays, you should look at the assigned readings as tool boxes through which you can rummage for techniques: architectonics, rhythms, syntactical patterns, metaphors, images, etc. that you can use in your own essays. You don't have to like all the readings; you do have to take them seriously, think about them, and try to learn from them," says Reginald Shepherd, Assistant Professor of English at UWF. Look at the creative assignments offered to you and explore. Find your voice that would perhaps allow others to join you in your thoughts.

Creative Nonfiction Assignments, as Compiled by Reginald Shepherd

1. Try writing a piece about yourself. This piece is not supposed to be a biography, in which you relay all aspects of your life; rather, it is supposed to focus on a particular time, event, or idea that you think holds a deep meaning. Be poetic when writing your memoir; include descriptions and dialogue between characters.
2. Focus on a particular place that you love. What is its appeal - its sights, smells, textures, or sounds? This place possibly could be a store, under a tree, even a dream.
3. Try writing an essay about nature. Examine the puddles that form around your driveway when it rains. What is it about those puddles that makes you ponder deeper meanings in life? That makes you question the way nature is? Have fun with this one. Nature is everywhere, and it is waiting to be explored creatively.
4. Another idea is to do a cultural analysis: Shepherd says that the this piece "takes a cultural phenomenon and investigates it, interrogates it, explores it." What effect has reality television had on the future of all television, for example?
5. Focus on current events. This literary journalism piece will be a personal reaction to current events. Take the cold, hard facts and make them part of your biography: how do you feel exactly about the War in Iraq? How has it affected you?

These are just ideas to help you get started in writing creative nonfiction. Use them to your advantage, and we guarantee you will find your creative voice in all of your writing.

THE FINE LINE BETWEEN FICTION AND CREATIVE NONFICTION: HOW CLOSE IS TOO CLOSE?

By Christina Lewis

Editor of *Troubadour*, Writing Lab Assistant, Creative Writing Major

The fun in writing creative nonfiction doesn't stem from creating a whole new story as it does in the fiction genre, but rather it comes from making a real situation or experience interesting and entertaining to someone who wasn't there to share the experience. One of the most difficult challenges of writing creative nonfiction is determining exactly how far to take the story and what alterations need to be made in order to grab the reader's attention. Take caution though when altering a story for entertainment because, at some point, the story shifts from the creative nonfiction genre into fiction. Depending on the content of the real situation, you may desire to make more or fewer changes to what really happened. The point of the change is usually to assist the writer in conveying a particular theme, feeling, or sentiment; however, the change is also usually subtle such as a person's exact words. If an event occurred several years ago, an audience generally won't expect you to remember verbatim what each character actually said, but here are some key traits that you can control without altering a story to the point of fictionalizing the event.

- **The Personality of the Narrator** - The narrator of the story has most of the control over the mood of the situation. If the narrator is somber about something or thinks the event was humorous, then the sentiments will be reflected in the content of the story through what the narrator thinks about the situation.
- **Point of View** - To add spice to a real event, you can try to tell the story of what really happened through another person's eyes. For example, if a writer has an embarrassing situation occur with an air conditioning repairman, rather than write the story in the writer's first-person, he or she can write the story from the perspective of the repairman. The repairman may think differently and react differently than the writer does, and so the repairman's actions may deem a more appropriate tone for the story.
- **Knowledgeability of the Characters and Scenery** - Remember that you are the one who knows what the characters are really like. Just because you know your friends' idiosyncrasies doesn't mean that everyone else does too. As with fiction writing, creative nonfiction requires great character description and setting. The description, or lack thereof, of a character can make or break a story, so try to make your characters as real as possible, but try to bring out their intriguing qualities.

Remember, there is reason why you feel compelled to tell a particular story. Hang on to that feeling, and the desire to express yourself will help you greatly in developing your story, so everyone will want to read it.

A CREATIVE NONFICTION EXCERPT FROM "Air Conditioning Exposed!" By Christina Lewis

*At this point in the story, an air conditioning repairman accidentally walks in on the narrator as she is in less-than-appropriate attire, after which he gasps and abruptly leaves the room with the door open.

"Just as Chris had promised, a few days later his father (the leader of the company) came out to inspect our closet. It was about ten in the morning, and I hadn't been out of bed for too long, so I was still in my pajamas. Being the socially appropriate girl who I try to be, I decided that greeting the air conditioning man in my pajamas was slightly uncalled for, and I went into my room to change while my friend Marylou greeted him. In the midst of my looking for clothes, I could hear Marylou and Mr. Lunsford (the AC man) in the hallway inspecting the closet and measuring. While I struggled and failed miserably to find something semi-fashionable to wear, the door to my bedroom opened, and in walked Mr. Lunsford. I had NOTHING on! Surprisingly, I didn't shriek or scream; my first inclination was to grab something to cover myself with and sit down, an act which I did with more swiftness and grace than I ever knew I had. I grabbed my robe and sat down on my bed. Poor Mr. Lunsford didn't fare so well in the instinct-reaction department. He shrieked slightly, covered his face, and left my room - with the door still open.

I sat for a few moments and analyzed the situation: 1) I had no clothes on. 2) A complete stranger had walked in on me when I had no clothes on. 3) Why didn't I scream when a complete stranger walked in on me with no clothes on? I composed myself, dressed, collected my dignity, and walked out into the living room where only Mr. Lunsford and I knew the events that had just taken place. I wondered to myself whether or not I should say something to him, but what would I say? "Don't worry Mr. Lunsford, this kind of thing happens all the time?" "It's okay Mr. Lunsford, you shouldn't be embarrassed?" I had no idea what to say, so I did what any great communicator and scholar of words would do: I didn't say a damn thing. I avoided the subject just as I would the black plague. Mr. Lunsford and I didn't make any eye contact or pass a single word to each other. He measured one final thing after the incident and then left."

CREATIVE WRITING COURSES AT UWF

The Creative Writing Program at UWF offers courses in three genres - poetry, short fiction, and creative nonfiction - for students who wish to develop their creative writing skills. Through this program, the Department of English and Foreign Languages publishes two literary magazines, *Bayou* and *Troubadour*, a poetry and short fiction magazine written and edited entirely by students.

Three credit-hour creative writing courses are available at both the bachelor's and master's levels.

CRW 2000 Introduction to Creative Writing	
CRW 3110 Fiction Writing	CRW 6130 Workshop in Fiction Writing
CRW 3310 Poetry Writing	CRW 6331 Workshop in Poetry Writing
CRW 4211 Creative Nonfiction	CRW 6236 Workshop in Creative Nonfiction
CRW 6806 Workshop in Teaching Creative Writing	
CRW 6934 Special Topics in Creative Writing	
CRW 6956 Workshop in Editing	

WRITE ON!

The late Dr. Laurie O'Brien wrote a letter to Robert Frost and asked him specifically about "Stopping by the Woods...." She wanted to know if his poem was, indeed, about death. Frost responded to her and said the poem was, in fact, just about stopping by the woods on a snowy evening.

Local writer Melody Neal asked an English professor to read her manuscript of poetry before sending it to a vanity press.

Local writer Rosalind Fisher published her first poem as a message on a greeting card, which she published herself.

Local writer Diane Gaines Jackson had a reading party, to which she invited friends to read the first three chapters of her book-in-progress before sending the chapters to her agent.

Ora Wills, Editor of a local publication *When Black Folks Was Colored*, read and edited the individual submissions to this series at least a dozen times.

Many writers, believing that their manuscripts are always in flux, continue to edit and revise their published works for the next edition.

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