

Saturday Writers Newsletter

Saturday
Writers



Writers Encouraging Writers Since 2002
A Chapter of the Missouri Writers Guild
A Nonprofit Organization / Corporation
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FEBRUARY 2024

IMPORTANT NOTES

- Join us on the last Saturday of every month at the [Kiskadee Road Library Branch](#) from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. in room A & B.
- Doors open at 10:30 a.m.
- Creative Salon is from 10 a.m. to 11 a.m. in the Quiet Room.
- Members are invited to participate via Zoom. The link will be sent out separately.

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February Speaker: Meredith Tate, Plotting Pitfalls and How to Avoid Them

This presentation will focus on common plotting pitfalls and how to avoid them, including a bit about — character motivation. Meredith has seen a lot of common mistakes while mentoring in numerous writing programs. She will share how to identify plotting problems and then how to avoid them.

Meredith is the author of four published young adult books, including FREEDOM TRIALS, THE RED LABYRINTH, THE

LAST CONFESSION OF AUTUMN CASTERLY, and SHIPPED, as well as an adult book titled MISSING PIECES. She also wrote a children's picture book for Kiwi Crate called BENNY BLUE.

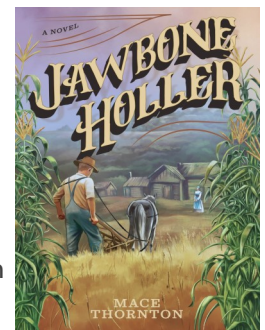
Meredith earned her master's degree in social work from the University of New Hampshire before deciding to switch career paths and pursue her true dream of telling stories. She moves around a lot, and has lived in New York, Boston, London, St. Louis, Zurich, and



Houston. Meredith recently relocated back to St. Louis, where she lives with her husband, Vincent, their son, Wesley, and their spoiled rescue dog, Finley. When Meredith's not writing, she loves photography, playing the piano, trying new recipes, and chasing her goal of seeing every continent (five down, two to go!)

Book Release

Jawbone Holler, a historical fiction novel by Mace Thornton, is in preorder stage and is expected off the press at Mascot Publishing within the next month. The novel is set around the pre-Civil-War and Civil-War era in Northwest Missouri and Northeast Kansas and follows a character named Perry Adams. After life takes a bad turn, Perry decides to leave his home in Indiana to travel west to Kansas Territory, heralded as a land of plenty at the time, to establish a farm as a squatter. He experiences many adventures and is beset by numerous challenges along the way and the cast of characters he meets are both inspiring and colorful. The book's website is www.macethornton.com.



From the President's Desk



Jeffrey Czuchna,
2024 President

“Learning should be a life-long effort and I’ll have to say that learning how to write has been a lot of fun.”

He Said, She Said

Saturday Writers motto is Writers Encouraging Writers, but we do much more than that. We not only encourage but we educate. I can’t tell you how much I have learned in the few years I have been a member of Saturday Writers. I cringe when I go back and read some of my early work. I think my writing has improved significantly and it’s due, in no small part, to the speakers at our monthly meetings as well as the October workshops.

Of course, I also have read several how-to-write books and listened to more than a few podcasts along the way. All of which have contributed to my education. Learning should be a life-long effort and I’ll have to say that learning how to write has been a lot of fun.

One of the things that I recently became aware of in my writing is how I use dialogue tags. During the editing process of my current work-in-progress I noticed how many times I use the phrase, “Michael said” or “Katey said.” It got to the point where it pulled me out of the story, and the last thing any author wants is the reader to become aware they are reading a story. Ideally the reader should be so immersed in the story that they lose track of who they are and where they

are. They should feel like they are a character in the story, experiencing the emotions and action along with the other characters.

I certainly am not the first author to have a problem with dialogue tags. So, what can be done about it? The first solution, I’ll suggest, is to use a word other than “said,” maybe try “yelled,” or “exclaimed.” While this is a possibility, and may be appropriate in some cases, I warn you about doing this too much. A few alternatives to “said” may be fine, but don’t go overboard. Words like “asked, replied, answered, or responded,” are fine but be careful about going too far. Use words like “uttered, stated, whispered, blurted, or declared,” very carefully.

Even though it feels like you may have overused the word “said,” the reality is that most readers don’t even notice. The bottom line is, pay attention to your dialogue tags and be intentional with them, but don’t try to be clever or cute. In the vast majority of cases simply using, “said,” will do.

The second solution, the one I am using more often in my writing, is to say, “he

said,” or “she said,” more often. Once it is established that the only characters in the conversation are Michael and Katey, I can simply say “he” and “she” from then on. Using the pronouns instead of their proper names makes the writing feel more intimate. I scan each chapter for the character names and replace most of them with a pronoun. This usually improves the story and helps it flow better. I have found the best way to check the flow is to read the story out loud. Does it sound right?

The last option that I’ll discuss here, is to leave the dialogue tag off completely. Once a pattern is established, you can simply have the two characters banter back and forth, with no description of who is saying each line. That’s why you start a new paragraph when the speaker changes. If written well, the reader will be able to follow and easily figure out who is speaking. Every once in a while, you can throw in a “he said,” or even a “Michael said,” just to reassure and reorient the reader.

I hope this month’s article will help you on your writing journey. Until next time, be sure to write something every day.

Jeffrey Czuchna – 2024 President

Writer's Showcase

A Sloth in the Pride

By Bob Weismiller

Something prodded Sly's back. He opened his eyes to a set of claws. He followed the paw to saliva dribbling down a lioness's chin.

Sly looked up to the peach tree and over to the rock wall, recalling from where he jumped onto the tree. Pulling on a succulent fruit, he fell in the midst of napping lions. Temptation gave way to eating the peach rather than escaping the pride. Then he did what all sloths do after a meal—he slept.

"What do we have here?" the lioness said. "A sloth. Not much meat on it."

"Tsk, tsk," Sly said.

"What?" the lioness asked.

"Your claws," Sly said. "Sloths are high in cholesterol. Clogs your arteries and prevents blood flow to those nails, causing them to become brittle."

The lioness lifted her paw off Sly. "What can I do about it?"

"Peaches is the cure for better nails," Sly said. "Eat them instead of me and in no time your claws will be the envy of the pride."

"What about mine?" another lioness asked.

Sly inspected them and shook his head. "Tsk, tsk."

The remaining lionesses lined up for their evaluations. The sloth disapproved each one. At the last claw, Sly heard a deep voice.

"I'm not worried about my claws."

Sly stared at the lion king's tongue rolling over his lips.

"Tsk, tsk," Sly said.

"What?"

"Your mane lost its luster, looks mangy. Sloth meat ruined it. Peaches will restore that regal look. Try one."

The lion consumed one. "This is sweeter than sloth meat."

Sly snatched some fruit, gazed at the ripening peaches on the tree, and crept backwards to an exit, watching the pride munch on the fruit. "Now that I'm your life coach, I'll return to make sure we are eating those healthy peaches."

Writer's Showcase

The Midnight Caller

By Diane How

I try the sleep, the dark of night

You gently stir my mind

You nudge and poke relentlessly

'Till paper and pen I find

And then the words will come to me

As simple as they are

Like life-long friends they find their way

They journey from afar

Then soon the rhythm of my pen

Is flowing smooth and free

A poem entangled in my mind

On paper I will see

No credit for it can I take

The words aren't even mine

A mere imperfect mortal soul

Is all you'll ever find

An instrument of someone else

Who's greater than us all

If only during daylight hours

He'd bless me with His call

ICYMI: Brad Cook, Story Graphing

During the Jan. 2024 Saturday writers meeting, author Brad R. Cook gave a presentation on the “Parts of the Story.” This broke down the shape of a story based on legendary writer Kurt Vonnegut’s model of story analysis.

Cook noted how Vonnegut claimed there are only eight different types of stories. There have been plenty of people, from college professors to bloggers, who have debunked this theory but, Vonnegut split stories up by specific categories that do pertain to a lot of writing.

His eight stories were:

Man in a hole

Boy meets girl

From bad to worse

Creation

Old Testament

New Testament

Cinderella

Cook also noted that Vonnegut surmised, based on what type of story a book was, whether or not it would be a bestseller. He was a logical writer who enjoyed math. Utilizing his logic-brain, he calculated the shapes that stories create when plotted on a graph.

This model consists of a horizontal line, which represents the story’s timeline, and a vertical line, which represents the positive and negative events that transpire.

Positive events go above the horizontal timeline, negative events go below. When connecting these dots, the shape of the story becomes apparent, but what is interesting and helpful to authors is the fact that the shape of most stories indicates what type of story they are.

Cook explained that by graphing a story, an author can better understand their market. He also noted that graphing a story can be utilized during the writing process to keep an author on track and make sure that they don’t plateau and bore the reader throughout any section of the story. Cook said, “What you’re really looking for is a roller coaster.”

For anyone seeking to graph their story, he noted that writers can plot as many points as they want. Vonnegut used about 10 points, whereas Cook noted that he plots anywhere from 25 to 40 plot points when graphing his stories. The main idea is to plot the important events.

He then described how authors can also plot different timelines. While the entire story can be illustrated by these graphs, writers can also use this visual shaping of a story to map out the main characters emotional arc, side characters story arcs, the arc of the villain, the arc of a trilogy or series, or even when seeking insight on word usage.

He explained that, like many writers, he tends to get stuck repeating a specific word in each book. To weed that term out he plots how many times he used it in each chapter so he can go back and use other phrasing.

To put the theory into practice, he then challenged writers to graph their current story. This is done using simple steps

1. Take the top 10 moments of a story
2. Assign points to the best moment (any amount of points-you set the scale)
3. Assign points to the lowest moment
4. Start at the beginning on a positive, low, or neutral start based on where your character begins
5. Plot all the points
6. Connect the dots

Use the visual to improve your work

Cook also noted that the range of the points scale doesn’t really matter, so long as it’s consistent. The main point is to help writers see the story going up and down. He stated that he believed that Vonnegut was better at analyzing genres rather than individual books but that this system does work. All of his own books follow the same pattern.

For writers who

choose to plot their villain’s story arc, they should expect to see the inverse of the main character’s. Regardless, peaks and valleys are important for the story flow. Flat lines are boring and disinterest readers.

Cook called it “better than a synopsis” because instead of condensing the story to offer a short blurb, graphing offers an illustrated representation that can be compared to other works. He went on to discuss that every writer’s graphs will be different in their own way, and that’s partly why he disagrees with Vonnegut that there are only eight types of stories.

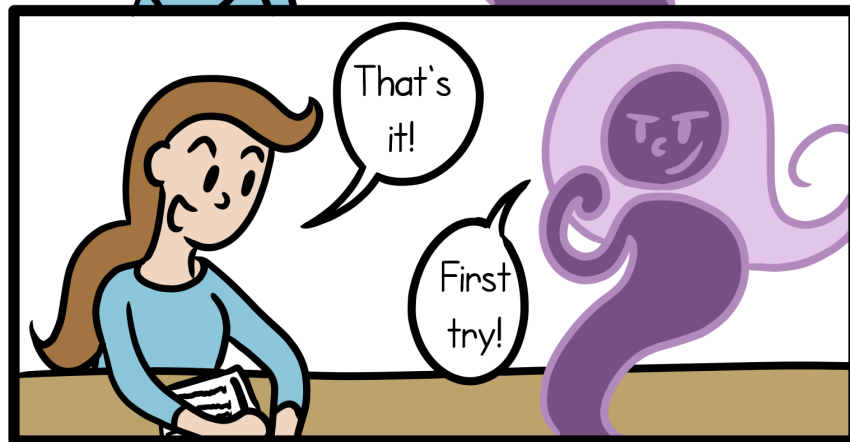
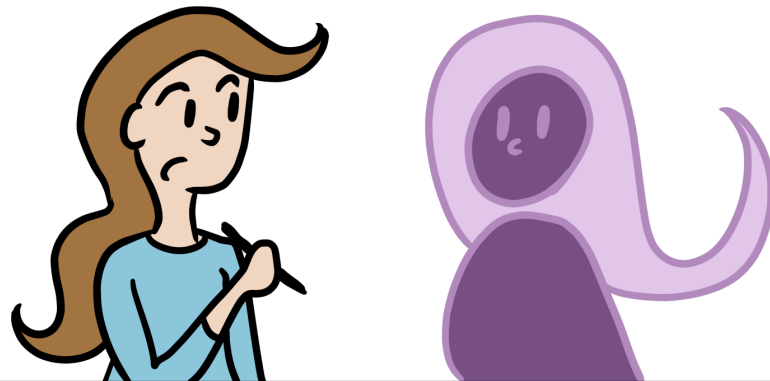
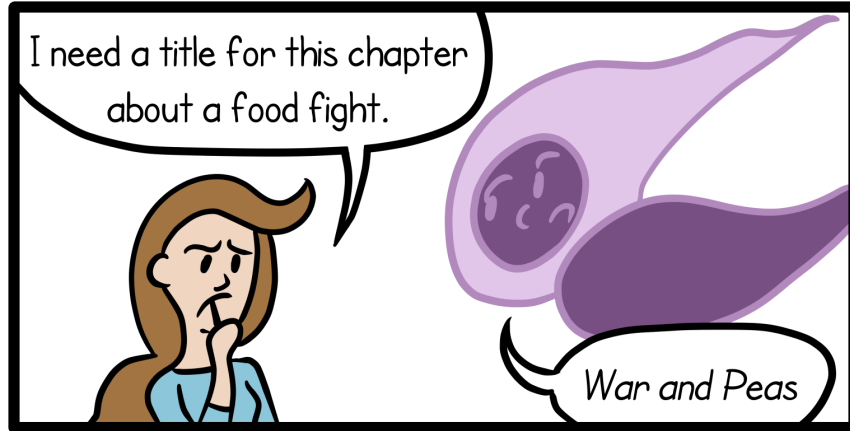
Creating these graphs can be done in Word, Photoshop, or a good old-fashioned piece of paper. Once an author finds the shape of their story, they can tweak it and work on ensuring that they control the highs and lows. This pushes a creative work toward a more tangible understanding, thus making it more marketable and likely to be picked up by an agent, publisher, and/or reader.

—Jessica Marie Baumgartner

Writer and Muse

Writer and Muse: Inspired

by Emma Vogt



See more *Writer and Muse Comics* at Emma's website: <https://writerandmuse.com/>

February Contests

President's Contest

Theme: Unique National Holidays

Deadline: February 24th, 11:59 p.m.

Prose: 1,000 word limit

Flash: Up to 500 words

Drabble: Exactly 100 words (Title not included in word count)

There will be no poetry or essay this year.

Cost: FREE and open to members only (If you're not a member yet, it's not too late to join!)

Check out the full rules and guidelines [here](#)

Poet Laureate's Contest

Theme: "Turn, Turn, Turn" by the Byrds

Poetry: 50-line limit

Cost: Unlimited FREE entries for members, \$10 for non-members

Deadline: February 24th at 11:59 p.m.

More information and submission [here](#)

Upcoming Events

February Monthly Meeting: February 24, 11 a.m. Speaker TBA

March Open Mic: March 11th, 6:30-8:30 p.m. via Zoom. Link will be sent out at a later date.

March Monthly Meeting: March 30, 11 a.m. Estelle Erasmus, Finding your Writer's Voice

April Open Mic: April 17th at Third Wheel Brewery from 6-8:30

April Monthly Meeting: April 27th, 11 a.m. Hadara Bar-Nadav, Poetry

We're looking for a few of your stories!

If you'd like to see your name in print in our monthly newsletter, please send your poems of 25 lines or less or your stories of 500 words or less for our new Writer's Showcase!

Officers and Volunteers

President: Jeffrey Czuchna
president@saturdaywriters.org

Vice President: Bob Weismiller
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Secretary: Holly Elliott
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Treasurer: Diane How
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Volunteers/Chair Positions

Directors: Tom Klein

Speaker/Workshop Chair: Jeffrey Czuchna

Contest Chair: Heather Hartmann

Newsletter Editor: Beatrice Underwood-Sweet

Website Chair: Mark Vago

Membership Chair: Diane How

Membership Assistant: Denise Wilson

Anthology Chair: Brad Watson

Social Media Chair: Holly Elliott

Publicity Chair: Holly Elliott

Holiday Party Chair: Bob Weismiller

Poet Laureate: Robert Sebacher

Youth Outreach Chair: Jessica Gulmire

Marketing Coop: Carol Baker

Writing/Critique Groups

Members Online Critique: Susan Moreland

Tuesday Round-Table: Tammy Lough

Wednesday Novel Group: Brad Watson

Wednesday WIP Cafe: Jim Ladendecker

Thursday Novel Group: Bob Crandall

Children's/YA Critique: Emma Howard

Pre-Meeting Saturday WIP Cafe & Creative

Writing Salon: Robert Sebacher

Write-In Chair: Terry Moreland