

JUNE MEETING

From Print to Screen to Zine: Secrets of the Trade Publication and Webzine Markets

BY DAVID EPSTEIN

The June meeting is titled "From Print to Screen to Zine: Ruth L. Ratny Shows You How to Get Hired." Come and learn how to win business in trade publications and online webzine markets from a writing entrepreneur who's done all, seen all, and will tell all in a live interview with IWOC's own Catherine Rategan.

Ratny has been active in virtually every aspect of Chicago's film and video world since the 1960s: documentary, corporate, entertainment, and broadcast. Her current focus is ReelChicago.com, a web portal with a September relaunch as a major resource for business media and entertainment with a variety of features, and a need for freelance writers.

Ratny will offer real-life lessons for writing professionals, plus a few cautionary tales drawn from her lively career at the hub of Chicago's journalism, film, and video production scenes. She carries the story forward to today's – and tomorrow's – "rich media" online world with her current venture in web publishing.

Born in Chicago, Ratny attended DePaul University and started writing for broadcast media when she was a teenager. After getting into the film business, she wrote

non-theatrical scripts, including several award-winners. At first, she worked for a big studio, then ventured out as a freelance writer/producer. She has also written screenplays as well as many training and corporate films and videos for large corporate clients.

In 1979 she decided Chicago's film industry needed its own news publication. She launched *Screen Weekly Newsletter: Your Indispensable Source of Chicago News*. Its four-page issues were always packed with industry news, and the newsletter soon grew into the original *Screen* magazine, which was always exclusively focused on day-to-day news of the Chicago industry.

Ratny published *Screen* until 2002, over two decades during which she and her associates demonstrated the size and economic value of the Chicago film production industry, thus forging a professional community where none had existed before. Widely credited with increasing film production business in Chicago by 25 percent, the group behind the original *Screen* magazine has been honored for this and other contributions. They pioneered in many areas, publishing the first exclusive Chicago-area film directory, hosting film expos and seminars here, and becoming the first trade

publication in the country to switch to desktop publishing. They also started a massive networking party called SchmoosaRama.

In 2003, after leaving *Screen*, Ratny started the web portal, ReelChicago.com to continue meeting the demand for daily online coverage of the local film industry in a medium more suited to "these viral times." After its September relaunch, the site will have many new features, including a much-needed directory, microsites (equivalent to feature sections in print publications), social networking for industry professionals, and other "stuff I never heard of." The expanded portal will also create opportunities for freelance writers to write about film industry developments in and around Chicago.

Networking with snacks and beverages begins at 5 p.m. and the meeting at 6. Nonmembers are cordially invited. The meeting is free for IWOC members and \$15 for nonmembers. Plan to stay for a buy-your-own dinner at a nearby restaurant after the meeting. Remember: the location is National-Louis University, 122 South Michigan, Room 5008. (National-Louis is across the street from the Art Institute.) See you there! 🍷

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PRESIDENT'S COLUMN/ROGER RUEFF

Curiosity and Delight



The other day, my brother in Dallas forwarded me an email filled with clever turns-of-phrase ascribed to people of at least moderate renown. Its slate of witty luminaries, pseudo and otherwise, included everyone from Clarence Darrow ("I have never killed a man, but I have read many obituaries with great pleasure.") to Abraham Lincoln ("He can compress the most words into the smallest idea of any man I know.") to Paul Keating ("He is simply a shiver looking for a spine to run up.") I'm not in the habit of forwarding emails to friends, but this one I did—I suppose because I was so amused by its contents—for example, a quote from Billy Wilder ("He has Van Gogh's ear for music.") and another from Andrew Lang ("He uses statistics as a drunken man uses lamp posts... for support rather than illumination.")

After I forwarded the email, I got to wondering why it pleased me so much. Why I shared it with others the same way I might share a particularly tasty dessert with friends in a restaurant—offering them the chance to experience the joy of something well-made. What is it about a well-turned phrase that fills me with an almost-tactile sensation of delight? And that thought led to a larger question—something I've pondered from time to time for years: Why do any of us like what we like? What is it about a particular object, sensation, or experience that makes appreciation swell up in us to the point that it rais-

es the edges of our mouths into a smile? It strikes me as a very large question—and one that someone somewhere is probably studying even as I write this—for future publication in a scholarly journal. It's important, I think, because it knocks at the cellar door of whatever it is we are both as individuals and as a species.

Why do certain things please us?

I'm not sure what the parameters might be of the scholarly study I mentioned above, but it seems to me that to properly address the larger aspects of the question, one must at the outset dispense with experiences related to specific personal history. Certain smells, for example, can trigger deep memories—pleasant and not—because they go straight to the most primitive part of the brain without being processed, and the memories themselves can create a smile or frown or teeth-gritting grimace. But with regard to the question as it pertains to our species as a whole, such experiences amount to noise in the data set.

To address the deepest aspects of the question, it seems to me you'd need to focus on those likes we all share—or which so many of us share that they can be confidently labeled "common" and considered hard-wired into our biological makeup. The satisfying relief that comes with the first sip of a cool beverage on a hot summer day. The smooth and calming pleasure of an embrace from someone we care about. The mesmerizing

enjoyment we sometimes feel in witnessing the colorful explosion of blossoms and flowers in the spring. The quiet, meditative awe that can so easily overcome us when we observe the deep, warm colors of a western sky at sunset—or the long, misty shadows of late-afternoon sunlight filtering through a canopy of leaves and onto a forest floor in the last hours before dusk. Of all these examples, it's the last one I find most intriguing. From an evolutionary standpoint, the others make rational sense. The sip that satisfies a thirst, the embrace that comforts and assures—both of these compel us to seek satisfaction of basic survival needs... in this case, water and acceptance by an ally, respectively. And the pleasure of seeing the buds and flowers blooming might have evolved as a means of compelling our ancestors to seek out places brimming with life and sustenance. But what about the sunset? What is it about the colors and the fading light that can invoke the calming sense of ease and awe? Is it an artifact of the time before fire—when darkness and night were inextricably tied together and our ancestors punched out on their biological clocks every day when the sun went down? Is there a day-is-done gene? I plead curious ignorance. Which brings me back to my curious delight at the well-turned phrase—which might be the most puzzling of all, because I can find no obvious evolutionary purpose

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Association Publishing: Two Views, Many Possibilities for the Independent Writer

BY CYNTHIA MIKAL

Our May speakers were Jean Roberts, who is Director of Production and Manufacturing for Business Products at the American Medical Association (AMA), and Jay Strother, Senior Manager, Publishing Services, Marketing and Communication Services at SmithBucklin. The AMA has numerous physician-oriented publications and a few intended for the general public (www.ama-assn.org).

SmithBucklin is an association management company. They manage 200+ trade associations, professional societies, technology user groups, and government institutes/agencies. (www.smithbucklin.com) Roberts is extensively involved in 60-65 publications of the AMA (excluding JAMA and the Archives journals, which are separately managed). Roberts works in conjunction with many independent professional writers and consultants. Her work focuses primarily on "current procedural terminology" (CPT) coding manuals. Every medical procedure is identified by these industry-wide codes. At present, there are in excess of 8,000 annually updated discriminate CPT codes. While perhaps too specialized an endeavor to appeal to every independent writer, CPT coding might appeal to writers with a background and/or an interest in the healthcare field.

In addition to the CPT coding manuals, Roberts also contracts with writers and editors for the other

publications with which she is involved, including compilations of various clinical materials, career and practice management books for physicians, and publications intended for the general public (of note, publications intended for such widespread readership require "translation" of complex medical terminology into verbiage and form that can be understood by, and useful to, the intended lay readership and as such present an opportunity for independent writers able to do so). During the question and answer session at the end of the forum, Roberts noted that a resume that included a medical writing course (particularly some of those offered through the University of Chicago) and/or a membership in the American Medical Writer's Association (www.amwa.org) are valuable credentials and viewed very favorably by those in the medical association publishing field. Ms. Roberts requires that work submitted to her for review and/or potential publication in any of the publications with which she is involved be in AMA approved format as set forth in the *AMA Manual of Style*.

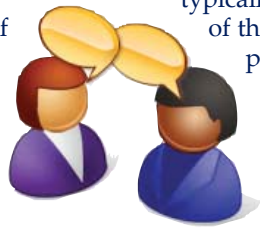
Roberts says she typically has more work for editors than for writers. Obviously, knowing the AMA style is equally important for editors and/or proofreaders.

Currently, those submitting accepted work to Roberts are paid between \$25 and \$40 an hour, paid twice monthly on receipt of timely invoices. Editing rates are typically on the lower end of the scale, with writing paying more.

Strother manages 35 association publications for SmithBucklin, including business products, books, e-publications, journals, and newsletters. Some association publications rely heavily on independent writers but not others. In some cases, writing is done by volunteers and staff members due to small budgets. Strother works with associations in the fields of technology, healthcare, and business trade. Many are not for profit. He recommended directing queries to publications aligned with your specialty, and he emphasized the importance of proficiency with any particular association's jargon. He finds that there is so much jargon, it is easy to get lost. Go to the association website to check out the jargon and language and check their online publication before sending a query. Some information there is basic, but Strother has found that many people don't do their homework. Most queries go through staff, and assignments are made by editors, including for copy editors' re-writes. He recommends AP style for general writing and AMA for medical. The typical length

of a piece is 500- 3500 words and payment varies from 33 cents to a dollar a word. The amount of information the company gives the writer can vary also. They may provide materials to the writer, or the writer may need to do his or her own research, or they may give contact information but will not guarantee that it is good information. Other things to do: check the editorial calendar for topics and submit ideas. General articles are sometimes accepted, but industry-specific articles are preferred. Pay is on publication, and the freelance writer's contract is with SmithBucklin, so there are opportunities to write for more than one publication.

Besides checking the websites above; here are two more that came out of the question and answer session: Snaonline.org is the website of the Society of National Association Publications (SNAP), the non-profit, professional society serving association and society publications. In other words, SNAP is an association for association publications, and it is a great resource to writers. The Association Forum (www.associationforum.org) is a local Chicago organization that, according to their website, is an association of associations, providing essential learning, compelling experiences and powerful resources that advance the professional practice of association management. They offer career services, education and other resources to their members. ♡



Punctuation Expertise Isn't Limited to Pandas

This is yet another review in an irregular series devoted to books and Internet sites that are popularly classified as reference source material.

A Dash of Style / Noah Lukeman / 201 pp. (incl. introduction and acknowledgements) plus a reading list / W.W. Norton, 2006 / \$23.95 list (hard cover) / ISBN-13:978-0-393-06087-X

BY RICHARD EASTLINE

Just in case you thought that the last word on “proper” punctuation was proffered by British teacher Lynn Truss — well, think again. While her runaway best seller (*Eats, Shoots & Leaves*) no doubt informed or at least bemused readers on both sides of the Atlantic, her approach to mastering the art of punctuation was characterized by a “scold with a smile, teach with a threat” undertone. Nonetheless, her adoption of a panda encyclopedia entry to set the stage was inspired. No doubt there were many who thus presumed that pandas had a genetic propensity for punctuation usage and it would follow that reading the book would bestow such trait on aspiring writers.

Fantasies persist in our goal of writing well. But, as so many have learned, even high quality prose is cheapened by chinks in the structure held together by commas, semicolons, apostrophes, and other oddities that contribute to style and substance. Ill-placed dashes

and gratuitous ellipses may not detour a recognized masterpiece, but the path to literary success usually is mined with a liberal assortment of punctuation elements just waiting to disrupt a journey at the wrong times.

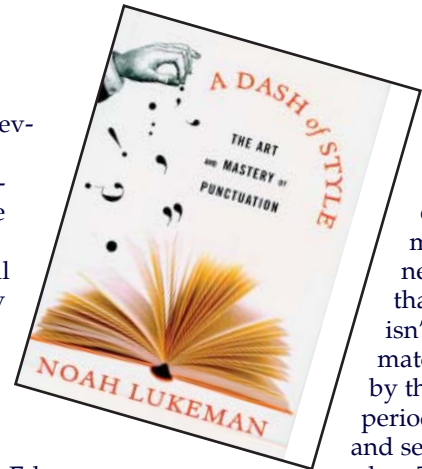
Enter Noah Lukeman. He is both a prestigious literary agent (there are such things) and an accomplished writer-advisor to authors. Among his own successes is a familiar staple in many writing programs, *The First Five Pages: A Writer's Guide to Staying Out of the Rejection Pile*. His foray into purely grammatical guidance in the matter of punctuation has brought high praise for his clarification coupled with an unpretentious style in putting forth the benefits to be gained. *A Dash of Style* is not another rules-fixated lecture. Its purpose is to make any writer better by understanding how punctuation contributes to clarity and creativity in expression.

Lukeman further advances his stand on considering punctuation as a writing tool by calling upon excerpts

from the works of several authors. These illustrate his conviction that knowledge of punctuation imparts style as well as meaning, thereby contributing character to content.

Henry James, E. M. Forster, Vladimir Nabokov, Edith Wharton, and Edgar Allan Poe are among the many writers he has chosen to participate in his “symphony of punctuation”—demonstrating how a subtle mood, for example, can be established through the pace imposed by the adroit use of commas, periods, et al.

Going beyond the familiar marks that are inserted in the course of creating sentences, there is the matter of paragraph and section breaks. Lukeman considers these as part of a writer's tool kit and details how and why these devices were introduced into present-day formatting. Originally devised to allow space for decorative lettering, they retain value in providing pauses or transitions



in a fluent manner that isn't matched by the period and semicolon. To

think of a paragraph as being a container for a theme rather than simply a way to break up lengthy text is the dictum here.

In this book, as in others he has written, philosophy and lucid explanation permeate the many discussions, making “A Dash of Style” much more than a categorical directory of usage. Lukeman senses that mastery of punctuation is an ongoing pursuit, not a fixed curriculum. His conclusion is that punctuation is at its best when you don't notice it, when it serves as a seamless companion to the writing. More than that, it can help to reveal the writer in a manner that words alone cannot. 🐼

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WWW.IWOC.ORG

with which to pair it. It's the appreciation of someone else's handiwork—like watching Michael Jordan switch hands three times in midair before laying the ball in the basket over Magic Johnson... or watching Eli Manning escape an onslaught of Patriot pass rushers and chuck the ball downfield to David Tyree... and watching Tyree go to the turf clutching the drive-sustaining catch against his helmet.

These athletic feats have nothing to do with me, and yet they delight me. Why? A well-turned phrase might be someone else's doing, yet I enjoy it as if it were mine. Again, why? I'll let the question rest unanswered here—in part because I'm not in position to come up with an easily stated answer and, in part, because in asking the question, I'm dancing dangerously close to the edge of over-analysis (if I haven't crossed that line already). A professor of mine in graduate school once tried to start a casual conversation with a group of students by bringing up a paper he'd recently read by someone who was studying "fun" and trying to break it down into its basic components. Even as an engineering student, it struck me that anyone who wanted to break fun into its basic components had missed the point already. So I'll stop and keep my record of point hitting largely intact... except to pose one last self-consuming question. I wonder why I get such a kick out of wondering about things. ♡

It's IWOC Renewal Time!

Once again it's time to renew our membership in IWOC. Even though pricing has gone up on almost everything you can think of, we've held the line, and you'll get the same deal you got last year: \$150 for a professional membership with five free listings (plus three more freebies if you work on a committee); \$95 for seniors over 62 (otherwise same deal as professional); and \$90 for associates (no online listing and contact info only in directory). Plus, this year we're offering a 10 percent discount on dues (not category listings) if you reup between June 9 and June 30.

Think of what you get: a whole year's worth of free advertising on the internet; 10 months of terrific programs, many featuring people who hire; 2 great parties; Writers' Line; the print directory; a boatload of Writers' Resources on the website; the Rate Survey; *Stet* (soon to be augmented by an online version); seminars (a splendid one is coming up in October); a drawing for a gift certificate for stuff you can use at every meeting; and perhaps best of all: an opportunity to network and make friends with talented colleagues with whom you can commiserate, exult, share info, and maybe get some job referrals. And more is coming: we've got money to spend on advertising IWOC, and the benefits committee is working hard to bring you discounts on office supplies, printing, and other goodies that will save you money. Plus, belonging to IWOC gives you status as a member of the absolute best professional writers' organization in the Midwest. So let's try for 100 percent renewal this year. Go to members-only to use PayPal or download the printed forms. And, if you have friends who haven't yet joined, this is the time: they'll get a 10 percent discount if they join during this period too. ♡

Calendar

June 10

IWOC Monthly Meeting. "From Print to Screen to 'Zine: Ruth L. Ratny Shows You How to Get Hired." Come and learn how to win business in print, screenwriting, and online webzine markets from a writing entrepreneur who's done all, seen all, and will tell all in a live interview with IWOC's own Catherine Rategan. Tuesday, May 13 at National-Louis University, Room 5008, 122 S. Michigan Ave., Chicago. Program 6 p.m. Networking 5 p.m. Nonmembers, \$15; IWOC members free. For more information, call 847-855-6670 or visit www.iwoc.org.

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.

June 26 (4th Thursday)

IWOOP Monthly Lunch. Near-west suburbanites meet at noon on the 4th Thursday of the month for lunch at Poor Phil's, 139 S. Marion St., Oak Park. For more info, call Barb Dillard at 312/642-3065. This group doesn't always meet, so be sure to check to see if there is to be a lunch meeting this month before you show up.

July 3 (1st Thursday)

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

IWOC Welcomes New Members

Kirk Anderson

Deborah Cohen

Sarah Klose

Denise Power

And Returning Member

Patricia Cronin