



VALLEY VOICES

The Newsletter of San Joaquin Valley Writers | September 2024

From the President

Greetings to all SJVW members! Fall is almost here as summer stretches and yawns before bedding down for an eight-month nap. As we move into a new season, it's time for us all to take stock of where we are on our projects and wrap them up before the holiday period sneaks in and nibbles away at our time. So, how about a commitment to get major work on our writing projects completed by mid-November? Let's do it!

And now that September is here, it's time to see how our organization is doing. Renewals and new memberships were due this last month. At this point we total 47 members. But it's still not too late to get someone new to join. If you have a friend or relative who is writing or is an aspiring writer, have that person consider joining us. Simply direct them to our website to see what we do and what we're about. We are writers helping writers, powered by our motto "Words have power." We will welcome new members up until November 1. From December until February, they may join for the one-half pro-rated membership that runs January until June.

That's it from me for this issue of the newsletter. Sending everyone the best wishes for the autumn season and I look forward to seeing you at any or all our planned events, especially November 9.

—Bill VanPatten



2024 Contest Winners Announced

SJVW is pleased to announce **the winners of our first biennial writing contest for 2024.**

Fiction: **E. J. McBride** (San Fernando Valley) "End of the Road." WINNER
Todd Whiteley (SJVW) "Eye of the Beholder" HONORABLE MENTION
D. L. LaRoche (South Bay) "Perfect Teeth" HONORABLE MENTION

Poetry: **Melissa Huntington** (Orange County) "A View of Tahiti" WINNER
Pamela Pan (SJVW) "Wonton Soup" HONORABLE MENTION

No award was given this year in the category of Memoir/Creative Nonfiction. All submissions were blinded and anonymously judged. The awardees and honorees will be recognized at our November 9 gathering **Celebrating Success!** (see Additional News and Notes). The winning submissions will be published on our website during the month of September and will also be included in our 2025 anthology. Congratulations to all! Our next contest will be held in 2026. Be on the lookout for it.



2025 Anthology Theme Announced!

The theme for our next anthology is here! *Beginnings & Endings*. To learn more, go to our publications page or click on this box.

Upcoming Events



Monthly meetings¹

- Saturday, September 14, 12:00-2:00 p.m. “Author Website Starter Kit,” presented by Pauline Wiles. <https://www.paulinewiles.com/bio>. Via Zoom.
- Saturday, October 12, 9:00 a.m.-4:00 p.m. Great Valley Bookfest in Manteca. <https://gvbookfest.org>. SJVW will host a panel on “AI: What It Can Do For You.”

Craft Chats

- Saturday, September 28, 12:00-2:00 p.m. Craft Chat. “What Going in in your Character’s Head?” Join us to examine the value of using internal dialogue in your storytelling. Internal dialogue is a useful tool that makes your characters three-dimensional, makes them more relatable to the reader, and increases narrative tension. (Papapavlo's, 501 Lincoln Center Stockton)
- Saturday, October 26, 12:00-2:00 p.m. Craft Chat. “Being Flashy.” Come explore the A, B, Cs of flash fiction and learn how to keep that story *short*. (Papapavlo's, 501 Lincoln Center Stockton)

For a full description of these and future events, please visit our website by [clicking here](#).

News and Info from Our Members

- Congratulations to **James Fox**. *Boomer* will reprint his short story, “The Drive-in Banshees”, in which an ex-marine takes his seven kids to a drive-in horror movie. In addition, his poem “Trek to Serenity” will appear in the Redwoods Writers anthology *One Day*. Great news, James!
- **Carren McDaniel** has been in Scotland recently, conducting research for a YA series set in that part of the world. What a great way to do research!
- **Barbara Young** is speaking at the Sacramento Suburban Writers Club on the topic “Building an Online Book Creation Team.” Date: September 9 at 7 p.m. Barbara will also be reading from her book *Mother’s Pearls: An Enduring Gift* at Chateau Davell, 3020 Vista Tierra Drive, Camino, California. Date: September 22. Check these events out if you’re in the area.
- **Pamela Pan** attended the Community of Writers Workshop in July, where she learned a good deal about the craft of writing while also connecting with other writers. She also reports that her story, “Champion of the Swine”, will appear in the Redwood anthology *Transitions*.

If you have news or information you would like to share, please contact us by [clicking here](#). We welcome all kinds of news from our members.

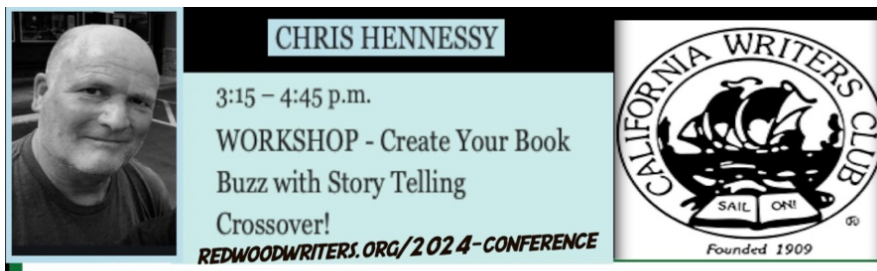
Additional News and Notes

- **Save the date!** Join us on November 9 at Papapavlo’s (501 Lincoln Center, Stockton) for our first biennial **Celebrating Success!** This special event will feature accomplishments of SJVW writers, including winners of the first writing contest, those who’ve published their first book-length projects, special publications, awards and honors, and the recipient of the first June Gillam Award. This will be a festive occasion and


¹ Check email messages for Zoom login information regarding monthly meetings.

time for us to mingle and applaud ourselves for our efforts. **We will soon post the form for signing up on the SJVW website. There will be limited spaces. Stay tuned!**

- Be sure to come support SJVW at **the annual Great Valley Bookfest** in Manteca, October 12, 2024. [Click here](#) to go to their website for all the details. SJVW will have a booth and will also have a panel titled “AI: What It Can Do for Writers” featuring June Gillam, Pamela Pan, Debbie Saarloos, and Bill VanPatten. If you’d like to volunteer for a one-hour stint at the booth, let [June Gillam](#) know by October 1.
- The Elk Grove Writers Guild is excited about its upcoming fall event on “Crafting Compelling Characters.” Registration is easy. Just click on: <https://egweg.org/fall2024/>. If you have any questions, please let Loy Holder know at loyholder77@gmail.com.
- Redwood Writers is pleased to announce its 12th biennial Sonoma Writers Conference, the 12th biennial Hosted by Redwood Writers 8:30 am to 5 pm Saturday, Oct. 19, 2024. Finley Community Center, 2060 W. College Ave., Santa Rosa, CA. For details, click on the link below. <https://redwoodwriters.org/2024-conference>



CHRIS HENNESSY
3:15 – 4:45 p.m.
WORKSHOP - Create Your Book
Buzz with Story Telling
Crossover!
REDWOODWRITERS.ORG/2024-CONFERENCE



CALIFORNIA WRITERS CLUB
SAIL ORN
Founded 1909



Elk Grove
Writer's Guild
Fall Seminar
November 2, 2024
11:30 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.
Holiday Inn
Express & Suites
905 W. Stockton Blvd
Elk Grove, CA
Box lunches at 11:30 a.m.
Program begins at noon
Register Now!
Registration Fee: \$30
Registration Link
egwg.org
<https://egwg.org/fall2024>

Writing Tips and Tidbits

- **Should you use Amazon’s free ISBN code or purchase your own?** All print books require an ISBN. When you publish with Amazon, you can create an ISBN for free or use an ISBN you purchased elsewhere. But if you use Amazon's free ISBNs and then leave their platform, you also lose their free ISBN. To purchase your own ISBNs, the central source is Bowker Publishing Service. Even publishers and third parties use Bowkers to purchase ISBNs. Their url is <https://www.myidentifiers.com/>. They will also answer all questions at isbn-san@bowker.com. Currently they list the following prices: One ISBN is \$125. Ten are \$295. 100 for \$575. In the end, if your plan is to only sell on or through Amazon, the free ISBNs might be your best bet.
- If you haven’t heard of **Submittable**, you need to check it out. It is the main source writers go to for publication sites for short stories, memoir pieces, poetry, and essays. Just [click here](#) and the rest is self-explanatory. The site is free. Let us know if you’d like a session sometime on other’s experience with Submittable.
- At some point, we all may need to write **promo copy** for our publications. What is promo copy? Well, it’s everything from back cover blurbs to ads to one-line pitches and more. If you have difficulty writing promo copy for your book, check out the article [“How to Write Attention-Grabbing Promo Copy for Books”](#) published in July 2024.

Interested in working on one of our committees? SJVW is happy to accept volunteers to work on various aspects of our organization (newsletter, events, scholarships and awards, anthologies, recruitment/ outreach, among others). Time commitment is minimal, and you’d be helping other writers in a different way!

Featured Essay



Staying Out of Research Rabbit Holes (The Alice Complex)

by Jo Donahue (www.jodonahue.com)

Research is an essential part of writing books, but it's easy for authors to fall down "rabbit holes" – spending hours lost in fascinating but ultimately unproductive tangents. For me, sometimes rabbit holes are much more exciting than what I was trying to research, but that won't write a book. So, I've had to develop strategies to stay on track and avoid research pitfalls.

1. **Start with a clear research plan.** Before diving in, outline the key topics and questions you need to investigate. This provides a roadmap to keep you on track. Keep that outline open and handy. Refer to it constantly, maybe use it as a checklist. Since I write historical Western romances, I find I can reuse some of the research for several books. I keep a copy of the resource essays in a specific folder, so they are handy.
2. **Set time limits.** Allot a specific amount of time for each research task. When the timer goes off, wrap up and move on. (By the way, this is soooo hard, so be prepared to have a little frustration...however keep tasking.)
3. **Take notes strategically.** Rather than trying to capture everything, focus on information directly relevant to your book's content and themes. This is a case where less really is sometimes more.
4. **Recognize when you have "enough."** You don't need to become an expert on every subtopic related to your book. Once you have sufficient accurate information to write credibly, stop researching that area.
5. **Save interesting tangents for later.** If you discover an intriguing but non-essential topic, add it to a "future research" list rather than pursuing it immediately. Make a note of where you found it so that you can go back to it later. Don't waste time writing the information down now.
6. **Alternate research and writing.** Don't do all your research upfront. Stop at a certain point and put your fingers to the keyboard. As you write, you'll naturally identify specific details you need to look up later.
7. **Consult with subject matter experts.** Do an internet search to find people. They can provide focused, high-quality information more efficiently than hours of independent research. Prior to the meeting, develop a list of questions so you stay on target and use it to refer during the interview. And, of course, set a timer so that your conversation with that person doesn't take you off into tangents.
8. **Be wary of internet rabbit holes.** It's easy to click from link to link endlessly. Stick to reputable sources and avoid going more than 2-3 clicks deep on a topic.
9. **Remember your purpose.** You're researching to write a book, not to satisfy your own curiosity. Most writers have a natural curiosity, and that can be a downfall. So keep yourself in check and keep your end goal in mind.

With a strategic approach, you can conduct thorough research while avoiding unproductive tangents. Stay focused on gathering the information you truly need to bring your book to life.

Featured Essay

You Don't Need to Wait for A Copyeditor: Learn to Self-edit as Part of Your Craft

by Pam Van Allen

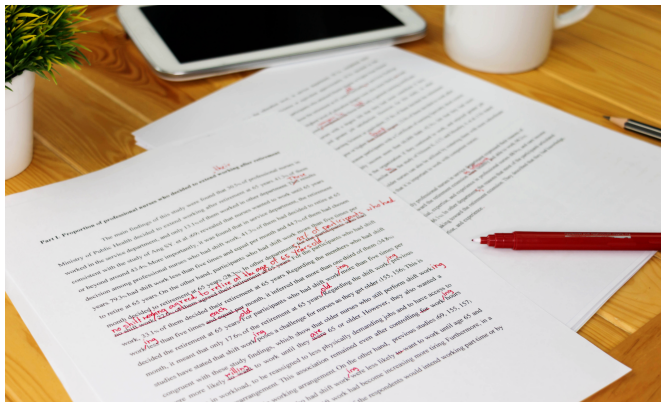
Self-editing is an important process in the creation of a final draft. Some writers self-edit as they go. Some wait until they have a first draft. Others self-edit as they go and then self-edit after a draft is completed. No matter the process, self-editing is important. Although an editor can make changes for you, the fewer changes an editor makes, generally the shorter and less expensive the process is for the author. In addition, the better your work looks to agents, periodical editors, anthology editors, but most important, to readers, the more successful you will be as a writer.

What are some typical aspects of writing that we can all self-edit? The obvious are spelling, grammar, and punctuation—what some call the mechanical aspects of writing. There are programs to help with these, with some better than others. However, nothing surpasses the trained eye of a professional proofer and copyeditor for these details.

Additional areas where writers can self-edit involve **filler words** and **filter words**. Filler words are often used in spoken language but unnecessary in prose. Here are some examples of filler words: *very, in order to, just, actually, of course, in fact, suddenly, somewhat, perhaps*. So, for example, we can take the sentence “Mary suddenly turned in order to get a better view of the action” and work to get rid of “suddenly”, “in order to”, and even “better.” A sample rewrite might be “Mary spun to see the action behind her.” Filter words intervene between the point-of-view character and the reader’s experience of the action. Avoiding the use of filter words brings the reader closer what the author wants to get across. Some filter words include saw, heard, felt, decided, knew, and realized. Let’s take the sample sentence “Tom heard the rumble of thunder and decided not to go to the party.” Here we want to rework to get rid of “heard” and “decided.” Our rewrite could be “The rumble of thunder discouraged Tom from attending the party.”

There are many other things for which a writer can self-edit, including **progressive verbs** (e.g., “The girls were singing in the chorus” → “The girls sang in the chorus”), using “it” and “there” to begin sentences (e.g., “There is a town in north Ontario where I used to live” → “I once lived in a town in north Ontario”), and **overuse of passive** voice (e.g., “John was killed by a drunk driver” → “John lost his life to a drunk driver” or “A drunk driver ended John’s short life”). Sometimes passives appear without the “by” as in “The lunch was served” or “Much was said on the topic.” If you can add the humorous phrase “by zombies”, you have a passive that may need attention: “The lunch was served by the zombies” or “Much was said by zombies on the topic.”

An internet search can help you find typical problems in writing that can be fixed during self-editing. For now, if you don’t self-edit for the things mentioned here, you have a place to start. Enjoy deleting and reworking!



Final Thought

“There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside you.”—*Maya Angelou*

The next newsletter will appear in November. Send us your news, thoughts, and ideas!

