



The Blue Review

BOOST's Official monthly E-zine for Children's Writers

Sample issue

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Letter from the Editor

It's spring, and spring is always filled with life and inspiration. People enjoy being outside after months spent in centrally heated homes. We marvel at the budding plants, colorful flowers, and new leaves on the trees. We feel relaxed and carefree as they shed a layer of clothing in the warm weather. Spring is a time of inspiration.

We can use the colors, smells, sights, and sounds of spring to our advantage in our writing. Giving our reader a full experience (without bombarding him or her) makes our writing direct and personal. When we write stories for older readers, we use the qualities of all the senses effectively. Thus, the inspiration of spring can enhance our writing for middle grade readers and young adults. This month, writing for the YA market is the theme of *The Blue Review*.

The suggested age range for young adult stories spans from about fourteen to twenty, depending on whom you ask. But who really reads young adult literature? People from age ten to ninety! Everyone who reads can enjoy a young adult novel. Knowing this can be another source of inspiration for the YA story writer. Your audience is broad.

While BOOST is focusing on writing for young adults in the March edition of *The Blue Review*, we are also thinking of younger readers. Our short story contest is for readers age 6-9, and the contest is in full swing. Entries came in throughout the month of February, but you still have plenty of time to polish and send yours. The deadline for submission is April 15, and the maximum word count is 800 words. Full submission guidelines are posted at <http://www.boost4writers.com/contest.htm>. The prizes are attractive this year. And don't forget that winning a contest can give you an "in" with a prospective publisher or magazine editor.

If any of you would like to write to me, please do. I always love to hear from BOOST members and TBR readers.

Happy spring! Happy writing!

Jill Ronsley
Editor-in-chief, *The Blue Review*

Word: Creating Believable Voice in the YA Novel

by Maurene Hinds

“Okay, so like, I’m totally buggin’. I’ve got an awesome idea for a rad book for teens, but like, how do they talk these days?”

“Word up, dude. I totally feel your pain.”

As adults writing for teens, we want our stories and dialogue to sound authentic. It seems only natural that using appropriate “teen speak” will add authenticity and believability to the story. If this element is missing, we figure, readers might decide an old timer who is completely out of touch with the contemporary teenager wrote the book.

While this reasoning seems logical, there are some flaws to this approach. Yes, you want readers to relate to and believe your characters and their situations. However, relying solely on jargon rather than solid characterization to create this believability is a mistake. Using language trends as a means of creating authenticity can quickly detract from the story. This will turn off readers, as it is obvious that the writer is trying to use the easy way out. When done incorrectly, using “teen speak” can inform a reader that the writer is out of touch. Even if done well, jargon can date your story. Unless you are writing historical fiction, use other, more reliable writing techniques to create believable teen characters. (And when writing historical fiction, it is still a good idea to keep trendy dialogue to a minimum.)

Make it Memorable

A good story line and engaging characters make a story memorable. Many stories written a few decades ago, such as J. D. Salinger’s *The Catcher in the Rye*, published in 1951, capture the essence of teen anger and frustration without using flowery or trendy dialogue. Consider the opening:

“If you really want to hear about it, the first thing you’ll probably want to know is where I was born, and what my lousy childhood was like, and how my parents were occupied and all before they had me, and all that David Copperfield kind of crap, but I don’t feel like going into it, if you want to know the truth.”

There is no trendy language in this opening paragraph, yet the character, Holden Caulfield, is completely believable. What does the reader learn in one sentence? The character has attitude, is angry, had a lousy childhood, and is not going to stand for doing things in the “traditional” sense. Very few teens would find this character unrealistic, and yet, aside from perhaps the word “crap,” none of the language is out of the ordinary in everyday language.

In *Blood and Chocolate*, published in 1997 by Annette Curtis Klause, the author uses a variety of terms in the werewolf world she creates. These words are not contemporary jargon, but rather, words she uses to add depth to the characters and set the werewolf world apart from the world in which her readers live. Terms specific to the story are

explained and then used in context, such as “meat boy,” a human male. Other words that may not be familiar to readers are also explained, such as in the following dialogue:

“What does he look like?”

“Oh, I dunno. He’s tall, bohemian.”

Whatever that means, she thought.

Mr. Antony must have noticed her blank look. “You know, a throwback to the sixties, jeans and beads, an MTV hippie.”

Elaine Marie Alphin presents a mystery that opens with a violent episode, and racial conflicts are weaved throughout the story in her book, *The Perfect Shot* (2005). While it would be easy to use contemporary jargon or stereotypical dialogue, Alphin chooses straightforward language and dialogue to move the story forward. For example, rather than using jargon to convey the closeness of a high school basketball team, Alphin’s characters give one another nicknames, and readers enter the games through exciting play-by-play action from the main character’s point of view.

Make It Believable

How do you make your characters believable? By using time-honored techniques. Get to know your characters. Ensure that everything they say and do is true to the characters and not what you think they “should” say or do.

Give them an opportunity to learn and grow by facing challenges and finding solutions. Develop a world that is appropriate to their situations, and allow them to operate within that world in ways that are natural to their character, not through words or actions imposed from the outside. Is this easy to do? Absolutely not! But it’s the stuff that sets the really good books apart from the rest.

Holden Caulfield is a believable character because he is so honest. The world in *Blood and Chocolate* draws the reader into the story. The mystery in *The Perfect Shot* is not diluted by unnecessary jargon.

Tips for Thought

Swearing: Don’t have your characters swear just for the sake of swearing. Be sure it’s for a good reason.

Teen Speak: Don’t try to be a teenager. You’re not one! If all teenagers could write great stories, adult authors wouldn’t be needed.

Unknown Terms: When using specific terms, explain them to your reader, and use them in the known context from that point forward.

The Bottom Line: The overall quality of story and characters make your YA novel believable, not a bunch of jargon.

Be Yourself: Trying too hard to “fit in” doesn’t work. Being true to yourself as a writer will.

Maurene Hinds is a fulltime freelance writer specializing in children's writing and educational materials for teachers, parents, and students. She has published a number of nonfiction books for teens and is currently completing a young adult novel. She holds a Master of Fine Arts in Writing for Children and Teenagers from Vermont College and has written and critiqued manuscripts for all ages of children.

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Book Basics: A Bibliography

by Rebecca Berg

I love books. I've worked in libraries for years and am currently working toward my graduate degree in Library Sciences. Two years ago, I wrote a book-length bibliography for the Literature for Youth series at Scarecrow Press. The topic of my bibliography was the Great Depression. Book-length bibliographies are used primarily by librarians, educators and researchers who want a comprehensive source of materials available on a given topic.

Since my book was published, many people have commented on how helpful it is to find a source of materials that have been read and reviewed. It's a joy to hear such feedback because that was the main reason that I wrote the book. I wanted to find as many books about the topic as I could, read them, and then write short descriptive paragraphs. That way, users would know, at a glance, if this was a book they would be interested in.

That's what I hope to do with this column. My goal is to offer title suggestions that not only coincide with the monthly "Blue Review" themes, but also titles, new or old, that might have a particular value or angle not found in other books. Hopefully, you will find one or two books that interest you or cover an area you'd like to learn more about.

This month's theme deals with the business end of writing. I've selected two books that cover this subject extensively.

Appelbaum, Judith, *How to Get Happily Published*. New York: HarperPerennial, 1998. 5th Edition.

The fact that this book is in its fifth printing speaks volumes to its popularity and longevity. Author Appelbaum's success might be because she treats the process of getting published as an educated and controlled endeavor. She states that authors often feel luck or gimmick surrounds publication. But the information she puts forth in her book dispels this myth.

She opens with chapters on such topics as revision, story development, and evaluation before taking the reader through the steps needed for publication. She discusses book proposals, agents, manuscript submission, and the relationship between writer and editor. An entire section explains what an author can expect once a sale has been made, such as navigating contracts and book production. She devotes one chapter to book promotion and another to self-publication.

The resource section at the end of the book is comprehensive. It includes additional reference books, as well as organizations to contact and programs that readers can investigate as they work their way through the publication process.

Litowinsky, Olga, *It's a Bunny-Eat-Bunny World: A Writer's Guide to Surviving and Thriving in Today's Competitive Children's Book Market*. New York: Walker & Company, 2001.

Olga Litowinsky knows her stuff. She's been an agent, has worked as an editor for Simon and Schuster, and is a published author. She has all the credentials needed to write about

the world of children's publishing. But be warned! This book is not for the faint-hearted. It jumps right into the fire of the publishing world, never holding back on painful truths nor sidestepping the tougher issues writers face on their way to publication. That's also the best aspect of this book. It opens up the world of children's writing with frank discussion on what it takes to succeed, ways authors can improve their skills and what writers can *really* expect in the realms of children's marketing and publication.

Litowinsky uses Gus the bunny to show the reader what happens as a writer and his or her manuscript work their way through the publication process. She begins with a background of the publishing industry, and as the book unfolds, she discusses current trends. She offers an enlightening story about what happens to a manuscript as it journeys through the editorial process. She also suggests ways writers can advance skills, make industry contact, and improve sales.

Bragging Rites

by Kathy Greer

Where has the year gone? It seems some of us are still trying to form goals and resolutions for the “new year” and it’s not so new anymore! Well, here are a few BOOST members who have achieved some of their goals already. Good for them. A hearty “congratulations!” to each one.

Christine Tricarico of Blue Journey – I had two poems accepted by Wee Ones: “*Sleepwalking in Space*” will appear in their May/June ‘07 issue and “*Winter’s Homemade Warmth*” will be published in their Jan/Feb ‘07. I’ve also had two poems accepted by Cecil Child <http://cecilchild.com> for their spring ‘06 issue, titled “*Dancing Flowers*” and “*Bugs!*” Recently four more poems were accepted by Hopscotch, “*Fun With Feet*” for their October 2011 issue, “*Sunflower Dance*” for the June 2011 issue, “*Splish-Splash Fun*,” June 2012 issue, and “*White & Light Comforts*,” June 2013 issue—wow another long wait! Have a creative-filled day! I’m having acceptance-mania—YAY!

Annette Gulati of Blue Journey – My nonfiction article, “Bend, Stretch, Roar,” was accepted by Wee Ones. It will appear in the Jan./Feb. 2007 issue. I also had a photo essay, “Glimpses of India,” accepted by Skipping Stones magazine. It will appear in the March or May 2006 issue. Also, I’m excited to say that my short story, “No More Dinosaurs,” will appear in the Sept. ‘06 issue of Dragonfly Spirit.

Jody Little of Blue Inspiration – My article “Just a Casual Guy” was accepted by Wee Ones and will appear in the Jan/Feb 2007 edition. Thanks for letting me share!

Mary Meinking Chambers of True Blue – Wee Ones has accepted my NF article “No Horsing Around With George” (about George Washington’s love of horses). It’s to appear in their March/April 2007 issue. This is my first acceptance with them. My New Year’s resolution was to get accepted with a new magazine, so I have one thing off my list for the year!

Jill Ronsley, BOOST Executive Board member and Editor-in-chief of *The Blue Review*, won the award Best Book Editor 2005 from the Preditors and Editors Readers Poll. Of the 105 nominees for best editor, Jill placed first. You can see the plaque on her Web site, www.suneditwrite.com. One of the prizes for the winner of the 3rd Annual BOOST Contest (short story), which is currently underway, is an edit of the first place story by Jill Ronsley.

We are so proud and happy for our BOOST family members’ successes. We would love to put yours in the Bragging Rites column, too. But first we need to know of them! If you have had a recent writing success involving children’s literature or writers’ helps, please send it to me at eringobraugh5@juno.com. Include the name of your story, article, or poem; also the name of the publication, your full name and the name of your BOOST group. And list when it will appear, if known.

Children's Market News

by Carol Kelly

My mother was the best at saving a penny. She shopped for bargains and deals everywhere. "Bacon is bacon and it all comes from a pig," she would say. "You are buying the brand name on those jeans, Carol. Wouldn't you rather have more jeans?"

Well, growing up with Mom was frustrating, but now that I'm a writer, I appreciate the thrift she taught me years ago. I've learned that I don't need to buy all the writer market books each year or spend money on magazines to research submission possibilities. Most of the time, I can find all the information I need by doing the things I enjoy in my writing: researching, reading, going to the library and talking with friends. I like to spend money—don't get me wrong—but if I can get the same thing for free, well ... you decide. Would you rather save a penny or spend a penny?

Here are some ideas for finding the right markets for your manuscript. It won't cost much more than a bit of research time.

LIBRARIES

Most magazines won't send writers free sample copies. So how do we go about finding a sample copy without spending writing profits? Hike down to the nearest public library. Libraries have current and back issues of many magazines. Most are available for loan. Flip through these and note the editors and how many articles are freelance. Get a feel for how to write for that magazine. Other available resources might be local university and college libraries. Call them for their policies on visiting. Ask if and how you're allowed to borrow books and magazines.

BOOKSTORES

If you are like me, bookstores are a dangerous and costly place to visit. However, if you don't take your wallet, the local bookstore becomes a writer's friend for free magazine browsing.

NETWORK WITH FRIENDS AND FAMILY

Think about your brother, sister, parents, grandparents, teachers, neighbors, and friends who receive magazines in the mail every month. Ask if you can have the back issues for study. Do a swap of magazines with writing friends through the mail. Though this will cost a bit for postage, the money you save in swapping several magazines will exceed what you would spend for a single issue at the store.

INTERNET

You've got to love the Internet, right? Go to your search engine and type in "freelance writers" or "paying markets" or a specific magazine title. Hundreds of writing listings pop up to browse and search. Most magazines post their writing guidelines on their Web sites. BOOST4Writers, Writer's Digest, Freelancing4Money and other Web sites post searchable data banks of markets.

Magazine Publishing Markets

College Bound Teen

The submission address for this periodical is 1200 South Avenue, Suite 202, Staten Island, NY 10314. The Editor-in-chief is Gina LaGuardia. The Web site is www.collegeboundteen.com. This magazine helps college bound teens find practical information about college life. It publishes 175 freelance submissions yearly; 60 percent are by unpublished writers. Sixty percent of its writers are new to the magazine. They publish monthly regional editions and a national edition, biannually.

College Bound Teen asks that writers query with clips or writing samples to the above address or email queries to editorial@collegebound.net. Please enclose a SASE. They will respond in six to eight weeks.

Article lengths average 600-1000 words. They accept informational, how-to, profile, interview and personal experience pieces. The publishers ask for first and second rights and pay \$50-100 for articles and \$50-70 for departments. They pay upon publication and provide three to five contributor copies.

Dimensions

The submission address for Dimensions is 1908 Association Drive, Reston, VA 20191. The editor is Traci Moinar. The Web site address is www.deca.org. High school students who wish to learn more about marketing, management, and entrepreneurship in the business world read this magazine. Dimensions offers articles on effective communicating, developing leadership, and community service, as well as preparing for college. It publishes nine freelance submissions yearly, with 60 percent written by non-staff writers. Of the freelance submissions, 50 percent are from unpublished writers or writers new to the magazine. Writers may query or send the complete manuscript with a short author bio. Send email submissions to traci-moinar@deca.org. Response time varies.

Articles average 800-1200 words. The categories are informational, how-to, profile, interview, and personal experience pieces. Dimensions asks for first North American serial rights, and payment rates vary. The magazine pays upon publication.

Contest Corner

by Kelley Hunsicker

Writing contests are a good way to learn to follow guidelines, to hone your writing skills, and to get your work noticed. A winning piece can stand out from the slush pile and enhance an article's sale value. With this in mind, here are a few contests happening in the next few months.

Smart Writers

<http://www.smartwriterspro.com>

All contests end at midnight on March 15, 2006. You may enter by snail mail or email. \$10.00 entry fee.

Young Adult: Novel excerpt to 1,000 words plus one page synopsis

Middle Grade: Novel excerpt to 1,000 words plus one page synopsis

Chapter Book: Novel excerpt to 1,000 words plus one page synopsis

Nonfiction: Book excerpt to 1,000 words plus one page synopsis

Picture Book: Full manuscript – text only

Poetry: 3-5 poems, up to six double-spaced pages total

Illustration: Cover art for any book, existing or imaginary

Dummy Picture Book: This is for artists who offer the whole package, enter a dummy book with at least four full-color finished page spreads

Visit the website for complete guidelines and prize packages.

FFWA Contest: Children's Literature Division

http://www.writers-editors.com/Writers/Contests/Contest_Guidelines/contest_guidelines.htm

All entries must be postmarked no later than March 15, 2006. Entry fees vary. Visit website for complete submission guidelines and prize packages.

2006 CNW/FFWA 23rd Annual Florida State Writing Competition. Children's Literature Division includes: unpublished or self-published Short Story, Nonfiction Article, book chapter, or poem (Judged as one category)

Contests are a good way to get your writing noticed. Be sure to follow the guidelines and submit polished work. By doing these, you will already be halfway to winning the prize.

Every Picture Tells a Story

Write to Invite Great Pictures

by Kevin Scott Collier

Every month I am assigned one or two manuscripts to illustrate for a children's picture book. The best thing about being both a writer and an illustrator is that I've learned to appreciate chemistry in a book—when text complements art, and art complements text.

With children's picture books, the horse is before the cart. It is the writer who provides the story and gallops down a trail. The illustrator is the cart that follows the horse. The reader is the passenger.

Where the reader goes and what he or she sees is virtually mapped out by the writer. The artist draws the map. The illustrator must follow the trail, illustrate the environment, and give the passengers sights.

Sometimes I receive manuscripts that do not provide many opportunities for interesting artwork. Those present a challenge.

One book I illustrated before last Christmas described a boy and his grandmother as they wandered through a shopping mall talking about the true meaning of the holiday. With the exception of some pop up "dream" balloons to show examples of what they were discussing, the setting was always in the mall. No matter how creative an illustrator is, storefronts get boring after a while.

When the writer leans heavily on character dialog in a stationary setting, the best an illustrator can do is change camera angles—close-ups of characters, overhead shots, panoramic angles. Backgrounds, for the most part, are going to remain consistent. More than a few pages of these types of drawings in a row limits variety.

The best advice I can offer a writer who is working on a children's picture book is to imagine what could be pictured to correspond to your text. Read your story over. What do you see?

A writer shouldn't play illustrator. The author need not imagine what every illustrated page should look like. That is the artist's job. But, did you give the illustrator enough to work with? Did you open up opportunities for the illustrator to be creative and produce an attractive visual?

Good artists have a keen eye for fleshing out ideal scenes even in the most restricted settings. For example, a cat hiding inside a dark garbage can to avoid the neighborhood bloodhound is easy for an artist to depict. A snug fit illustration—the cat's eyes big, the metal-dented background. But if the writer's story calls for two or more close-up illustrations of the cat in the trashcan, the illustrator has few options.

Children's picture book writers should look at their story as if it's a script for a movie or TV show. The illustrator represents the camera crew, costume, and set designers. Have you

written something that takes place on a small sound stage, or are we shooting outdoors in some wonderful locales?

I recently illustrated a book about a bunny. Some events in the script had the same location a page apart. Two consecutive illustrations called for the bunny to be sitting on a porch with a woman appearing in a doorway. To make the illustrations work, I changed “camera angles.” The vantage points were different, but the environment was the same.

I appreciate working on books in which a chemistry between the writer and me exists—when the author provides a “picture friendly” script that inspires great images. This kind of script—or story—fosters imagination and provides wonderful moments for the reader, because the text and the drawings both tell a story, figuratively and literally, on the same page.

Marketing Tips for Authors

Discern Your Market

by Jill Ronsley

A writer who wants to succeed must not only write a story or book, but, when it is published, make sure that people know about it so they can buy it, read it—and perhaps buy another one for someone else.

As a writer, you focus on writing. You hone your skills, edit your stories, ask other writers for critiques, edit some more, and finally, submit your manuscript to an agent or publisher. If you are lucky, a publisher sends you an acceptance letter. Hooray! You made it! Now, you can sit back, bask in the glory of being a published author, watch sales climb, and know that thousands of people are reading your book.

Except that as most of us know, it doesn't quite work that way. The truth is that the author's job is not over when his or her work is accepted by a publisher. Only half the job is done—the job of writing. In order to be a successful published author, your books have to sell. And you, the author, must do the selling or nobody will think of buying your book. Hardly anyone will even know about it if you don't promote it. Sure, the publisher will invest a certain amount in marketing, but that will not be enough. And if you choose to self-publish, the onus for promotion is entirely on you.

Many authors shy away from the thought of promotion, or worse, self-promotion. But it isn't so difficult to do. In fact, it can be fun! In this column, I will present a tip to writers each month to help them promote their books and promote themselves as authors. If you are a writer, just follow one tip, then another and then another. Take one step at a time. Before you know it, you will find yourself far along the road of book-promotion and self-promotion as a writer. You will see that marketing can not only be relatively painless, but also, inspiring and rewarding. In fact, selling your books will be just one of the benefits.

First marketing tip for authors: You must be clear about who your market is. Even if you are a children's writer, your target market is not just your target age group.

When you write a book or story, you are expected to let an editor know the target market of your manuscript. BOOST writers write for children—but they also write for adults! *The Blue Review*, for example, is an e-zine about children's writing, but its target market is adults who write for children. If you write picture books, your target market is children about age 3–6. If you write YA novels, your target market will be children age 14–95. (Adults love YA books.) But your target market does not stop there.

Is your picture book about the meaning of Christmas? If so, then your target market might be not only children, but the Christian market. Is your MG novel about a boy who loves his dog? Think of dog-lovers—millions of dog-lovers would like nothing better than to sit in front of the fireplace with their pooch at their feet, reading a good story about a girl and her canine pal. Is your YA novel about a young man with a gift for music or about a group of teenagers who set off on an adventurous hike in the Rockies? Your market will be not

only children in a specific age group, but people who love to listen to, compose, play or record music, or hikers and outdoorsy moms and dads.

I'm sure you get the point. As a children's writer, think beyond your target age group. Once you have defined your target market clearly and broadly, you will be able to promote your book in a focused manner, because you will know just who is likely to buy it.

For more information about Jill Ronsley, an award-winning editor, and her work, visit her Web site, SUN Editing & Book Design, at www.suneditwrite.com .

Questions & Answers

Read Aloud to Polish Your Manuscript

by Jill Ronsley

Q. *I have finished my short story and I think I'm ready to submit it to a publisher. Can you tell me what I should do to make sure it's really ready?*

A. This question invites one of the most important tips to check how polished your story is. When all the grammar and punctuation are correct and the story is well-edited, read your story aloud. Are there any spots where you “trip”? Does one word sound out of place? Is a particular phrase awkward? Don't brush over any of these warning signs and assume that the story is fine. If you “trip,” something needs to be changed. Stop. Reread the sentence. Determine the exact point where the reading is not smooth. When you figure out what it is, revise it. Change the wording so it's tighter, clearer—better!

Do you have an extra adverb anywhere—one that is redundant because it says what the reader already knows or inserts something that is unnecessary? Take it out. Are any of your sentences too long? When the reader reaches the end of a sentence, will he have forgotten what he read at the beginning? Does she get lost along the way? If *you* get lost, you can be sure that your reader will, too.

When you read aloud, do so attentively. Read naturally—not too slowly or quickly. That way, you will notice all the wrinkles and be able to iron them out.

Be sure to read your manuscript aloud when you think it is finished—and *listen* to it. When you hear a polished, well-written story, any weakness it may have will jump out at you. Thus, you will be able to improve your manuscript before you submit it to a publisher.

Q. *When writing a cover letter or query, we are always asked to include its word count. Accuracy seems to be extremely important for most publications. My question: Does a word-count in Word include the headers and page numbers in the tally? If so, should I leave the count as it is or deduct the number of words in the headers and footers? Or should I use the word “about” or “approximately” before the count?*

A. When you submit a story to a magazine or publisher and the guidelines state a specific word count, make sure that you stay within the limits. An editor may reject a story without reading it if the word count is too great. The word count in Word includes all the words in your main document, but not the words or numbers in your headers or footers. A simple way to verify this is to open a new Word document, type “Hello” in the body text, type “Hello” in the Header and insert a page number. Then do a word count. The number of words should be 1.

If you have a question you would like answered in the Q & A column, or if you would just like to drop me a line about your writing, send me an e-mail.

For more information about Jill Ronsley, an award-winning editor, and her work, visit her Web site, SUN Editing & Book Design, at www.suneditwrite.com.

Sue's Reviews

by Susan Gilliam

Elsewhere by Gabrielle Zevin

*An announcement comes over the ship's PA system:
"This is your captain speaking. I hope you've enjoyed your passage.
On behalf of the crew of the SS Nile, welcome to Elsewhere.
The local temperature is 67 degrees with partly sunny skies and a westerly breeze.
The local time is 3:48 p.m. All passengers must now disembark.
This is the last and only stop."*

Thus begins Elizabeth Marie Hall's new life—or should I say death?—in Elsewhere, a place where new citizens arrive by cruise ship, humans can speak Canine, time moves backward, and no one grows old. On the contrary, residents of Elsewhere become younger each day until they are babies again, ready to be launched by river currents back to earth. There, they are born and age all over again. Sounds like heaven, right?

Not to Liz Hall. When Liz dies in a car-bicycle accident, just shy of her sixteenth birthday, she laments all of the firsts she'll never experience in Elsewhere. Important things like the chance to pass her driver's license exam, to attend her senior prom, to experience true love. Liz is not at all happy to be dead. Even her grandmother, Betty, despairs at Liz's failure to acclimate. Zevin's heroine refuses to change out of her hospital jammies. She spends every day at the OD, the observation deck where she can view (through binocular viewfinders) life moving on without her on earth.

In this breakout YA novel, Gabrielle Zevin imagines a whimsical alternate universe. Her present tense narrative is the perfect format for a story where time is relative. In Elsewhere, there is no future or past—only now. A reader might expect such serious subject matter to be approached with solemnity and melancholy, but this is no *Lovely Bones*-type novella. Zevin packs her novella with humor, wit, and teenage angst. The author creates a clever hereafter, where talking dogs impart philosophical wisdom from a canine point of view, and even roadside Burma Shave signs poke fun at the dearly departed.

*YOU MAY BE DEAD,
BUT YOUR BEARD GROWS ON.
LADIES HATE STUBBLE,
EVEN IN THE BEYOND.
BURMA SHAVE*

When Liz falls in love with Owen, another resident of the hereafter, death begins to look up for her. That is until Liz learns of the latest arrival to Elsewhere, Owen's newly deceased wife from his life on earth. Liz must decide. Should she stay in Elsewhere or utilize the "Sneaker Clause," an option that would send her back to earth and a new life?

If you're reading this novel expecting a good, ghoulish Halloween read as I did, you'll be surprised. *Elsewhere* has no macabre elements. Likewise, if you're expecting some great theological enlightenment, you'll be disappointed. Liz has no audience with her Creator in *Elsewhere*. Gabrielle Zevin's story is just fun, light-hearted fare. *Elsewhere* is a rollicking voyage to the far side, grounded in believable and endearing characters.

Writing Nonfiction

by Maurene Hinds

Stop Researching and Start Writing

One of the joys of writing nonfiction is learning about and exploring a topic in detail. This is also one of the drawbacks. For people who enjoy delving into a topic, it is easy to become so engrossed in their research that they delay writing. Another issue that arises is feeling overwhelmed by the amount of information available, and then determining how to put it all together. These scenarios often go hand-in-hand. As a writer falls deeper and deeper into the investigative process, becoming sidetracked is more likely simply because the topic is interesting. Over time, the research process can become overwhelming. Remaining focused and organized helps overcome these obstacles.

While not all writers like to work from an outline, for nonfiction, an outline can be a useful tool. If you are in a position to do so, allow yourself the freedom to alter your outline as needed, but use it as a guide when conducting research. An outline can help keep you on task. When developing the outline, you need to know a certain amount about the topic. Here again, focus on the primary issues to keep from becoming bogged down by research before you even begin. As you gain a feel for the topic, you'll quickly see which are the main points. Your audience and situation will also help determine which areas to focus on. If you're writing for a younger reader, narrow the focus as much as possible. Trying to introduce all sides of a subject can be too confusing for the young reader, and many editors prefer a tight, focused nonfiction piece.

As you research, you'll find that many sources provide the same information. The "rule of three" is a useful tool. For every fact you state, have at least three credible sources. This helps ensure accuracy. New research will sometimes discredit earlier sources, but this rule can help you establish a baseline. It will also show the reader more than one side of the issue (when appropriate) or show how breaking research adds depth to the topic.

Are you still researching and not writing weeks or months after you began? There comes a time when it's necessary to stop the investigative process and begin to write. When you reach the point where your research covers subjects you've already studied and you have three reliable sources for your primary facts, it's time to start writing. Your outline can be useful for this, as it gives you a starting point.

Some writers prefer to write as they research, while others prefer to research and then write. No matter which method you choose, there comes a time when you need to move on to the next section of the process. With experimentation, focus, and organization, you can make a smooth transition from researching to writing—and enjoy the whole process.

The following tips will help keep you focused and on track:

- Narrow your topic.
- Write to your target audience.
- Use the "rule of three."
- Start writing when your research starts to present repetitive information.

The Write Way

by Kathy Greer

This month we continue in the series of how to use the comma correctly. When and how to use that pesky comma can be confusing, and we often find ourselves leaving it out rather than putting it in, perhaps incorrectly. There are so many ways to use—and misuse—the comma, and so many rules to observe, it's wise to have a book on punctuation handy when you write.

Here are a few more comma rules to help us along the way to proper grammar.

1. When using groups of words that convey the intended meaning of the sentence (rather than adding extra information), do not set them off with commas. These are called restrictive clauses.

The big St. Bernard that Dora walked every day wasn't hers.

2. When a clause adds meaning to the sentence, but isn't crucial to the meaning, add commas.

Frankie, my friend, is a redhead.

When the words are needed to convey the meaning don't use commas to set them off.

My friend Frankie is a redhead.

One general rule of thumb is:

CAPITALIZED NOUN + common noun = commas.

common noun + CAPITALIZED NOUN = no commas.

3. The pronoun WHICH introduces a nonrestrictive clause. The word THAT does not.

Sometimes it depends on the meaning of the sentence whether or not commas are used. For example:

The dog that was judged best of show was a bull terrier.

The dog, which was judged best of show, was a bull terrier.

In the first sentence, the main thought conveyed is that a bull terrier was chosen as best of show.

In the second, the main thought is that the dog was a bull terrier and happened to be judged best of show.

- 4.** An expression added into a sentence is set off with commas.

Your opinion, by the way, is not important to that arrogant preacher.
Susie will, in any event, be late getting to church.

- 5.** A conjunctive adverb of more than one syllable inserted into the sentence is set off with commas.

Kayla's speech, however, didn't go over well with her classmates.
Kayla, nevertheless, forged ahead to win the election.

- 6.** When a person is being addressed directly in a sentence use a comma to set that one apart.

Tyler, when are you coming home?
To tell you the truth, Mom, I'm not sure.

- 7.** Yes, no, or exclamations coming at the beginning of a sentence are followed by commas.

No, you cannot go to the game!
Oh, and why is that?

- 8.** Use a comma between the parts of an address or date.

I moved to Salem, Ohio on June 10, 1980 and stayed until June 1,
2002.

When the items are joined by prepositions, do not use a comma.

I relocated to 29 Willow Road in Salem, Ohio. That was on a rainy
Wednesday in June of 1980.

- 9.** When introducing examples with **ESPECIALLY** or **SUCH AS**, precede them with a comma.

Composing is quicker today with modern conveniences, such as
computers and printers.
I'm grateful for the features that make it easy to correct mistakes,
especially the delete key.

- 10.** When choosing to omit a word or words, substitute the word(s) with a comma.

I selected two deserts from the tray; Brody, three.
(The second half of the sentence is an ellipsis for "Brody selected
three deserts.")

I hope this clarifies some of the questions and quandaries you may have had about using the comma.

If you enjoy **The Write Way**, please write me at eringobraugh5@juno.com with suggestions and questions about writing the right way. I'd love to hear from you.