



February 2019

Issue 2

## Welcome to Central Ohio Fiction Writers Newsletter

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Newsletter Editor: Rachel Dye

Central Ohio Fiction Writers (COFW) <http://cofwevents.org> is a non-profit professional association for romance writers and a local chapter of the Romance Writers of America® (RWA) organization that offers monthly meetings. Since 1987, COFW has promoted excellence in fiction writing, encouraging writers to grow and gain knowledge in their craft. Members provide a networking system to share knowledge and support the goal of becoming published.

## **2019 Leadership**

President, Jeanne Estridge

Secretary, Sandra J. Kachurek

Treasurer, Stacy McKitrick

Program Chair, Aleta Dodson

Newsletter Editor, Rachel Dye

Membership Chair, Linda Rice

Social Media Chair, Andrea McConnell

Incentives, Julia Blaine

## **Meetings**

First "Teen" Saturday of the Month. Social: Noon to 12:30. Business: 12:30. Guest Presentation: 1:30. Location Norwich Township Building 5181 Northwest Parkway. Hilliard, OH 43026

## **Dues**

Renewal before January 31: \$25. After January 31: \$30.

- Membership with Romance Writers of America required.

## **Follow COFW**

Twitter <https://twitter.com/COFWriters>

Facebook: <https://facebook.com/COFWriters>

Closed Facebook Group <https://www.facebook.com/groups/177462723049177/>

## **Central Ohio Fiction Writers**

P.O. Box 24254 Dayton, OH 45424

## **Next Meeting: March 16<sup>th</sup>, Come Plot and Brainstorm with COFW**

We will be brainstorming, plotting, and generally getting those writing juices flowing! We will have 5 plot boards available for plotting based on 3 act (short) and 4 acts and post it notes to use. If you bring a short scene we will have opportunities for critiquing and discussions on maintaining websites, newsletters & self-publishing.

## **COFW Fiction Plotters Meet Monthly - East**

Need a boost with a story idea that has yet to see words on a page? Can't get your protagonist out of a hole you've written her into? Not sure whether the antagonist is antag-ging enough? Consider stopping by the COFW Fiction Plotters group. We meet the first Wednesday of the month at 10 a.m. at the Panera Bread in Taylor Square in Reynoldsburg, Ohio, 43068.

To verify members are meeting and to stay in touch in between, we use this email:

[cofwplot@yahoogroups.com](mailto:cofwplot@yahoogroups.com)

If you have questions, contact:

Andrea McConnell: [fyrefly93@gmail.com](mailto:fyrefly93@gmail.com)

Saralee Etter: [saralee\\_etter@yahoo.com](mailto:saralee_etter@yahoo.com)

## **COFW Fiction Plotters Meet Monthly - West**

All the same fun as above but located in Huber Heights. We meet the second Monday of the month at 6:30 pm at the Panera Bread off I-70 exit 36.

If you have questions contact:

Jeanne Estridge: [jeanneestridge@gmail.com](mailto:jeanneestridge@gmail.com)

Rachel Dye: [juliette.r.hyland@gmail.com](mailto:juliette.r.hyland@gmail.com)

# Minutes, February 16th

## Minutes of the Central Ohio Fiction Writers Norwich Township Fire Station, Hilliard February 16, 2019

### I. Welcome.

A. At 12:30 pm, President Jeanne Estridge called the meeting to order.

B. Jeanne recommended that members **update their profiles on the new RWA.org and our portal, Cofw.rwa.org**. She explained that the new RWA website is actually two different pieces of software, which means you need to set up your profile in both different places. Be sure to load a picture and bio to both sites.

[Jeanne provided the following information after the meeting.] In addition, please go to *Notification Preferences* on *RWA Forums* where you will update your email preferences for the new COFW loop. To do this, go to *RWA.org* and click on *Forums*. Once you're in the Forums tab, click on *Communities*, then *My Communities*. Select *Central Ohio Fiction Writers*. Once you're there, click on the *Settings* button to change your email notifications preferences from "No Mail," which is the default, to either "Real Time" or "Daily Digest."

On June 1, COFW will retire the Yahoo groups loop and begin using the RWA Forum loop exclusively. Until then, announcements will be posted in both places.

In May, Jeanne will spend a half hour demonstrating how to navigate the new RWA website as well as our portal, [cofw.rwa.org](http://cofw.rwa.org).

C. Secretary Sandy Kachurek requested members and guests sign the WIP/Attendance record being passed around the room.

### II. Meeting Business.

A. Rachel Dye made a motion to accept the minutes of January 26, 2019, seconded by Janice Beckett. Motion passed.

B. Treasurer Stacy McKitrick reported that COFW currently has 46 members and in available money, \$5460.41 in cash and \$2245.83 in PayPal for a total of \$7706.24. The Financial Assistance Fund has \$1519.64.

C. Donna MacMeans, CPA and COFW member, having met with Jeanne, Stacy and Sandy, announced that COFW passed its annual audit of COFW financial accounts.

D. As chair of the Branding/Marketing Committee, Donna presented the preferences of three choices for a new logo design for COFW. Jeanne shared the design options. Donna moved to accept the branding committee's recommendation for the quill design as COFW's new logo. Aleta Dodson seconded. Motion passed.

E. Linda Rice and Shari Heinrich, co-chairs of Ignite the Flame Contest, were establishing rules for the contest and acquiring judges. Jeanne added that the COFW meeting in May will focus on how to judge entries, particularly how to comment on poor writing without destroying a writer's confidence. Several

members have volunteered passages from their own early works to use as examples. Jeanne asked if members would like to provide an example for practice judging, please send it to her at [cofwpresident@gmail.com](mailto:cofwpresident@gmail.com).

F. Incentives chair Julia Blaine offered sweets to all members who made progress in their writing process, whether the results received rejections or acceptances.

G. Jeanne presented Aleta Dodson an award for 2018 Member of the Year based, in large part, for the stellar job she did on programs last year. She was unavailable at the Holiday Party in December to accept it.

I. Social Media chair Andrea McConnell was absent.

J. Erin Novotny volunteered to write today's recap of RWA's Workshop in a Box by Damon Suede for newsletter editor Rachel Dye.

K. Programs chair Aleta Dodson announced the following presentations for the year and current details on each:

March 16: TBA.

April 13: Julie Kemerer, "Exquisite Planning: Ditch the Guilt and Get More Done."

May 18: "How to be a Positive and Affirming Contest Judge" and "Portal? What's a Portal?: Navigating the New RWA Website."

June 15: Julie Sturgeon, "Pitch to Tule Publishing and Four Career Sabotages Sneaking Up on You."

July 13: Laura Schnebly, Topic to be Announced.

August 17: "2019 RWA National Conference Recap."

September 14: Eliot Parker, Topic to be Announced.

October 19: TBA.

November 2: Damon Suede, all-day workshop. Fee. Location TBA.

Donna MacMeans suggested we ask whether COFW can receive a percentage of the sales of Damon's books on the day of the workshop. A short discussion was held regarding where and how to handle sales.

L. The first of two online classes with Linnea Sinclair, "Inside Out: Crafting Your Characters' Internal Conflict," runs April 1-30 and currently has seven students. Maximum enrollee number is 20 to ensure that Linnea can provide the best individual interactions. Cost to COFW/RWA members is \$25; for RWA members only is \$30; and nonmembers is \$35.

The second online class, "Pitches and Blurbs and Taglines, Oh, My," runs from June 1-30 for the same prices.

Go to the [COFWEvents.org](http://COFWEvents.org) website to enroll.

### III. Introductions.

Jeanne ended the meeting with members and guests introducing themselves.

Meeting concluded at 1:10 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Sandy

Sandy Kachurek

COFW Secretary

## *Works in Progress/Attendance for February 16<sup>th</sup>*

1. Stacy McKittrick: revising *Biting the Curse*.
2. Linda Rice: working on memoirs for writing material.
3. Julia Blaine: rejected by Hallmark and a couple of agents.
4. Shari Heinrich: fifth draft of YA, *Queen of Wands*.
5. Donna MacMeans: trying to finish *How to Bait a Dangerous Rake* and also thinking about *Christmas at the Castle*.
6. Rochelle Bradley: editing the third in a series.
7. Rachel Dye w/a Juliette Hyland: *The Spy's Unlikely Bride*.
8. Aleta Dodson: working on scheduling yearly slate of speakers and securing a venue for Damon Suede for our November 2 workshop.
9. Janice Beckett: working on book 3, *Horses Heal Hearts* series.
10. Charles Coffin, guest: working on expanding base knowledge.
11. Kris Branch, guest: writing book 4 and doing weekly Instagram stories at kris.branch.
12. Erin Novotny: final revision of *Vicious Justice* and second draft of *Garza Security*.
13. Barb Riley w/a Riley Darkes: editing *Pink Ribbons*.
14. Sandy Kachurek: revising fantasy novel.

## Meeting Recap for February 16<sup>th</sup>

### Workshop-In-A-Box: Dark Heart : The Root of Character with Damon Suede

By Erin Novotny

The majority of the following information is accredited to Suede, Damon. *Live Wire Writer Guides*. "Dark Heart: The Root of Character." 2012-2018.



#### ***“Pain anchors a character,” Damon Suede***

Darkness” is about where to start your story and the character’s flaw (aka scar, trauma, wound) and how to weave that into the story.

**Keep in mind that your characters story starts before you book and continues after the happily ever after.**

- *Ab initio* (From the beginning) – Damon says there is no single beginning (and you shouldn’t start your story from the character’s birth)
- *Ab ovo* (from the egg) stories shouldn’t start from scratch.
  - Horace *Ars Poetica* does not begin the Trojan war from the “double egg” (meaning Helen and Clytemnestra being the start/reason for the Trojan war).
  - The crack in the egg allows us inside... offers access to the character’s essential course.
- *In media res* (into the middle of things). All stories begin in the midst of action.
- Exposition of the character and context around the character gradually revealed via dialogue, flashbacks, description, history. We LOOK for cracks. We like complex characters.

**NOTE FROM ERIN:** *If you haven’t listened to the 2018 RWA workshop mp3 from Dr. Lynn Barnes the Romance Writers Guide to Psychology of Fiction try it. Much of what Damon’s talk assumes we understand about human psychology and how we perceive and why we enjoy fiction. Dr. Barnes talks about how readers like to uncover puzzles, how they like to predict behaviors in characters, and much more. For me, this was not something I’d considered before and it definitely made it easier to understand Damon’s talk.*

- Every character is a stick to crack the emotional piñata of the READER. The flaws in our characters allow the reader to “escape” through the flaw.
- The ACTION is how readers determine what came before. (Not Info Dumps)
  - Unpack the present, elicit emotion by telling/showing why events happen, and the reader weaves themselves into the story
  - Fiction extracts emotion
    - SHOWING AND TELLING show the CAUSE so they can feel the effect – this entangles the reader
  - You much crack your characters open to release the energy trapped inside them.

- Your writing should be like a jungle gym – so that readers can use their imaginations properly.
  - They need to extrapolate (the backstory). Offer significant details (but only just what they NEED to know)
- Readers crave meaningful patterns (of behavior) and satisfying emotion. To FEEL the story, they need to know WHY something happens, WHY it matters, WHY they should give a damn.
  - This refers to the backstory, but as it's revealed through the action of the character, not just an info dump of their scar/wound/trauma
- Empathy: key is not likability but ACCESSIBILITY. Perfection paralyzes and prevents access to the character and the emotions.
  - Empathy is easiest with pathos, but that makes pathos a cliché.
    - Tyrian Lannister is accessible but not likable. He's not perfect, he's complex.
    - Readers emotions become entangled with the character's emotions
  - Backstory shouldn't stop the story to drag readers into the *past*.
    - Think triggers – the way the character acts in a situation which make them uncomfortable and how they react – it is telling about the past without explaining the actual incident
- AIM: Damon uses the Greek word *TELOS* (think goal) the ultimate end or purpose of a character, barring mistakes. Think active destiny. What the character wants to be or would be, assuming there are no conflicts/road blocks in the way.
  - The telos of an acorn is an oak

#### **SCARS – Depth should be written in invisible ink. This section deals with revealing backstory**

- Backstory is the SUBJECTIVE past to the character – how they perceive their past. Without backstory every character is generic, which means they can only fear or desire abstraction generally, and pursue or avoid generalities. This leads to 2-dimensional characters
  - Backstory without purpose is description of context and history DEVOID OF EMOTIONAL LEGIBILITY/understanding – use it to reveal character
    - Don't USE backstory... HOARD backstory. Guard it jealously and deploy for maximum impact.
  - Every time backstory appears it should be to accomplish something, and it costs the character.
  - Exposition stops the narrative dead to fill in informational gaps and offer details the writer wants the audience to know.
- **Backstory is the character's past serving the story's present.**
  - It involves the reader.
  - The writer needs to know the backstory, the reader needs to EXPERIENCE the story
  - Details – not insertion of info but extraction (hoarding of backstory) takes us into the character's subjective experience.
    - Use of NEED to justify backstory via interviews, interlopers, internal struggle.
    - Only share when and what characters NEED TO KNOW: determines how much backstory applies
- Invisibility – Backstory appears on and informs every page without intruding, like punctuation.
  - You do not “weave/sprinkle/pepper” in backstory as the story requires, you *wring* resonant details loose to *cause* reactions and build context in the present predicament.
- When does backstory appear? ALWAYS, but invisibly. Great stories reveal backstory in every moment.
  - It's present on every page, detectable but omnipresent: look at the space between words.



- Used effectively, readers don't even notice it because BACKSTORY IS STORY
  - Backstory flows under the action of the book, fills its spaces, anchors its world
  - Backstory is story oxygen: omnipresent and invisible, vital and explosive under pressure
- Damon's Scars exercise: Secret Garden
  - What critical, hidden elements must readers discover for themselves about your main character? Plant resonant clues to unfold. Think of them as seeds that bear potent fruit by story's end.
  - Examples:
 

Long skirts	later revealed	prosthetic leg
• Polite glance	later reveals	erotic obsession
• Empty crib	later reveals	imaginary baby

## **ENTROPY – voids always suck. This section deals with the goals and motivations of the character**

- The void is the fatal flaw, wound, shadow, scar, mistake, skeleton in the closet
- Characters motivated by error/need/lack/injury/absence which paralyzes and imprisons energy.
  - Sucks characters toward sameness, blankness, vagueness, annihilation and failure so the character pushes against it.
- The void = backstory (flaw, ghost, scar etc. aka motivation in GMC)
- What sucks for this character? What inner error, absence, loss, issue do they have that creates a desire and DRIVES this character (motivation)
  - Once you've identified the right void for a character you will show even WHEN you tell.
  - Voice crates chemistry, comedy pathos, eroticism, irony, suspense, empathy, transcendence, etc.
- *Chambers Dictionary* defines entropy: the measure of unavailable energy, energy still existing but lost for the purpose of doing work because it exists as the internal motion of molecules."
  - Voids create inertia in characters, what scare them, what they fight against
  - Example of void – parents cut off child's arm so they could work as a slave in a mine.
    - The further in the past the void – the darker it is
    - Void IS the backstory, their actions reveal their pasts
- Just as entropy traps energy, voids paralyze characters and actions
- VOID = problematic emptiness that sucks + past origin + deep resonance/personal significance + persistent influence on character and emotions
  - Show cause, not effect. The most powerful void is something audience doesn't need to be told. Voids that affect the character in every scene doesn't need to be told to the reader. The backstory unpacks for the reader
    - Lubitsch: Let the audience add up two plus two. They'll love you forever.
    - **If you have to explain something, you don't understand it well enough to use it.**
  - Strong characters avoid their void, which anchors their action. THEIR VOID CREATES THEIR VOICE.
- Entropy exercise – poisonous root: what does your character's void reveal about their nature, their strength, their weakness? What makes this character care and what do they care most about? What never stops sucking? Pick your character's poison. Situate your character's failing within their
 

BODY (Desire/Appetite)	MIND (Ignorance/Delusion)	SPIRIT (Hate/Wrath)
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Now get specific by digging for the underlying root. What constant negative UNDERMINES their best efforts and ISOLATES them from the community Articulate the void via a "bad" lib:

Because I constantly struggle with (VOID), I'm always trying to (ACTION), people, places, things, and ideas in every situation I face.

**Damon's example from *Rebecca* by Daphne du Maurier**

BODY:

Because Max constantly struggles with (his first tragic marriage), he's always trying to (bury), people, places, things, and ideas in every situation I face.

MIND:

Because the 2<sup>nd</sup> Mrs. DeWinters constantly struggles with (bullying from others), she's always trying to (expose), people, places, things, and ideas in every situation.

SPIRIT

Because Mrs. Danvers constantly struggles with (the loss of Rebecca), she's always trying to (enshrine), people, places, things, and ideas in every situation.

**TRAUMA: pain has a cost – This section deals with creating three dimensional characters, including the villain and secondary characters.**

Trauma destabilizes identities and communities. Reverberations can be lifelong.

- Handle with grace, tact, serious or you will write SHAM PAIN
- SHAM PAIN – never exploit suffering as a cool plot device or insta-depth. Don't minimize or trivialize significant experiences, even your own. Even when you have a direct experience it doesn't mean you completely understand the potential impact for *ALL PEOPLE. OWN IT.*
  - Assault, abuse, addiction are complex and polyvalent. There is no one truth. ***Know what you write.***
  - Never include trauma in a story unless you will take time to unpack its significance with care.
- Sentimentality – the attempt to reduce complexity to one interpretation.
  - Don't tell people what to feel, make them feel it.
  - In stories, *EVERYONE IS RIGHT*, give every character a conscience. Reducing any character to a paragon or villain removes their agency and authenticity. Stick figures make no choices and take no action (hollow and dull).
  - Be wary of the seductive dangers of the WHINE BAR, esp. in emotional storytelling – This is when everything goes wrong, lost job, love, home, etc.
  - Mary Sues and Sad Sacks suck the life and feeling out of every story. They are flat, no character arc, can't change.
- DON'T WRITE WHAT YOU KNOW... WRITE WHAT MAKES YOU FEEL, WRITE WHAT MATTERS TO YOU
- Obstacles and opponents: How do other characters exacerbate and alleviate that void? How do other characters embody conflicts with that core belief? PAIR VOIDS FOR MAXIMUM CHEMISTRY
- Example: Darcy's void – LOSS of his parents –  
Lizzie's void – her parents' horrible marriage and their constant PRESENCE
- Void illuminates past and futures.
- Isolation (internal/external) of protagonist highlights the EMOTIONAL TRUTH and PERSONAL STRUGGLE.

- Every credible character reflects or rejects protagonist's action with their own actions/reactions.
  - All heroes fight the void. All villains are voids made visible.
  - Antagonist must always be STRONGER than protagonist – or there is no conflict or power struggle
- If void is the error that always screws up actions, what is the actual AIM (telos) of each character?
  - Where is your character headed and where might they end up by mistake?

## TRAUMA EXERCISE: Tangled Branches

How does each character in your story relate to the protagonist's central void? How does each member of the cast exacerbate/ameliorate, address/avoid, spur/soothe that character's high-stakes choices? Think of those reflections/rejections like branches and roots from a dark tree.

### *Harry Potter's (HP) Void is the Murder of Harry's Parents*

#### **Character/connection VS character/connection**

Dumbledore rescued and hid HP after to keep him safe, VS Voldemort murdered them and scattered his power

Hermione protects and adores muggle parents, VS Ron overwhelmed by loving pureblood family

Hagrid lost his parents but nurtures wild, unloved beasts VS Snape escaped horrible family – loathed James/Loved Lily

#### **Effort – Earn every ending. This section deals with aligning your story/character arc/GMC.**

Alignment: Keeps effort efficient and effective. A stack conserves energy and concentrates attention. Most writing advice relies on extrapolation, but alignment is easier.

- All character details spring from coherent core of energy... not sham pain but real VOID
- Character coherence allows every detail to multitask *holographically* (each piece/scene has the whole image) (EG mindful complexity) – it creates impact
- You can trace character in any direction. When plotting/planning/revising think about the alignment of goals, voids, actions.
  - If goals come easy, work backwards to voids, if you prefer thinking about voids, work forward to goals. Everything aligns, so everything connects.

Pursuit of happiness: NEED is the root of every character decision. (Void provides power source.) What do they A-Void? Action is how they avoid it. Even in the fluffiest romcom, the sweetest middle grade, the dark heart beating inside the characters is what makes everyone's blood flow.

- Need for reversal and scope/range (low to high) in different genres. Known to Unknown
- Emotional landscape/emotional legibility
  - (ex: wealth as burden, mating as crisis) If money solves everything, then story ends on page one. Likewise, if mating makes HEA immediate, there's no story.
- The void is the anchor of each scene. Void needs to create conflict.
- Cast characters with a transitive verb that springs from their void. Individual tactics are synonyms. *For more information see Damon Suede's book, Verbalize.*

- Damon's example....

Snape in Harry Potter – the transitive verb to describe him would be VEX,

- Synonyms: vexes, victimizes, misleads, snub, snipe, snape!
  - Fun fact: Snape is a synonym to vex!
- Verbs allow the reader to know the character.
  - Use words to build outward.
  - ACTIONS SPEAK LOUDER THAN WORDS
- Characters aren't people BUT devices to extract audience emotion.
  - Play with them and make them FUN for your readers to play with!
  - Stores aren't ABOUT action... They don't TELL action or SHOW action...
- BE A SADIST! Make the shadow dark, push the problem, amp the agony
  - To torture people USE pain AND imagination. What people do in imagination is WORSE than what you could actually do.
- The void is consonant resonance (imagine the hum of strings) – it evokes context around the character.
- People start from the uncomfortable and want to fill the void to be happy.
- Your void is the source of your voice. What is your shadow and how can you bring it to light?

Heroes need flaws and villains need virtues. No strength comes at no cost. Look for the flipside of every coin in your story and spend them wisely. Find the salt in the sugar and explain how the NEGATIVES of the Void could *possible* provide a net positive.

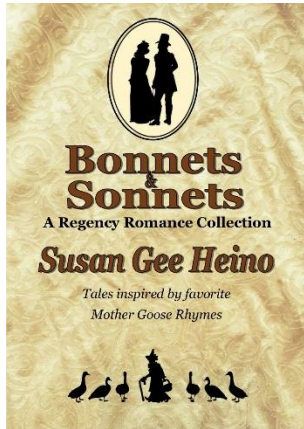
- How might the Void's attraction STRENGTHEN your character physically?
- How might the Void's oblivion EDUCATE your character mentally?
- What KEY does your character believe would unlock their Void's cage to permit an HEA?

Damon's example (*Pride and Prejudice*)

Think of the RIDICULOUS BENNET MARRIAGE.

- How might the Void's attraction STRENGTHEN your character physically?
  - Lizzie gains the brash confidence necessary to bewitch Darcy, reject Collins, and withstand Lady Catherine.
- How might the Void's oblivion EDUCATE your character mentally?
  - She can detect subtle flaw and foibles in fools with protects her from Caroline, Wickham, her mother and more.
- How might the Void's corruption ELEVATE your character spiritually?
  - She believes poverty and spinsterhood are preferable to a disastrous marriage, which helps her avoid Charlotte's drudgery and Lydia's folly.
- What KEY does your character believe would unlock their Void's cage to permit an HEA?
  - A true marriage of equals, rich in sense passion, humor, and resources.

## ☆☆☆ New Releases ☆☆☆



### **Bonnets & Sonnets: A Regency Romance collection By Susan Gee Heino**

*Tender tales inspired by favorite Mother Goose rhymes*

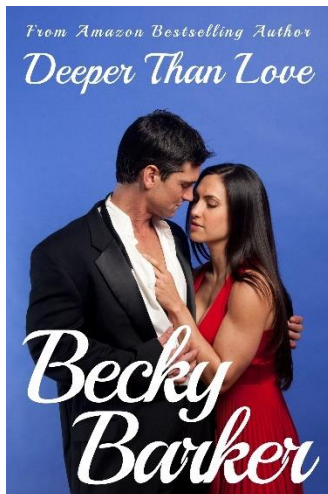
Seven well-loved rhymes from Mother Goose have been cleverly adapted into seven surprising and sweet Regency Romance Stories.

Mother Goose nursery rhymes have been with us for hundreds of years. Those dashing heroes and spunky heroines from our favorite Regency Romance novels probably grew up reciting *Little Miss Muffet* or *Jack and Jill*.

Now some of these well-known rhymes have been given full Regency Romance treatment. These Mother Goose characters are all done up in muslin and breeches, cavorting at balls, navigating the *ton*, and ready to meet their own happy endings.

Available on Amazon!

### **Coming soon: DEEPER THAN LOVE by Becky Barker**



Billionaire in Pursuit...

After being framed for embezzlement, Ciara Jayne Moore fled her executive position as well as her lover, Wyatt Marcum, to start a new life in southern California. There, she manages an elegant but aging seaside resort. The only thing she wants now is to put the past and the man out of her mind. He'd let her down when she'd badly needed his support, and she vowed to never trust him again.

Ciara's disappearance from Marcum International's Manhattan office had CEO Wyatt Marcum and his security staff scrambling. Despite their considerable resources, it took five months to track her down. It only took Wyatt a few hours to have his private jet in the air. He planned to get to the truth and set a trap for the people who'd stolen

from him. But first, he had to break through the professionally detached attitude his recalcitrant lover wore like armor.

Checkout Becky's [Bookbub Profile](#) for release dates!

## ☆☆☆ Stellar News ☆☆☆



Photo Credit: Shari Heinrich

**At the February meeting, Aleta Dodson received her award for 2018 Member of the year!**

## **COFW now has goal sheets!!!**

**Thanks to Erin Novotny & Arianna James for setting this up.**

Want to track a daily word count and compete with your fellow COFW members for the highest point total? Add your name and goals our Magic Spreadsheet here: <https://bit.ly/2Wprwt0>

Looking for a way to hit those goals: Did you know that studies have shown you're up to 66% more likely to achieve a goal if you write it down and up to 95%(!!) more likely to achieve a goal if you tell someone else what it is and have a deadline by which you need to meet it. List your goals here and

Arianna will check in to see if you've hit it: <http://bit.ly/2HJoDNq>

## Updating Your RWA Profile Information:

The new RWA website (rwa.org) is actually two different software packages. One is for communicating information about what's going on at RWA. (aka the RWA website). The other is used for chapter portals (We have one of these: [cofw.rwa.org](http://cofw.rwa.org)) and microsites (We don't yet have one of these). Each of these sites has a spot for profile information for members.

You can update your profile at: [www.rwa.org](http://www.rwa.org) and the forum profiles at: <https://community.rwa.org/update-profile>.

*You can also access the profile update page by logging in to rwa.org and selecting "Update Profile" at the top of the page.*

1. First update your RWA membership profile.
  - a. Click on the pencil beside the little silhouette.
  - b. In the "change picture" dialogue box, click Select.
    - i. From your computer, choose a picture with a file extension of one of the following:
      - .GIF
      - .JPG
      - .PNG
      - .BMP
    - ii. Click Open
    - iii. Click Save & Close
2. Click on the "About Me" tab and then click on the little pencils to update each section. Save each section after completing.
3. Click on the Preferences tab to update your communication preferences. Be sure to save your changes.
4. Review the other tabs to ensure the information is correct. If it's something you don't have access to change, click on Contact RWA at the bottom of the page to send Donna Mathoslah an email.
5. Update your RWA Community Profile (You should still have the original tab with the links to both profiles open)
  - a. Click on the little silhouette and upload your picture.
    - i. On this page, you have the option of pulling in a picture from your computer or Facebook or Instagram or Dropbox or a host of other places. Load your picture and save it.
6. Update your My Profile information:
  - a. Click on the little pencil next to Bio and share a little about yourself.
  - b. If you've been a finalist or winner in any contests, enter that under Honors and Awards.
  - c. If you belong to other professional organizations, enter the information under Professional Associations.

- d. Add or update your social media links.
- 7. Some information was loaded from the old website. Verify everything is correct and up-to-date.
- 8. click on Communities and then choose My Communities. You should see an entry for Chapter: Central Ohio Fiction Writers (along with any other communities you belong to, such as PAN).
  - a. Click on Central Ohio Fiction Writers.
  - b. Click on Settings and set up your preferences for the discussion forum.

**As of January 1, 2019, Treasurer's Reports, Meeting Minutes and presentation documentation will be posted in our COFW community on the RWA site.**

**Reminder: On June 1, the Board will stop posting to the Yahoo loop and we will stop monitoring the Yahoo loop. Please have yourself set up on RWA COFW discussion loop prior to that date.**



# An Elephant in Pajamas

by Suzanne McKenna Link

The following article first appeared in the February 2019 issue of *ShoreLines*, the monthly newsletter of Chapter 160- Long Island Romance Writers. Permission granted to reprint or forward to sister RWA chapters with proper credit to author and chapter.

Most of us have read books on the craft of writing and have our favorites. But what about books on the craft of sentence structure? As a student of English and journalism, I thought my grammar was on the mark, but a woman who proclaimed herself exceptionally educated in grammar left a review on my debut novel that humbled me. Though it might sound boring, reading a book or two on sentence structure, punctuation and grammar is time well invested.

When it comes to writing, there are rules. A sentence contains, at base level, a subject, verb and object. "She threw the ball." Rigid rules of punctuation and grammar are a must for formal writing, such as in textbooks and newspapers. In places like these, we want and expect clean writing in a neutral voice. In writing fiction, readers expect a lot more. Words should show and reflect character personalities and emotions. To do this, sometimes you have to bend the rules. Fiction writing is about expressing personal style, but it's the writer's responsibility to provide readers with clear sentences that mean something.

I am no guru of grammar, but over the last several years, I've applied, and continue to apply, myself to learning all I can about this wonderful, crazy, maddening craft I love. Below is a mash-up of a few simple writing tips that I've learned.

**The Comma:** Punctuation exists for common understanding. In the proofreading office where I work, there's a sign on the wall that says:

Punctuation saves lives: *Let's eat grandma.* Vs. *Let's eat, grandma.*

Silly, but you get the picture. One comma can change the meaning of a whole sentence. Powerful! (Thank goodness for grandma!) Here's another example of how commas can affect our understanding of a sentence:

*I'd like to dedicate this book to my parents, God and Shakespeare.* The comma after "parents" absurdly implies the writer's parents are God and Shakespeare. Instead, use a comma to indicate a separation of the three items in a list: *I'd like to dedicate this book to my parents, God, and Shakespeare.*

**Short Sentence Structure:** Current reading trends say readers like shorter sentences. They read quickly and with clarity. Shorter sentences make writing feel overall more frenetic, but don't forget to consider the rhythm of your writing. Too many short sentences strung together can make your writing tedious. It'll give your reader the effect of running without a chance to rest.

**Long Sentence Structure:** Are long sentences a no-no? Never say never. Longer sentences tend to slow a scene and sometimes dilute the effect of a sentence, but when crafted with intent, can be quite effective. Consider times you want to set a particular mood, perhaps to show a character's confusion or languidness. Here, a long sentence will set the tone and pull its weight. When it comes to writing, vary the lengths of your sentences. Variety is the spice of life. Long or short, whatever your preference, a manuscript should never be edited so sterile that it loses the author's voice and style.

**Emdash and Ellipsis:** An article written by an editor cited the tendency of new writers to use an emdash (-) to signify interrupted dialogue, or an ellipsis (...) to signify speech or thoughts that drop away. He strongly advised writers to let characters finish their sentences. Why? After all, people do actually behave this way. But, he's right, and here's why: First off, the constant use of this technique is annoying to read. And worse, many times, what you as the writer believes to be understood is simply missing for the reader. Never use this technique to hold back on a juicy secret.

You will leave readers in the dark, irritated. Yes, hesitation is a part of natural speech, but for the most part, let your characters finish their thoughts and sentences.

**Active and passive voice:** While writing my first book, my editor red-flagged me on this, and I have to admit, I didn't have a clue what she was talking about. An example of passive voice:

"A gift was given by Joey."

Joey is performing the action, and therefore, the subject. "Joey gave a gift," is the active version. The subject should always perform the action. When in doubt, if the subject falls to the end of the sentence instead of the beginning, as is shown in my example, it's a good chance the sentence is passive.

**Adverbs:** Many writers belabor the ungodliness of adverbs. They say it weakens writing. There is truth to this, especially when redundant, such as: "He shouted loudly." Shouting, by definition, is speaking loudly. Don't be lazy. Adverbs shouldn't be *telling* things that nouns and verbs should be *showing*. Adverbs are part of grammar. Used infrequently, with consideration and purpose, adverbs serve as a means to an end, such as: *She knocked softly*. This is an efficient way of giving relevant, but inconsequential information.

**Non-defining Relative Clauses:** What are those you ask? It's that little bit of extra information tagged onto a sentence. The sentence doesn't need it. The telltale sign of relative clauses is that they are often set off by commas. An example: *The heavy rain, which was unusual for the time of year, destroyed most of the plants in my garden*. When used wisely as such, this clause offers a good place to pop in a bit of extra detail. Inarticulate use makes a sentence clunky and the information feels squeezed in, an afterthought. An example of weak relative clauses: *My eyes moved to Dad's stare, who was shocked*. Besides being a passive sentence, it's unclear who is shocked. Altogether an unappealing sentence.

**Modifiers and Order:** Modifiers are words and prepositional phrases that provide descriptions that connect a noun or pronoun to a verb or adjective in a sentence. When misplaced in a sentence, you can have this: *I photographed an elephant in my pajamas*, leaving readers wondering how the heck that elephant got into those pajamas! In this sentence, 'in my pajamas' is a prepositional phrase, and in this order, it's modifying the elephant instead of the photographer. Here's another example using a single word: *He stacked the extra white wooden pieces in a pile*. Here 'extra' is modifying white, as in 'extra white.' In both cases, the prepositional phrase needs to be moved closer to the noun and/or pronoun it modifies. A little shift and you get clarity: *In my pajamas, I photographed an elephant. He stacked the extra pieces of white wood in a pile*.

**Rules are meant to be broken:** I truly believe once a writer understands the basic rules of writing, then, they are free to bend them. Writing something with intent is very different than writing without knowing any better. When you have knowledge to write well, but choose to ignore the rules, it's called style. Without, it's called a mistake.

I leave you with this quote taken from *Punctuation For Fiction Writers*:

"Your prerogative as a writer is to punctuate however best conveys your intent, but if you employ some bizarre technique without a clear purpose, you take a huge risk. Some writers who choose to write dialogue without quotation marks get away with it; other times they alienate readers. Cleverness has its limits."

Two books on sentence structure for fiction I recommend:

"It Was the Best of Sentences, It Was the Worst of Sentences: A Writer's Guide to Crafting Killer Sentences" by [June Casagrande](#). (Casagrande's humor helps the medicine go down!)

"Punctuation For Fiction Writers" by Rick Taubold

About the author: Proud Sayville resident, Suzanne McKenna Link is a wife and mother of two adult children. She works as a page layout artist and freelance reporter/photographer for a South Shore newspaper office that produces *The Long Island Advance*, *The Suffolk County News*, and *The Islip Bulletin*. She has written and self-published two contemporary romance

