

WAG Digest Volume 14—Issue 1

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Writing Accurately About Mental Health Issues – Kassandra Lamb

February 11, 2:30 - 4:00 pm

Millhopper Library

3145 NW 43rd St.

Gainesville, FL 32606

Kassandra Lamb, a retired psychotherapist/college professor turned mystery writer, will speak at the Millhopper Branch of the Alachua County Library at 2:30 p.m. on February 11, 2024. In her talk, she will clarify several misconceptions and misrepresentations she has encountered as a reader of fiction.

While most writers are astute observers of human nature, they may not know the ins and outs of the psychotherapy field or the specific symptoms and etiology of various mental disorders.

Among the topics Lamb will discuss are:

- * Confidentiality in the therapeutic relationship
- * The nature of therapy ~ much more than listening
- * The difference between schizophrenia and multiple personalities
- * Terminology ~ psychopath, sociopath, or neither
- * Matching backstory to the mental disorder
- * The fickle nature of human memory

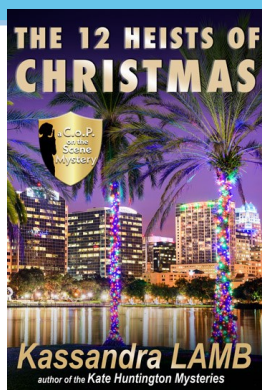
Lamb says she now spends most of her time with her characters in an alternate universe. She lives and writes in North Central Florida where her husband and her dog catch occasional glimpses of her.

CONT. ON NEXT PAGE

Writing Accurately About Mental Health Issues – Cassandra Lamb

**Feb. 11, 2024 2:30
pm - 4:00 pm**

Millhopper Branch,
Alachua County Libraries
3145 NW 43rd St. Gainesville, FL 32606



Cassandra Lamb cont. — February 11, 2024 — 2:30 to 4:00 pm

Cassandra has authored 36 novels/novellas in three mystery series and a romantic suspense trilogy, plus a guidebook for novice writers, *Someday Is Here! A Beginner's Guide to Writing and Publishing Your First Book*. Her latest book is *The Twelve Heists of Christmas*. You can read more about Lamb and her books at <https://kassandr Lamb.com>.

W*R*I*T*E

Blogging 101 – by Andy Adkins **March 3, 2024 — 2:30 pm - 4:00 pm**

Millhopper Branch, Alachua County Libraries
3145 NW 43rd St. Gainesville, FL 32606

Join us on March 3, 2024 for a talk by Andy Adkins on Blogging. On Sunday, March 3, 2024, at 2:30 p.m., author and active blogger Andy Adkins will give a talk at the Millhopper Branch of the Alachua County Library entitled “Blogging 101.”

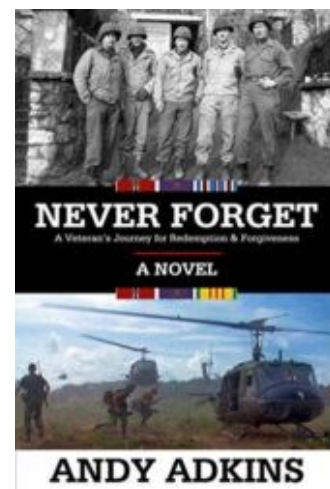
A glance at his blog, [A Veteran's Journey](https://azadkinsiii.com/blog/), (<https://azadkinsiii.com/blog/>) reveals that he has been an active blogger since 2019. He writes personal stories about his time in the Navy, both in Guam and aboard *USS Kitty Hawk*; his father's and his father-in-law's experiences in WWII's European Theater of Operations; his experiences as a Gainesville firefighter, and his time as an engineer.

“Every now and then,” Adkins says, “I sprinkle in some life-changing tidbit.” He has certainly had quite a life—now in his fifth or sixth career and not slowing down.

Besides being a U.S. Navy veteran, he is a former City of Gainesville firefighter, an electronics engineer, a retired legal technologist, and an author. He's written and published several books about the military. His first novel, *Never Forget: A Veteran's Journey for Redemption & Forgiveness*, debuted in 2021. He is currently in the process of completing a high-tech thriller, *Until We Meet Again*.

He and his wife live in Gainesville. For more information, visit Andy Adkins' website: www.azadkinsiii.com.

Andy, we thank you for your service.



Writers Alliance of Gainesville

Fifth Annual Sunshine State Book Festival

Gainesville, Florida

January 26-27, 2024

**Bringing Readers and
Writers Together**



Thank you to all the amazing writers who came out to the Sunshine State Book festival last month. It was a great success. And thank you to all the hard-working WAG members who put so much time and effort into setting everything up. We appreciate your efforts and look forward to the next one!

WAG BRAGS

Bonnie T. Ogle announces the publication of her *A State of Irony: Florida*, available on Amazon (link provided) and soon on Kindle. Bonnie says in her preface:



A State of Irony, Florida: Bigfoot's Kin, Pirates, Moonshine, Art and Weapons Made of Fruit, Streakers, Hanging Chads, Sinkholes and Missiles. A historical, sometimes hysterical account. Interspersed throughout, some observations, at times, a little snarky. I love this state. I'd never waste my grits on termites. I've gone boating on the Suwannee River, despite 170-pound jumping sturgeon. I'm not quite a Cracker, but I am a Floridian. You can be, too, if you accept the State of Irony that is Florida.

Get your copy here on Amazon:

<https://www.amazon.com/State-Irony-Florida-Bonnie-Ogle/dp/B0CR9GJSTT?>

Or tap on the bar code to go to the site.



W*R*I*T*E

And Gainesville poet Susan Ward Mickelberry's new book,

And Blackberries Grew Wild is also now available on Amazon:

<https://www.amazon.com/Blackberries-Grew-Wild-Susan-Mickelberry/dp/B0CR5M4F7Y/>

Congratulations, Susan!



WAG BRAGS



Congratulations to Ronnie Lovler for publication of her story on the vaccine debate among the elderly.

Ronnie sent us this information about a new award she received:

I just got notice that I have been awarded a continuing fellowship to continue writing about aging issues. The fellowship is from the Journalists in Aging Fellows program organized by the Gerontological Society of America (GSA) and the Journalists Network on Aging.

Ronnie's article is available here: <https://www.mainstreetdailynews.com/local-living/aging-matters-vaccine-debate-seniors>

W*R*I*T*E

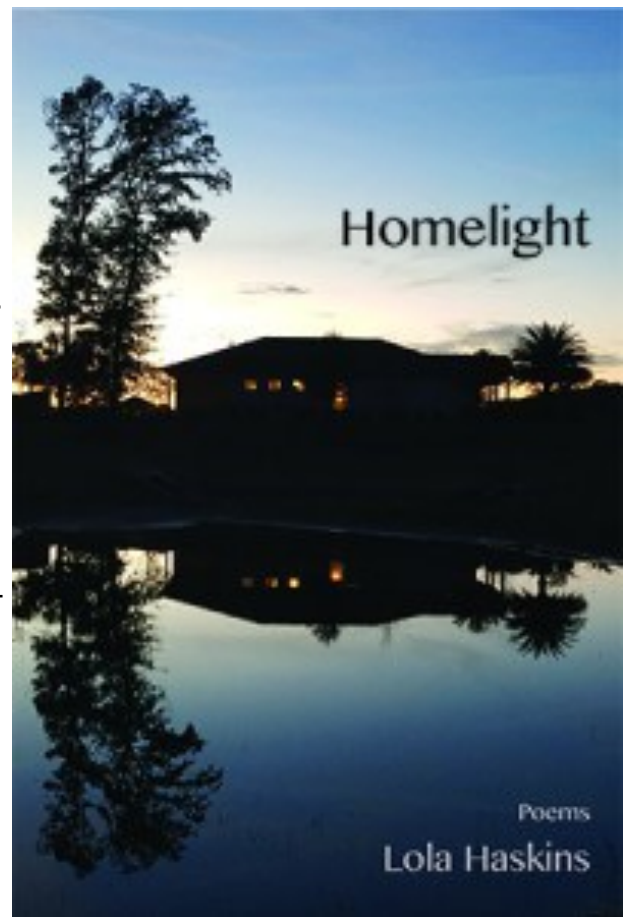
Congratulations to local poet Lola Haskins for a great review of her latest book of poems in the Southern Literary Review (<https://southernlitreview.com/reviews/homelight-by-lola-haskins.htm>). In the review, the reader, Claire Matturro, stated,

The poems in Lola Haskins' newest collection, *Homelight* (Charlotte Lit Press 2023), are equally elegant and eloquent in their graceful blend of theme, imagery, and language. Elegant in their refined, fluent use of words and eloquent in their visions and messages, these are luminous poems. While some poems are nearly haiku-short, others contain many stanzas, yet all resonate with beguiling, stirring words from a poet with a close connection to the natural world and an intense perceptiveness. There's a spiritual quality to many of the poems, even a metaphysical element to some, as in "The Discovery" where "time



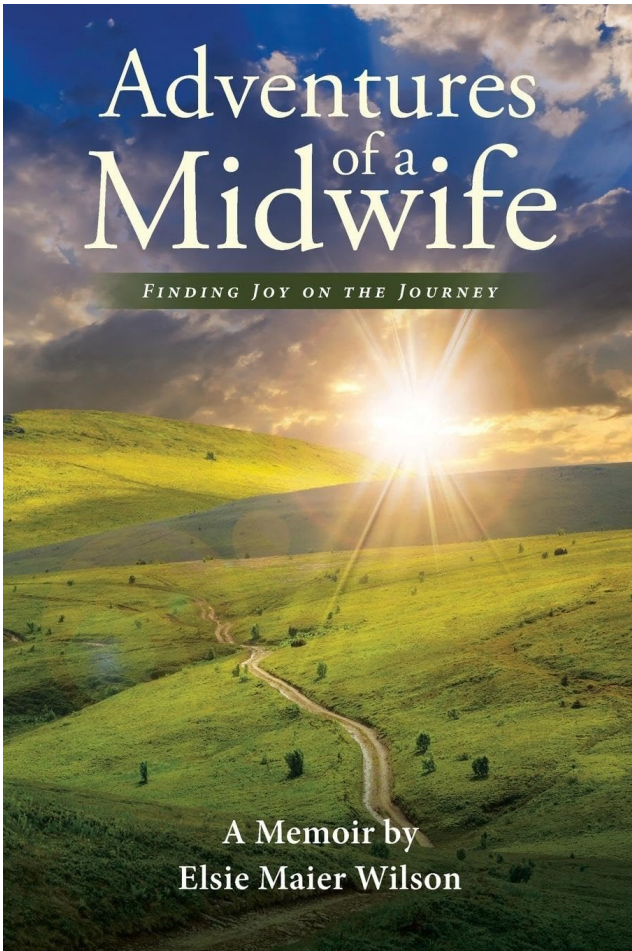
is as /random as the patterns the sun makes on / any given day..." As Haskins travels between accessible and elusive, the personal and the observational, *Homelight* offers a

stunning collection of well-crafted, evocative poems which flow with a natural rhythm.



The book is available on Amazon (<https://www.amazon.com/Homelight-Lola-Haskins/dp/196055803X>). Check out her website here: <https://www.lolahaskins.com/>

WAG BRAGS



Congratulations to Elsie Maier Wilson for publication of her new book, *Adventures of a Midwife: Finding Joy on the Journey*. Her book, available on Amazon, is described like so:

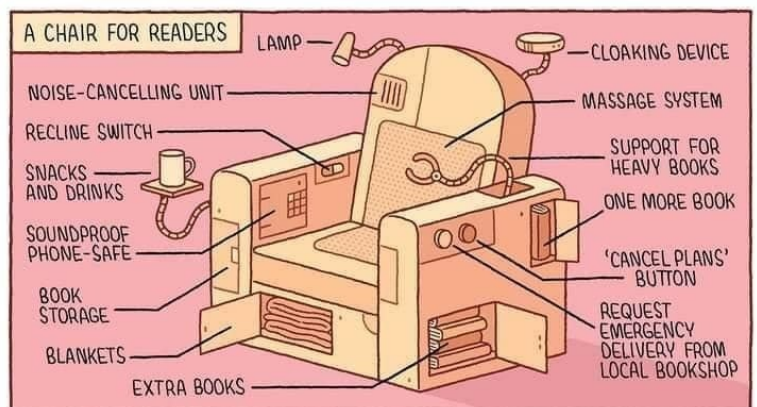
Adventures of a Midwife: Finding Joy on the Journey relates the challenges Elsie Wilson had in becoming a nurse-midwife in the mountains of Eastern Kentucky and the rainforests of Congo, Africa. This memoir describes her struggles in surviving abuse, cancer, depression, and fire. Her commitment to missions, which started at age thirteen, grew when she won a nursing scholarship and cared for her dying mother. The doubt and uncertainty that she could be used by God was dispelled as He took her on a journey only He could design, ending in joy.

She never imagined she would be driving up creek beds in a Jeep, crossing over swinging bridges, or examining a pregnant woman with a snake hanging over her head. Delivering babies in shacks with newspapers on the walls and depending on God in life-threatening circumstances developed an inner joy despite these difficulties. God's faithfulness and grace provided the strength to survive the trauma she experienced and led her to become a spiritual midwife.

The book is available on Amazon:

<https://www.amazon.com/Adventures-Midwife-Finding-Joy-Journey/dp/B0CPPD6J2D/>

An insightful, honest memoir by a remarkable woman. --Alycin Hayes, Author of *Amazon Hitchhiker*



TOM GAULD

The Complete Guide to Query Letters

January 14, 2024 Jane Friedman



The query letter has one purpose, and one purpose only: to seduce the agent or editor into reading or requesting your work. The query letter is so much of a sales piece that it's quite possible to write one without having written a word of the manuscript. All it requires is a firm grasp of your story premise.

For some writers, the query will represent a completely different way of thinking about their books—because it means thinking about one's work as a product to be sold. It helps to have some distance from your work to see its salable qualities.

This post focuses on query letters for novels, although the same advice applies to memoirists, because both novelists and memoirists are selling a story.

Before you query

Novelists and most memoirists should have a finished and polished manuscript before they begin querying. However, some may be tempted to begin early because it can take so long to receive responses from agents and publishers. The thinking goes: Well, the agent probably won't respond any earlier than a month anyway, and I'll be done by then, so why not get a jump on it?

But what if the agent responds right away?

Or what if you're not done in a month? What if you realize your manuscript needs a lot more work?

You'll wish you hadn't started querying. You may end up rushing your writing or editing process (undesirable to say the least), or admitting to the agent/editor that it will take you X weeks or months to follow up, by which point, their enthusiasm may have waned.

To avoid creating a high-pressure or awkward situation, I recommend you wait until you feel the manuscript is totally done—the best you can make it. That doesn't mean you have to hire freelance editors or copyeditors or proofreaders, but it does mean fixing or revising anything you know needs attention.

4 elements of every query letter

I recommend your query include these elements, in no particular order (except the closing):

- The housekeeping: your book's genre/category, word count, title/subtitle
- The hook: the description of your story and the most critical query element; 150-300 words is sufficient for most narrative works
- Bio note: something about yourself, usually 50-100 words
- Thank you & closing: about a sentence

The Complete Guide to Query Letters (cont.)

I consider personalization or customization of the query optional. More on that later.

Some agents and publishers require that you mention comparable or competitive titles. You can learn how to [research your comps](https://janefriedman.com/how-to-find-compelling-comps-for-your-book/) (https://janefriedman.com/how-to-find-compelling-comps-for-your-book/) in this post.

In its entirety, the query shouldn't run more than 1 page, single spaced, if printed, or somewhere around 200 to 450 words. I recommend brevity, especially if you lack confidence. Brevity gets you in less trouble. The more you try to explain, the more you'll squeeze the life out of your story. So: Get in, get out.

Opening your query letter

Put your best foot forward, or lead with your strongest selling point. Here are the most common ways to begin a query:

- Maybe you've been vouched for or referred by an existing client or author; mention the referral right away.
- If you met the agent/editor at a conference or pitch event, and your material was requested, then put that upfront.
- Starting with your story is a classic opening—and my preferred opening—when you don't necessarily have a good custom or personalized opening for the person you're querying.
- Some queries start in an informational manner, which is also fine: "[Title] is an 80,000-word supernatural romance..."

Published or credentialed writers might start with their successes, especially if they've won awards or received an MFA from a well-known school. However, few fiction writers begin their query by talking about themselves because most are unpublished. (This isn't a problem, though.)

Many writers don't have referrals or conference meetings to fall back on, so the story becomes the lead for the query letter.

Personalizing the query letter: yes or no?

Your query is a sales tool, and good salespeople try to develop a rapport with their target. It can be helpful to show you've done your homework and that you're not blasting indiscriminately. It can also set you apart from the large majority of writers querying—if it's done meaningfully.

Here's an example of a meaningful personalization: "The acknowledgments of *The Ideal American* mention you with praise, and F. Scott's masterful work partly inspired my own novel.

If you personalize the query by saying, "I found you in *Writer's Market*," or "I see from your website that you're seeking mystery," and you add nothing else, that's not terribly meaningful. Try to say something that can't be repeated by another writer or used in another query.

Identifying what you're selling

Your book's title, word count, and genre can be stated upfront, although often it's better to wait until the end of the query to offer this housekeeping information.

The Complete Guide to Query Letters (cont.)

- **Title.** Everyone knows your book title is tentative, so you don't have to explicitly state that the title is tentative.
- **Word count.** If your novel's word count goes beyond 120,000 words, you have a challenge ahead of you. Eighty thousand words is the industry standard for a debut novel. [See this post for a definitive list of appropriate word counts by genre.](https://www.writersdigest.com/whats-new/word-count-for-novels-and-childrens-books-the-definitive-post) (https://www.writersdigest.com/whats-new/word-count-for-novels-and-childrens-books-the-definitive-post) If you have an off-putting word count, some agents recommend withholding this fact until the end of the letter, once you've potentially hooked them. Minimum word count for most novels is 50,000 words.
- **Genre.** If you're unsure of your genre, you can leave out any mention of it. However, if you do, be sure to draw a comparison between your book and another recent title published within the last five years. You can say that your book is written in the same manner or style as another book or author, or that it has a similar tone or theme. Two comparisons are sufficient; the more thoughtful the comparison, the better. Comparing yourself to a current New York Times bestselling author can come across as arrogant or too easy. Instead, demonstrate a nuanced understanding of where your book falls in the literary landscape. Agents and editors will pay closer attention if it appears you are well read, because that increases the chances your book is well written.

Describing your story (the hook)

For most queries, the hook does all of the work in convincing the agent or editor to request your manuscript. Here are a couple formulas that can help you get started.

1. Who is your main character (protagonist)?
 2. What problem do they face?
 3. What are the choices they must make? What tension drives the story forward?
-
1. What does your character want?
 2. Why do they want it?
 3. What keeps them from getting it?

Here's an example of a brief hook for *The DaVinci Code*:

Robert Langdon is an American academic and an expert in the symbols of the ancient world. While on business in Paris, he's summoned to the scene of a grisly murder in the Louvre where he's the main suspect. He must race across Europe, one step ahead of the police chasing him, to solve the murder and prove his innocence. In the process, he uncovers arcane messages hidden in the world's best-known artworks, solves ancient puzzles, and ultimately discovers secrets about Jesus that could bring down the Catholic Church.

The Complete Guide to Query Letters (cont.)

As part of this hook, you may need to establish the setting or time period right away; this is especially true for authors of historical fiction or science fiction and fantasy. For example: “My novel, *SCI-FI EPIC*, is set in the distant future where humans have abandoned earth and now live on the rings of Saturn.”

A good hook balances character and plot. By the end of the query, the reader should have an idea of why we care about the main character(s) but also the story problem or tension that keeps us turning pages.

While the hook formula looks simple—and it is—your story may sound rather boring when it’s boiled down to these elements.

When a hook is well written but boring, it offers the same old formula without distinction. The protagonist feels one-dimensional (or like every other protagonist), the story angle is something we’ve seen too many times.

The best hooks have some kind of twist or an element that helps your work stand out, that makes it uniquely yours. That is: the idea doesn’t feel derivative of existing bestsellers. For example: Every time an agent comes across a query featuring a YA protagonist with special powers acquired on his birthday, and he must figure out how to control these powers at an unfamiliar school, there’s a good chance the agent is going to pass unless there’s a dramatic twist.

How do you know if your idea is tired—by an agent’s standards? Well, this is why everyone tells writers to *read and read and read*. It builds your knowledge and experience of what’s been done before in your genre, as well as the conventions.

In Laurie Scheer’s [*The Writer’s Advantage*](#), she well demonstrates the difference between a boring story hook and an exciting one:

I have heard an eternity of pitches featuring women as victims, survivors, single mothers, etc. If someone pitches me a story about a 43-year-old unmarried woman who has had a successful career in advertising or law or pharmaceuticals or whatever, and decides at the last minute that her biological clock’s ticking and she wants to have a child ... I will wait for the writer to tell me the rest of the story.

And there is no rest of the story, because in their mind, that is their story.

To which I say, “Who cares?” Seriously, who will care about that storyline? No one. We have seen numerous stories about women wanting to have children later in life. I could produce a list at least two pages long consisting of books and movies with this plot line.

However, if one of the main characters is a 43-year-old single businesswoman having her first child and, at the same time, her 22-year-old niece is also having her first child—because the niece does not see the benefit of having a career and only wants to be supported by a rich husband—I suddenly see some conflict here.

Whenever I teach a class where we critique hooks, just about everyone can point out the hook’s problems and talk about how to improve them. Why? Because when you’re not the writer, you have distance from the work. When you do come across a great novel hook, it feels so natural and easy—like it was effortless to write.

The Complete Guide to Query Letters (cont.)

Examples of brief story hooks

Every day, [PublishersMarketplace](#) lists book deals that were recently signed at major New York houses. It identifies the title, the author, the publisher/editor who bought the project, and the agent who sold it. It also offers a one-sentence description of the book. These sentences are inevitably well-crafted, and can help you better understand what is currently exciting to agents and publishers.

There are trends and fashions in publishing, and if you were to read the one-sentence description of every novel that sold in your genre in the last six months, you would see definite themes emerge.

While your query hook would get into more detail than the following two examples, these hooks help illustrate how much you can accomplish in just a line or two.

Bridget Boland's *DOULA*, an emotionally controversial novel about a doula with a sixth sense [protagonist] who, while following her calling, has to confront a dark and uncertain future when standing trial for the death of her best friend's baby [protagonist's problem] [a doula with a sixth sense? cool.]

John Hornor Jacobs's *SOUTHERN GODS*, in which a Memphis DJ [protagonist] hires a recent World War II veteran to find a mysterious bluesman whose music [protagonist's problem] — broadcast at ever-shifting frequencies by a phantom radio station — is said to make living men insane and dead men rise [twist]

Check for red flags in your hook

How to tell if your hook could be improved:

- Does your hook run longer than 300 words? You may be going into too much detail. Does your hook reveal the ending of your book? Only the [synopsis](#) should do that. However, former agent and editor Mary Kole [says you might need to reveal the ending](#) in your query. It's not my preference, but I've worked on projects where it becomes necessary, for reasons that Kole explains.
- Does your hook mention more than three characters? Usually you only need to mention the protagonist (s), a romantic interest or sidekick, and the antagonist.
- Does your hook get into minor plot points that don't affect the choices the protagonist makes? Do you really need to mention them?

Does your hook talk *about* the story, rather than *telling* the story? Don't get bogged down in how you wrote the book or what its themes are. Focus on what happens instead.

The Complete Guide to Query Letters (cont.)

Writing the bio in your query letter

For novelists, especially unpublished ones, I think it's OK to leave out the bio if you can't think of anything worth sharing. But it's nice to put in *something*.

The key to every detail in your bio is: Will it be meaningful—or perhaps charming—to the agent/editor? If you can't confidently answer yes, leave it out. In order of importance, these are the categories of pertinent info.

- **Publication credits.** Be specific about your credits for this to be meaningful. Don't say you've been published "in a variety of journals." You might as well be unpublished if you don't want to name them. If you have no fiction writing credits, you don't need to state that you're unpublished. That point will be made clear by fact of omission. If you have a long publishing history, just list the ones you're most proud of or the ones most relevant to what you're pitching. I don't recommend including academic or trade journals, since they don't convey storytelling ability.
- **Self-published books.** Lots of people have self-published, and a self-publishing history doesn't hurt your chances with a new, fresh project. However, if you're trying to get an agent or publisher for a book or series *that's already been self-published*, my advice is to not bother trying. (If you must, [here's how to pitch an agent with a self-published book](#).) Do not make the mistake of thinking your self-publishing credits make you somehow more desirable as an author, unless you have incredible sales success, in which case, mention the sales figures of your books and the average star rating.
- **Your profession.** If your career lends you credibility to write a better story, by all means mention it. But don't go into lengthy detail. Teachers of K-12 who are writing children's/YA often mention their teaching experience as a credential for writing children's/YA, but it's not, so don't treat it like one in the bio. (Perhaps it goes without saying, but parents should not treat their parent status as a credential to write for children either.)
- **Writing cred.** Mention any writing-related degrees you have, any major professional writing organizations you belong to (e.g., RWA, MWA, SCBWI), and possibly any major events/retreats/workshops you've attended to help you develop your career as a writer.
- **Special research.** If your book is the product of some intriguing or unusual research (you spent a year in the Congo), mention it. These unique details can catch the attention of an editor or agent.

Major awards/competitions. Most writers should not mention awards or competitions they've won because they are too small to matter. If the award isn't widely recognizable to the majority of publishing professionals, then the only way to convey the significance of an award is to talk about how many people you beat out. Usually the entry number needs to be in the thousands to impress an agent/editor.

The Complete Guide to Query Letters (cont.)

If you have no meaningful publication credits, don't try to invent any. If you have no professional credentials, no research to mention, no awards to your name—nothing notable at all to share—don't apologize for it. Perhaps say something brief about yourself—where you live, your education, your day job, hobbies. Remember: Even if you're unpublished, you're still completely respectable. You're mainly getting judged on the story premise, not your bio. On the other end of the spectrum: Don't talk about starting to write when you were in second grade. Don't talk about how much you've improved your writing in the last few years. Don't talk about how much you enjoy returning to writing in your retirement. Just mention a few highlights that prove your seriousness and devotion to the craft of writing. If unsure, leave it out.

If your bio can reveal something of your voice or personality, all the better. While the query isn't the place to digress or mention irrelevant info, there's something to be said for expressing something about yourself that gives insight into the kind of author you are—that ineffable you. Charm helps.

Novel queries don't have to address market concerns

Don't be tempted to elaborate on the audience or market for your novel. This is often misunderstood since nonfiction writers *do* have to talk about market concerns. However, when it comes to selling fiction, you don't talk about the trends in the market, or about the target audience. *You sell the story*. I often encourage memoirists to follow the same principle and leave out readership information—save it for the [book proposal](#) if it's requested.

Also, novelists don't need to discuss their marketing plan or platform. Sometimes you might mention your website or blog, especially if you feel confident about its presentation. The truth is the agent/editor is going to Google you anyway, and find your website/blog whether you mention it or not (unless you're writing under a different name).

While having an online presence helps show you'll likely be a good marketer and promoter of your work—especially if you have a sizable readership already—it doesn't say anything about your ability to write a great story. That said, if you have 100,000+ fans/readers on Wattpad or at your blog, that should be in your query letter.

Close your letter professionally

You don't read much advice about how to close a query letter, perhaps because there's not much to it, right? You say thanks and sign your name. But here's how to leave a good final impression.

You don't have to state that you are simultaneously querying unless the guidelines demand it. Everyone assumes your query is being sent to multiple parties and not to a single person at a time. I do not recommend exclusive queries.

The Complete Guide to Query Letters (cont.)

1. **You don't have to state that you are simultaneously querying unless the guidelines demand it.** Everyone assumes your query is being sent to multiple parties and not to a single person at a time. I do not recommend exclusive queries.
2. **If your manuscript is under consideration at another agency,** then mention it if/when the next agent requests to see your manuscript.
3. **If you have a series in mind,** this is a good time to mention it. But don't belabor the point; it should take a sentence, e.g., "This is the first in a planned series."
4. **Resist the temptation to editorialize.** This is where you proclaim how much the agent will love the work, or how exciting it is, or how it's going to be a bestseller if only someone would give it a chance, or how much your kids enjoy it, or how much the world needs this work. Basically, avoid directly commenting on the quality of your work (whether that's to flatter or criticize yourself). Your query should show what a good writer you are, rather than you telling or emphasizing what a good writer you are.
5. **Thank the agent, but don't carry on unnecessarily,** or be incredibly subservient—or beg. ("I know you're very busy and I would be forever indebted and grateful if you would just look at a few pages.")
6. **There's no need to go into great detail about when and how you're available.** At the bottom of your letter, include your email address, maybe a phone number.
7. **Do not introduce the idea of an in-person meeting.** Do not say you'll be visiting their city soon, and ask if they'd like to meet for coffee. The only possible exception to this is if you know you'll hear them speak at an upcoming conference—but don't ask for a meeting. Just say you look forward to hearing them speak. Use the conference's official channels to set up an appointment if available.

The following stuff doesn't belong in the query

- Your many years of effort and dedication
 - How much your family and friends love your work
 - How many times you've been rejected or close accepts
 - How much money you've invested in editors or editing
- Quotes of praise from anyone, or mentioning how such-and-such well-known person has read your work and/or offered advice on it. Perhaps it's boosted your ego or confidence that some VIP has read your work or offered a critique. But agents/editors will make up their own mind, and if your VIP really believed in your work, why aren't they offering you a referral to their agent or editor?

The submissions strategy I recommend

If you'd like to take a conservative approach, divide your agents into buckets: A list, B list, and everyone-else list. Try submitting in rounds of 5-10 at a time (depending on the size of your list), including 1-2 of each agent type. If your A list people immediately and favorably respond, then I'd send out another round right away, a mix of As and Bs, to see if you can gin up competing interest. If responses trickle in with no particular pattern or order, send another round within 2-4 weeks or so. At least every month, send another round until your list is exhausted.

The Complete Guide to Query Letters (cont.)

If you immediately see a pattern in the response that indicates something's amiss, you can adjust your approach for the next round of queries. The reason I recommend this conservative approach is it tends to be easier to manage psychologically. But there's nothing wrong with sending out your materials to everyone on your list at once or sending in higher volume. It just means that you don't get that "next chance" or opportunity to adjust your pitch later. (Once a rejection, always a rejection—or that should be your assumption.)

Special advice on email queries

Email queries and queries submitted through online forms tend to get read and rejected more quickly than snail mail queries (which are rarely accepted these days, in fact). Depending on your situation, you may end up creating two separate versions of your query letter, one for email and another for printing/mailing.

Here's the formatting process I recommend for email queries specifically:

- Write your query in Word or TextEdit. Strip out all formatting. (Usually there is an option under "Save As" that will allow you to save as simple text.)
- Send the query without any formatting and without any indents (block style).
- Don't use address, date headers, or contact information at the beginning of the email; put all of that stuff at the bottom, underneath your name.

• The first line should read: "Dear [Agent Name]:"

Email queries benefit from shorter paragraphs and/or more paragraph breaks—unless the agent insists everything be contained within three large, outsized paragraphs. That is a very backward requirement that only makes things harder for everyone, but follow such guidelines if you must.

If you have an email address for an editor/agent who doesn't accept email queries, you can try sending your query on a hope and a prayer, but you probably won't receive a response. In fact, I've heard many writers complain that they never receive a response from email queries. (Sometimes silence is the new rejection.) This is a phenomenon that must be regrettably accepted. Send one follow-up to inquire, but don't keep sending emails to figure out if your query was received.

You've sent your query—now what?

If you don't hear back, follow up after the stated response time using the same method as the original query. If no response time is given, wait about 1 month. If querying via snail mail, include another copy of the query. If you still don't hear back after one follow-up attempt, assume it's a rejection, and move on. Do not phone or visit.

The Complete Guide to Query Letters (cont.)

If an agent asks for an exclusive read on your manuscript, that means no one else can read the manuscript while they're considering it. I don't recommend granting an exclusive unless it's for a very short period (maybe 2 weeks).

In non-exclusive situations (which should be most situations): If you have a second request for the manuscript before you hear back from the first agent, then as a courtesy, let the second agent know it's also under consideration elsewhere (though you needn't say with whom). If the second agent offers you representation first, go back to the first agent and let her know you've been made an offer, and give her a chance to respond.

Thank you for the use of this article from Jane Friedman (Please check out her website here: <https://janefriedman.com/>)



[Jane Friedman](#)

Jane Friedman ([@JaneFriedman](#)) has 25 years of experience in the media & publishing industry. She is the publisher of [The Hot Sheet](#), the essential newsletter on the publishing industry for authors, and was named Publishing Commentator of the Year by Digital Book World in 2019.

In addition to being a professor with The Great Courses ([How to Publish Your Book](#)), she is the author of *The Business of Being a Writer* (University of Chicago Press), which received a starred review from Library Journal.

Jane speaks regularly at conferences and industry events such as Digital Book World and Frankfurt Book Fair, and has served on panels with the National Endowment for the Arts and the Creative Work Fund. [Find out more.](#)

Classes and Conferences



St. Augustine PoetFest is a 3-day event at the Waterworks and Flagler College April 11-13, 2024

LINK FOR ALL INFO <https://linktr.ee/stapoetfest>

George Wallace will fly in from New York to be our keynote speaker.

W*R*I*T*E

ARTSPEAKS COMING:

Sunday, March 10, 2024

4:00pm - 7:00pm

@The Beautiful Historic Thomas Center

302 NE 6th Ave. Gainesville, FL. 32601

We Invite You To Experience The Power Of Poetry And Creativity

If interested in sharing your own
expression or participating in the
exhibition, please contact

ARTSPEAKS

at INFO@ARTSPEAKSgnv.org.

Thank You!

We Look Forward To Hearing From You!

Classes and Conferences

Screenwriting for Feature-Length Movies.

This class is an introduction to the basics of writing a feature-length screenplay. You'll learn to think about your protagonist and antagonist, screenplay format, and plot your script (structure), and to avoid some of the classic mistakes made by beginning screenplay writers. You may even achieve writing your first ten or fifteen pages or the first act. Writing and participation will be encouraged as discussions and evaluation of submitted material is part of this class.

Class Details

5 Session(s) Weekly - Mon

Location

SF - NW Campus

Course Fee: \$69.00

Instructor

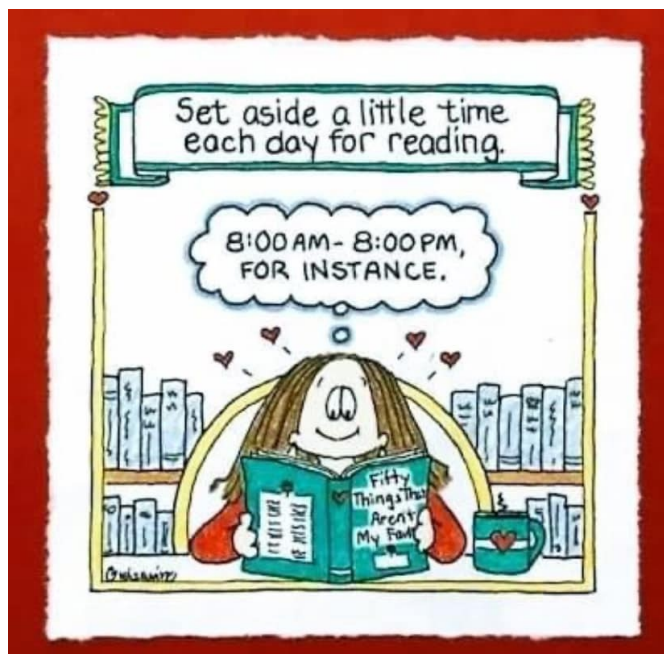
Gary Gordon

Registration Closes On Sunday, March 31, 2024 @ 11:59



REGISTER HERE: Santa Fe College Community Education Writing Arts

[https://sfcollege.augusoft.net/index.cfm?
method=ClassListing.ClassListingDisplay&int_category_id=2&int_sub_category_id=32&int_catalog_id=](https://sfcollege.augusoft.net/index.cfm?method=ClassListing.ClassListingDisplay&int_category_id=2&int_sub_category_id=32&int_catalog_id=)



Classes and Conferences



<https://www.ameliaislandbookfestival.org/>

Friday, February 23, 2024: AIBF 2024 Celebrity Author Gala 6pm - 9pm,

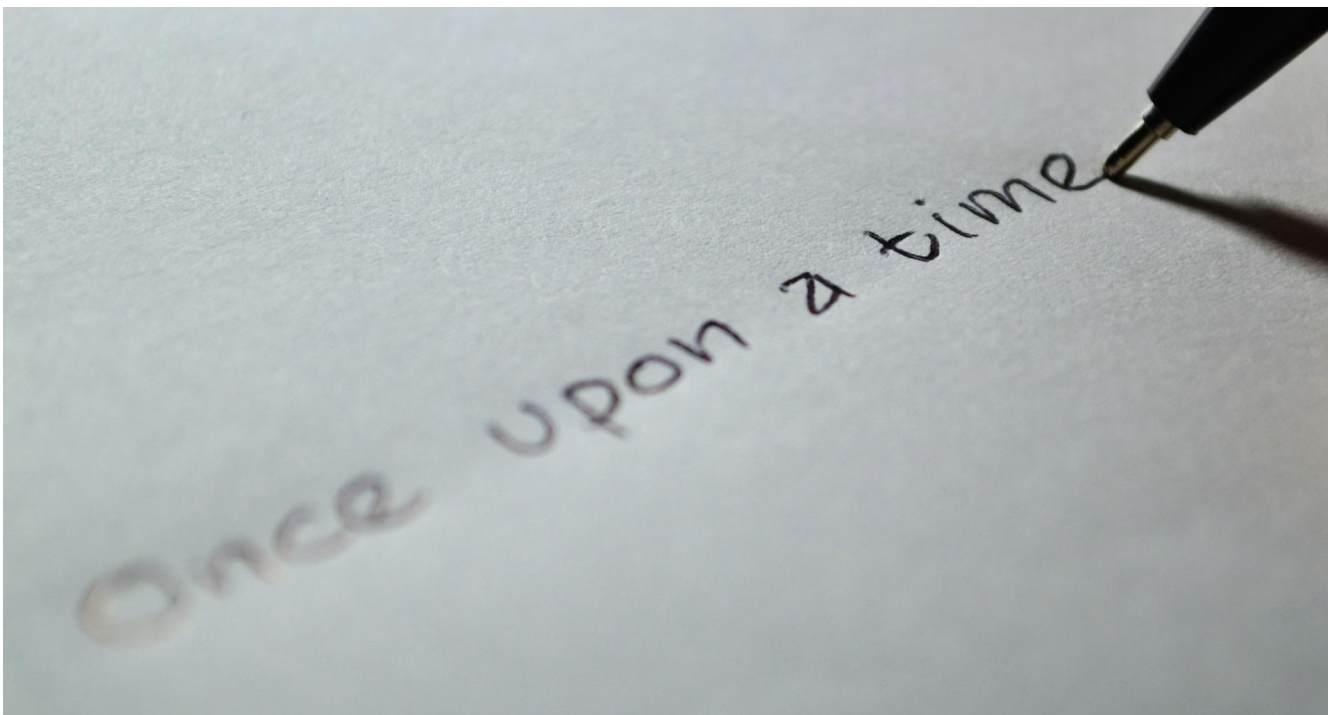
Ritz Carlton Amelia Island—<https://www.ameliaislandbookfestival.org/gala>

Meeting with David Baldacci, John Grisham, and James Ponti.

February 23, 2024: Celebrity Author Gala

6-9pm, Ritz Carlton Amelia Island;

<https://www.ameliaislandbookfestival.org/>



Calls for Submissions



<https://arkanamag.org>

How to Submit

We publish work by established and emerging writers unfiliated with the University of Central Arkansas. We accept previously unpublished fiction, poetry, creative nonfiction, scripts for the stage or screen, translation, artwork, and illustrated narrative through our [Submittable](#) submission manager.

Simultaneous submissions are always welcome. We only ask that you withdraw your piece as soon as you accept another opportunity.

As a journal of mysteries and marginalized voices, we're looking for quality writing that is thought-provoking and literary. We are especially interested in work that explores the identities and experiences of writers from the Delta region, BIPOC, immigrant, LGBTQ+, women, disabled, and neurodivergent writers, the resource-poor, writers over 50, those who have experienced or been impacted by incarceration, or anyone whose voices have traditionally been silenced.

*W*R*I*T*E*

BARROW STREET **A Poetry Journal Established** **August 1998** **Open For Submissions!**

The *Barrow Street Journal* reading period is currently OPEN. Send your submission for our upcoming issue by using our Online Submission Manager: barrowstreet.org/submissions/. There is a \$3 charge per submission, or for a \$10 charge, you may submit your poems AND receive a 1-year subscription to our annual journal. Submit up to five manuscript pages. We look forward to reading your work!

Calls for Submissions



Deadline: February 29,

Third Street Review, a quarterly online literary journal, is open for submissions. We publish fiction and creative nonfiction of up to 1000 words, poetry, and we are also looking for art and photography. Please check out our website for complete details. We are a paying publication and seek to support creators at all stages of their careers and from varied backgrounds. If you have something for us, we can't wait to see it! third-street-review.org/submissions/

W*R*I*T*E

Submit Now to Able Muse (Poetry, Fiction, Essays & More)

Deadline: July 15, 2024

Able Muse is now accepting submissions for our forthcoming issue, winter 2024/2025. Submit poetry, fiction, essays, book reviews, art, and photography. Submission opens yearly January 1 and closes July 15. Read our guidelines and submit at www.ablemuse.com/submit/.

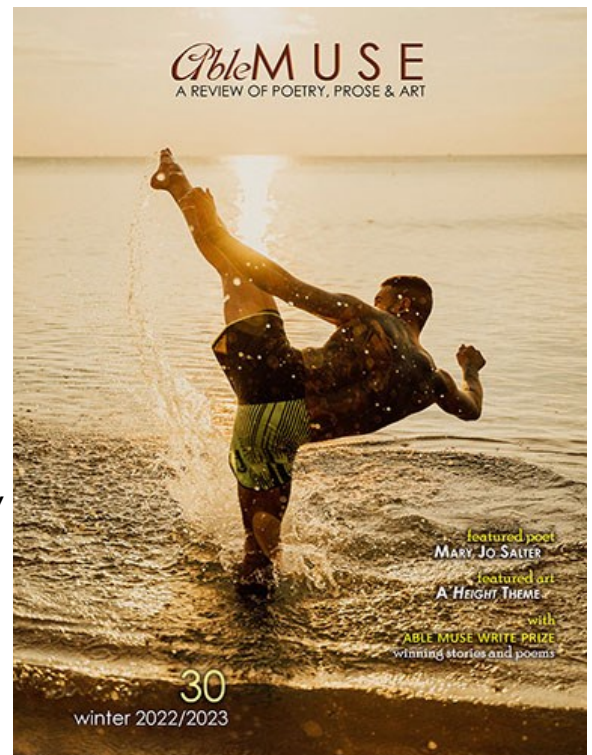
WHAT:

***Able Muse* publishes metrical poetry** and poetry translation, along with art, fiction, and nonfiction (essays, book reviews, and interviews that focus on metrical and formal poetry).

WHEN:

Able Muse accepts submissions in all genres from **January 1 to July 15**. We generally publish one issue per year.

- Each submission should contain:
- 1-5 poems or 1 long poem, metrical (rhymed or unrhymed), OR
- 1-2 stories, OR
- 1-2 pieces of nonfiction, OR
- 1-5 pieces of artwork or photography.



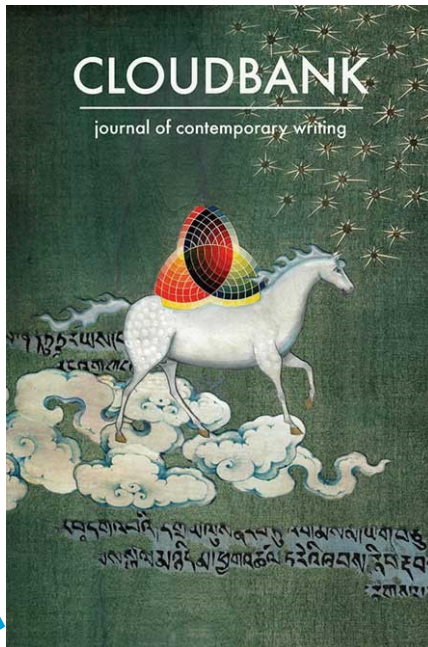
Contests

2024 Tennessee Williams Contests: Poetry & Short Story

In commemorating Tennessee Williams's 113th Birthday, the Tennessee Williams Museum in Key West, Florida, hosts poetry and short story contests that are open to everyone. There is no specific theme for the 2024 writing competitions; however, your submission must in some way reference Tennessee Williams. Authors may choose to write about Williams, his family, one of his characters, or one of the actors/actresses who played a role in his plays or films. First place receives \$300 while second place receives \$150. Contests Information, Rules and Submission information can be found by visiting www.twfest.org/contests.



Deadline: March 10, 2024



*W*R*I*T*E*

Cloudbank 18 Contest \$200 Prize

Deadline: February 29, 2024

Cloudbank awards a \$200 prize for one poem or flash fiction in each issue. Submissions for the Cloudbank 18 Contest are due by February 29. For full guidelines—and more—visit cloudbankbooks.com. Revive us with your fire!



Writer's Alliance of Gainesville
A not-for-profit Florida corporation

P.O. Box 358396
Gainesville/Florida/32635-8396
352-336-8062/wagmail@cox.net

The Writers Alliance of Gainesville (WAG) promotes, encourages and supports aspiring and experienced regional writers. This goal is accomplished via WAG monthly meetings, public readings, ongoing small critique groups, a literary journal, writers' contests, and collaborations with schools and civic organizations to foster creative expression through the written word.

Writers Alliance—www.writersalliance.org

Sunshine State Book Festival—<https://sunshinestatebookfestival.com/>

