

WAG DIGEST

Volume 19 - Issue 5

Inside this Issue:

Enhance
Your Prose 1

Bacopa Literary
Magazine 3

Zoom Marketing
– Preparing for
Holiday Book
Sales 4

WAG BRAGS 6

Sunshine State
Book Festival 11

Find your
Memoir Voice
Before AI 12

Classes &
Conferences 16

Contests 18

Submissions 21

WAG Digest

Enhance your Prose: Make Every Word Matter

October 11, 2:30 pm - 4:00 pm



Come join us at the Millhopper Library (3145 NW 43rd St, Gainesville Fl) at 2:30 p.m. on October 11, 2026, when author Marie Q Rogers—known to her friends and colleagues as Pat Caren—will share tips and advice on improving your writing skills.

Her presentation will include discussions on these 8 topics:

- The importance of the reader's experience
- The writing process
- Making your style fit your story
- Character and point of view
- Scenes and dialogue
- Sentences and rhythm
- Engaging the senses
- Word choices for stronger narrative

Enhance your Prose:

Make Every Word Matter. cont.

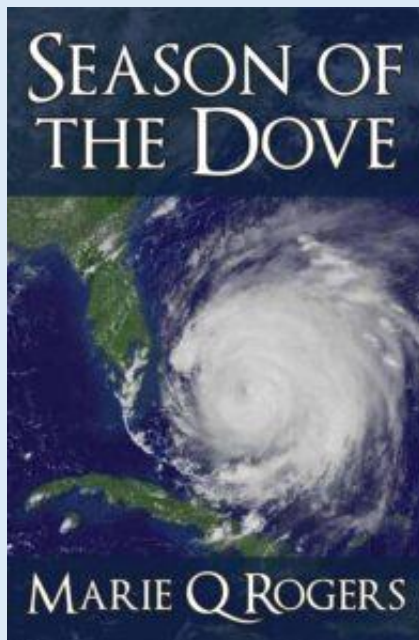
Whether you are an experienced writer or a newbie, you will gain knowledge and understanding that will benefit both you and your readers.

This prolific author studied Literature at Eckerd College and did her graduate work at the University of Florida. She has been writing off and on all of her life. “Work and children,” she says, “were excuses for my ‘off,’ and retirement allowed the ‘on.’”

Three of her novels have won awards: *Trials by Fire*, *Season of the Dove*, and an unpublished novel which will be out this fall.

Also to her credit are *Quest for Namai*, *House of No When*, and short pieces published in *Bacopa Literary Review*, *Eckerd Review*, *Pilcrow & Dagger*, and *Local Lives in a Global Pandemic: Stories from North Central Florida*. And, she posts stories and observations on her weblog: marieqrogers.com.

Under the name Pat Caren—which she calls “mundane”—she has served as President of the Writers Alliance of Gainesville (WAG) and Chairman of the Sunshine State Book Festival. She also currently serves as WAG’s membership coordinator. We are indeed fortunate to have Pat on our team of volunteers.



Debut of the *2026 Bacopa Literary Review*

November 8, 2:30 pm - 4:00 pm
Millhopper Library

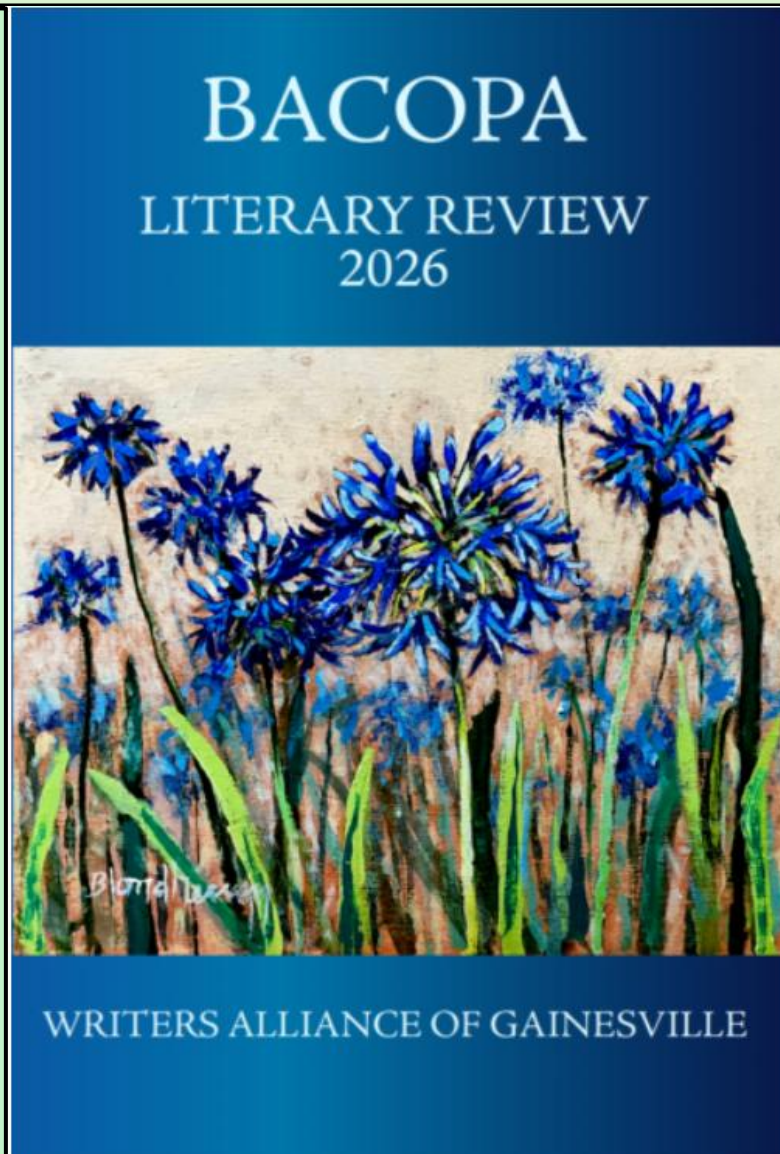
Come join us for readings from [*Bacopa*](#) and enjoy refreshments. Members may pick up their free print copies of the journal..

This journal is in memory of former editor in chief Mary Bast, who helped make the journal an internationally acclaimed publication.

Check out readings from around the world in multiple categories, including:

Free Verse Poetry
Visual Poetry
Form Poetry
Fiction and
Creative Non-fiction.

Hear readings from the various award-winning authors.





Preparing for Holiday Book Sales: Q4 Planning for Authors

October 19, 10:00 am - 11:00 am
Online (see next page for signup info)

Description:

October is when you should be planning your Q4 book marketing strategy. We'll cover holiday promotions, gift market positioning, and year-end sales tactics.

Key Points:

Q4 timeline: when to schedule promotions (Halloween through New Year's)

Holiday gift positioning: "perfect for readers who love..."

Amazon's holiday shopping features and how to leverage them

Creating gift bundles and special edition offerings

Email campaigns: holiday subject lines that work

Social media content: seasonal without being salesy

BookBub and other promo sites: timing your submissions

January planning: setting up 2027 for success

Worksheets/Handouts:

"Q4 Marketing Calendar" – week-by-week planning guide

"Holiday Email Templates" – 5 ready-to-customize emails

"Gift Guide Pitch Template" – for reaching out to bloggers

"January Prep Checklist" – ending the year strong

MARKETING

Preparing for Holiday Book Sales: Q4 Planning for Authors

October 19, 10:00 am - 11:00 am

*** The Zoom link is always the same:**

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81913659127?pwd=a1hTQWl1WVphTUxBOWdVWE9oV2ljQT09>

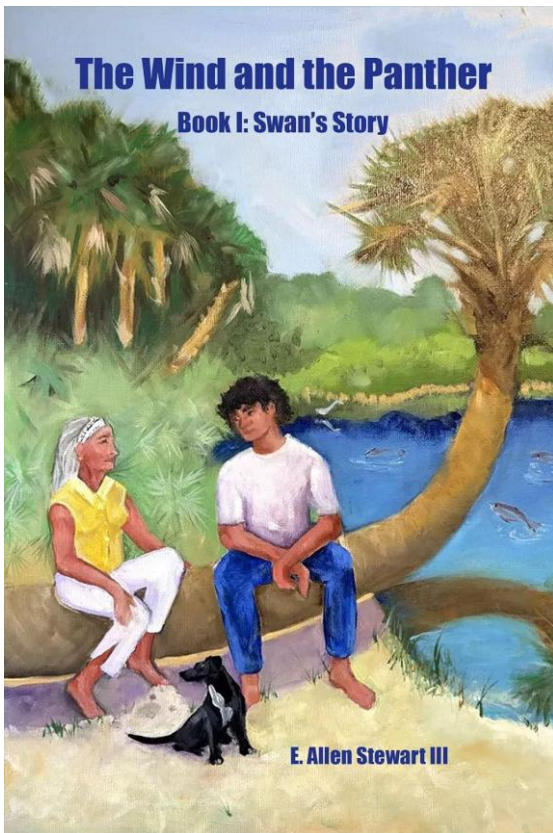
Meeting ID: 819 1365 9127

Passcode: 119030



Wag Brags

Congratulations to E. Allen Stewart for publication of his new book, "The Wind and the Panther Book 1: Swan's Story"



The book's description:

As a dying grandmother recounts the astonishing history of their family—from an indentured Greek laborer's unlikely integration into Seminole society to generations shaped by war, displacement, and the slow devastation of Florida's wilderness—a restless teenager must confront a prophecy that he may be destined to help restore the land's ecological vitality before it's too late.

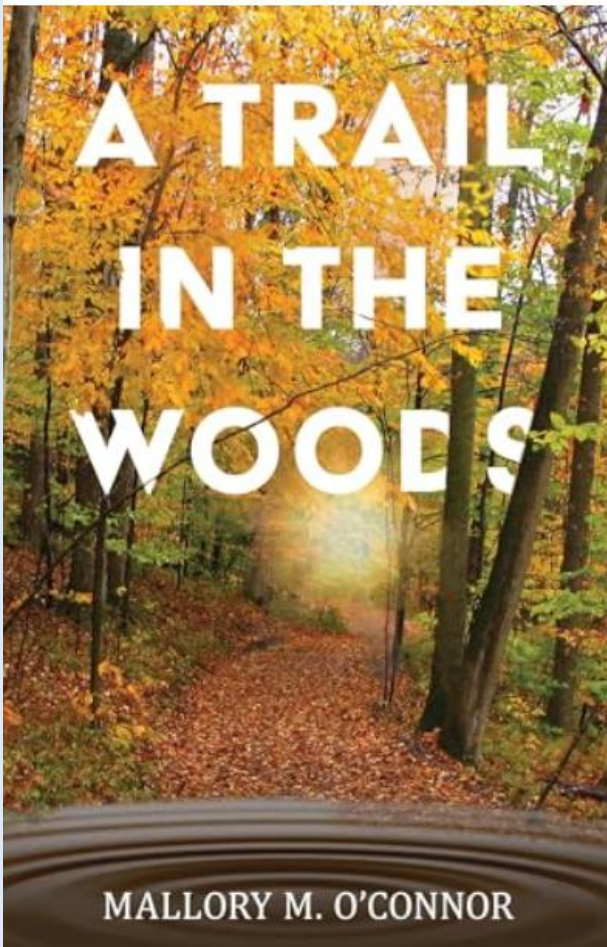
The book is available on Amazon here:

<https://www.amazon.com/Wind-Panther-Book-Swans-Story-ebook/dp/B0HGYX3PW3/>

And here is some information about the author:

Florida is my inspiration for writing. That is the Florida of my childhood, before theme parks and high rises, and private beaches. I was born in Florida, I was educated in Florida public schools and Universities, and I have spent my entire career as a Biologist and Environmental Engineer trying to protect and even restore what remains of this past Florida. Please read my blogs at www.pasop.org

Wag Brags



WAG Member Mallory O'Connor had her latest book launch on September 19 in the Hail Plantation Links Clubhouse. She has also been interviewed about the book, *A Trail in the Woods*, by Atmosphere Press.

To hear Mallory's interview, go to this site:

<https://atmospherepress.com/interview-with-mallory-m-oconnor/>

The book is available on Amazon—get your copy here:
<https://www.amazon.com/Trail-Woods-Mallory-OConnor-ebook/dp/B0H3RCK996/>



Wag Brags

A number of our local WAG Writers have requested that we put our monthly writing series (held at the Millhopper Library) online. Thank you to Susie Baxter for putting this program together for our September meeting. Here is the information on how to access the program:

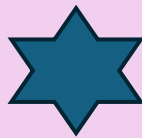
“You can now view and share the video of Julia Sander’s program, “Create a Compelling Elevator Pitch.” It’s public on WAG’s YouTube channel, thanks to Jolene MacFadden’s assistance.

Here’s the link: <https://youtu.be/luoP2QE9J14>

Please go there and **Subscribe**.

Susie ”

Thank you for all your hard work, Susie!

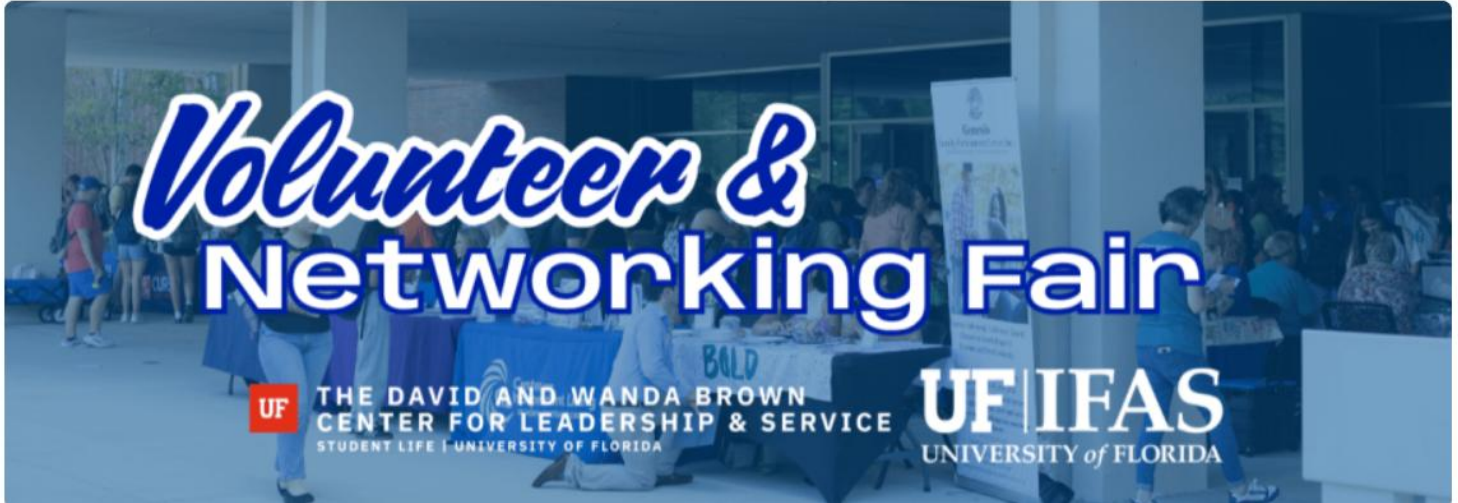


Wag Brags

Organization Tabling - Fall 2026...

Organization Tabling - Fall 2026 Volunteer Fair

Listed by Volunteer & Networking Fair



The Writers Alliance of Gainesville has been approved to join the University of Florida Fall 2026 Volunteer Fair. We will be looking for students who can volunteer and help for the upcoming Sunshine State Book Festival **January 23, 2027. Thank you to Ben Coward and Jennie Dearing for getting this set up for our organization.** If you would like to join Ben and Jennie for the tabling activity to help talk to the UF students, please contact Jenny at jenny.dearing@gmail.com. Below are the dates, times, etc.

Your registration has been approved for [Organization Tabling - Fall 2026 Volunteer Fair!](#)

Date(s)

Wednesday, October 14th, 2026 / 11:00am to 2:00pm (ET)

Location

[655 Reitz Union Drive](#)

[Gainesville, FL 32611](#)

Tabling Area - Reitz Union - North Lawn Entrance

Wag Brags

Congratulations to playwright Kimberley Mullens whose play “Napkins” was recently performed at the 2026 Elgin Fringe Festival in Illinois. According to Main Street Daily News:

“The play focuses on family and the impacts of Alzheimer’s Disease on an aging parent. Mullins loosely based the script on her own experiences dealing with her mother, Lillie Reese, who had the disease before passing.”

Kimberley’s play, "Single Black Female in the Navy," was recently performed at the Hippodrome Cinema.. And she’s published a number of books including: *Thinking Aloud: Dimensions of Free-Verse*, and her novels: *The Friends and Family Connection: Get Unplugged*, *In the Company of Strangers*, and *Murder: Another Name for Revenge*. To read the article in Main Street Daily News, go to this website:

https://www.mainstreetdailynews.com/local-living/gainesville-playwright-illinois-theatre-festival?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=gainesville_garbage_playwright_festival&utm_term=2026-09-24



ELGINFRINGEFESTIVAL.COM

Napkins by K.E. Mullins | ElginFringeFestival



Eighth Annual Sunshine State Book Festival

Gainesville, Florida
January 23, 2027

Bringing Readers and Writers Together



About Pat Dooley:

The Sunshine State Book Festival is pleased to announce legendary Gainesville sportswriter Pat Dooley as its Keynote Speaker. Dooley will speak on the **“Sport of Writing,”** at **1:00 p.m. Saturday, January 23, 2027 in the Santa Fe College Fine Arts Hall Theater.** His presentation and all Sunshine State Book Festival events are free to attend.

Over the last forty years, Pat has become synonymous with Florida Gators football and is one of the team’s preeminent historians. After arriving in Gainesville in 1987 shortly before NFL Hall of Fame running back Emmitt Smith’s first game, Pat served as the Sports Editor for the *Gainesville Sun* and later as a columnist for more than 25 more years. He also wrote for the *Fort Lauderdale Sun-Sentinel*, the *Jacksonville Journal*, and the *Florida Times-Union*, after earning his first byline at the *St. Augustine Record* as a junior in college.

Pat has also written three books about University of Florida football—*Game of My Life*, *Florida Gators: Then and Now*, and *100 Things Every Gator Fan Needs to Do Before They Die*, and he is working on a fourth book unrelated to the Gators.

Pat lives in Gainesville and still writes a weekly column for the *Main Street Daily News*, along with three columns and other articles analyzing Florida football for his Patreon site. He also hosts the “Another Dooley Noted Podcast” twice a week, for which is he joined on Mondays by Hall of Fame football coach and Heisman Trophy winning quarterback Steve Spurrier.

Find Your Memoir Voice Before AI Flattens It

September 17, 2026 by [Lisa Cooper Ellison](#)

“I’ve fallen in love with Lidia Yuknavitch’s memoir.”

As a writing coach, I regularly hear statements like this. In the early days of their infatuation, these writers flirt with their literary hero’s voice so much, it can be hard to distinguish where the professional ends and the acolyte begins.

I once knew a guy who wanted to be the next Hunter S. Thompson. His sentences galloped with Thompson’s trademark rhythm. They included the same irritable grandiosity and sense of disillusionment. He dressed and smoked like Hunter S. Thompson. He even spoke and read in Thompson’s idiosyncratic style.

Despite being in his early twenties, he had the chops to pull off this imitation. He’d already won numerous awards, and he’s since gone on to do great things in the literary world likely because of his careful study and emulation of a writer he admired.

At the time, I thought he was one cool dude, and I still admire his writing. But I also wonder what happened when he entered his first MFA class. Did any professor say, “You’ve got a great writing voice, but is it truly yours?”

There’s nothing wrong with mimicry and imitation when learning an art form. In fact, copying the greats was—and still is—an effective way to master a craft like writing, and especially what makes a great writing voice distinctive. I regularly encourage memoirists to do this while revising their stories.

But in the age of AI, the threat has shifted. Instead of trying to sound like your literary hero, AI’s ubiquitous use is flattening voices so that you sound like everyone else. And it’s subtly reshaping our work whether we use it or not. (Em dash culling, anyone?) That means protecting what’s both uniquely yours and uniquely human is more important than ever before.

Find Your Memoir Voice Before AI Flattens It

by [Lisa Cooper Ellison](#) cont.

What is your writing voice?

Before we explore some voice sharpening strategies, let's unpack the term *voice*. A standout writing voice is a mixture of your natural style and sentence-level decisions that bring who you are to life. It includes specific elements like tone, rhythm, syntax, and word choice. The wielding of those elements is what differentiates the poetic flair and subtle snark of Mary Karr's work from the understated lyricism of Kiese Laymon's or the simplicity of Tara Westover's.

Most new writers think voice is something great writers are born with. But those who've been at this for a while know that voice is partly instinctive natural talent but mostly hard work completed over a career.

Studying the craft elements of voice alongside great line editing techniques as you emulate the greats will help you master the mechanics of voice. But it's important to identify what's singular about your work *before* copying anyone or engaging with AI revision tools so you can protect and nurture what's truly yours. That way you can edit toward making your work reveal more of who you are.

Here are a few ways to do this:

First, write with abandon

It sounds simple, but many writers try to perfect their sentences before amassing a set of words that reveal their turns of phrase, sentence rhythm, and worldview. Write something with passion and emotion. If you're not sure how to do this, follow Marie Forleo's advice and [write it rude](#). This emotionally fueled writing about your experiences is something AI can't replicate, because only you know how your circumstances felt.

Run a subtraction test

Once you've amassed some material, write a scene while channeling one of your literary heroes. Afterward, strip out every metaphor, turn of phrase, or rhythmic pattern you know is uniquely theirs. Not sure what that might be? Choose a passage from your memoir in progress and rewrite the passage in the style of a few paragraphs from your favorite book. What did you have to change so your writing sounded like theirs? Sitting with other writers' sentences heightens your awareness of your own.

Find Your Memoir Voice Before AI Flattens It

by [Lisa Cooper Ellison](#) cont.

Create a personal vocabulary list

Select ten household items from the internet and name them. Do you see a truck or a pickup? A trash can or waste bin? A chair, davenport, or rumpus machine? That vocabulary is part of your worldview. Now select a passage from your work in progress and highlight additional words and phrases that fit with this worldview. Guard that list as if your writing life depended on it.

Play with AI

I know that simply writing these words might get me canceled, but bear with me. Like it or not, some writers use AI to generate their writing. At times, this is due to convenience, but in other cases, they believe AI knows how to write better than they do. This is happening across all age groups and all genres, and it's causing some [editors to rewrite their contracts](#).

I'm not here to judge. I simply want you to build some AI competence and ownership of *your* work. One way to do this is by training your ear and instincts using the following T.U.N.E. process with two example articles, which allows you to tune your ear as if it were an instrument.

Take it in: The two examples below will give you a chance to rewrite the articles in AI speak. As you make the changes, read them out loud and notice how each sounds and feels in your body. Your ear will catch things your eyes might miss. If you're using your own work, notice what feels flat and what feels true.

Unpack the attributes: Whether you're examining a work in progress or playing with the AI articles, ask yourself what's unique to each version. For example, do you use certain turns of phrase or words that reveal your personality or worldview? With each change you make in the two articles, what happens to the rhythm? What about the syntax? Are the words and phrases specific or generic?

Name what's yours: In either case, what sounds human to your ear and why? If something sounds beautiful and poetic, is it also meaningful? You don't have to get it right. What matters is that you're upping your awareness of how meaning and feeling are constructed.

Extend one edge: Channel your inner editor by revising your work or one of the articles so that it sounds more like you. Lean into the elements that are characteristic of your style. Include a metaphor. Elevate the diction. Change the tone.

Find Your Memoir Voice Before AI Flattens It

by [Lisa Cooper Ellison](#) cont.

And now for the articles I keep talking about.

“[See the hidden rules behind AI. Then use them to rewrite this article](#)” allows you to use prompts to edit a human-produced article as if it had been written by ChatGPT. Playing around with it, then reading the different versions out loud, helped me see and feel the flattening of the work.

The second article, “[Try to beat this AI writing detector](#),” was published on August 25, 2026, in response to Substack’s collaboration with Pangram. This one allows you to pick between two phrases so you can see what Pangram considers AI slop versus human generated work. If you play with this one, don’t just make the changes, go through the full T.U.N.E. process so you can experience each revision’s mouthfeel.

Then journal about your observations. What did you notice? What felt similar to your work?

I’m not suggesting you change your style—I’m team em dash all the way. But as you’re revising your work, if you notice something that falls flat in an AI-ish way or seems more generic, see if you can amplify the voice by increasing the specificity so it fully represents your worldview.

I’ve met many memoirists who proudly claim they’re working on their story. Often that means their version of events or their truth. But what might happen to your story if you claimed not just your version of what happened but your panache?

The more you know about your natural writing style, the more you’ll benefit from the hard work it takes to build a gritty, lyric, or confessional writing voice that belongs to just one person: you.

Check out Lisa Cooper Ellison’s Website here:

<https://lisacooperellison.com/>



[Lisa Cooper Ellison](#)

[Lisa Cooper Ellison](#) is an author, speaker, trauma-informed writing coach, and host of the Writing Your Resilience podcast. She works and writes at the intersection of storytelling and healing, and uses both her personal experiences and clinical training to help writers turn tough experiences into art. Lisa’s essays and stories have appeared on *Risk!* and in *The New York Times*, *HuffPost*, *Hippocampus Literary Magazine*, and *Kenyon Review Online*, among others.

Classes and Conferences

SANIBEL ISLAND
FLORIDA GULF COAST UNIVERSITY

writers conference



Back to the island! Registration is now open for the 2026 Sanibel Island Writers Conference, Nov. 5-7 at BIG ARTS on Sanibel Island.

Dates for the 2026 Conference: November 5-7. Location: BIG ARTS (on Sanibel Island).

Registration covers the following:

General craft workshops

Readings and panels

Evening cocktail hour

Nighttime events (concerts, readings, keynote address)

Manuscript Consultations is very limited, so act fast.

For an additional fee, registrants have the option to receive feedback on a pre-submitted manuscript by meeting individually with a presenter for a Manuscript Consultation. A complete list of participating manuscript consultants can be found at the bottom of this page next to the general registration button. **Note:** Space for individual Manuscript Consultations is very limited, so act fast.

https://secure.touchnet.com/C20748_ustores/web/store_main.jsp?STOREID=14&SINGLESTORE=true

Classes and Conferences

The 2026 Online Florida Writing Workshop

Get Your Writing Published: October 9-10, 2026

The 2026 Online Florida Writing Workshop: Oct. 9-10, 2026

<https://floridawritingworkshops.com/>



After many successful past Florida events, [Writing Day Workshops](#) is excited to announce **The 2026 Online Florida Writing Workshop** — a two-day online “How to Get Published” writing event October 9-10, 2026. (Writers are welcome to attend virtually from everywhere and anywhere.)

This writing event is a wonderful opportunity to get intense instruction over the course of two days, [pitch a literary agent or editor](#) (optional), get your questions answered, and more. Note that there are limited online “seats” at the event (200 total). All questions about the event regarding schedule, details and registration are answered below. Thank you for your interest in the 2026 Fall Online Florida Writing Workshop!

We have tons of new agents to pitch!

Writing Contests

FRESNO STATE

Philip Levine Prize for Poetry

The Philip Levine Prize for Poetry is an annual book contest sponsored by the [Creative Writing Program](#) at California State University, Fresno. This contest -- open to any poet writing in English (except current or former students or faculty of Fresno State) -- offers a \$2,000 prize and publication by [Black Lawrence Press](#), a New York-based publisher of contemporary poetry, fiction, and creative nonfiction since 2004.

<https://cah.fresnostate.edu/english/centers-projects/levineprize/>

Submission period: July 1, 2026 – September 30, 2026

Final judge: [Kaveh Akbar](#)

Award: \$2,000 cash prize -



Spokane Prize for Short Fiction

Deadline: November 1, 2026

\$1,500 prize and publication by Willow Springs Books is given annually for the Spokane Prize for Short Fiction.

Submit a short story collection

manuscript at least 100 pages long

featuring at least three stories by November 1 to be eligible. \$30 fee to enter. Authors do not need to be Spokane residents to submit. For more information, visit wse.submittable.com/submit.



Writing Contests

The Malahat Review

ESSENTIAL POETRY • FICTION • CREATIVE NONFICTION

The Malahat Review

Open Season Awards

Fiction, Nonfiction, Poetry

Entry Fee | Cash Award | Publication

Closes 11/01

The Malahat Review's Open Season Awards accepts entries in poetry, short fiction, and creative nonfiction with the winner in each genre receiving CAD\$2,000 and publication in the Spring issue.

https://www.malahatreview.ca/contests/open_season/info.html



Searchlight Writing for Children Awards

Best Children's Picture Book
Text

Fiction Manuscript

Entry Fee | Cash Award

Closes 11/20

<https://www.searchlightawards.co.uk/>

Writing Contests

Kurt Vonnegut Speculative Fiction Prize



The Kurt Vonnegut Prize is an annual fiction competition intended to recognize the finest speculative fiction, which can include, but is not limited to, work influenced by the postmodern science-fiction of Kurt Vonnegut. We love Vonnegut's dark humor, but please avoid mere imitation. We welcome all forms of previously unpublished fiction—one story per submission. We are enthusiastic about all work painted with speculative fiction's broad brush: fairy tale, magical realism, fabulism, the fantastic, horror, Afro-futurism, science fiction hard and soft, and everything in between. **Contest Closes:** November 2, 2026 at 2:00am CST

Entry Fee: \$23.00USD

Entry Length: 500–10,000 words

Winner's Prize: \$1,000.00USD

Contest Judge: [Kate Folk](#)

More information available here: <https://northamericanreview.org/kurt-vonnegut-speculative-fiction-prize>

Calls for Submissions

The Malahat Review

Open Season Awards

Fiction, Nonfiction, Poetry

Entry Fee | Cash Award | Publication

Closes 11/01

The Malahat Review's Open Season Awards accepts entries in poetry, short fiction, and creative nonfiction with the winner in each genre receiving CAD\$2,000 and publication in the Spring issue.

https://www.malahatreview.ca/contests/open_season/info.html



Searchlight Writing for Children Awards

**Best Children's Picture Book
Text**

Fiction Manuscript

Entry Fee | Cash Award

Closes 11/20

<https://www.searchlightawards.co.uk/>

Calls for Submissions



Palooka Seeks Chapbooks, Prose, Poetry, Artwork, Photography

Deadline: Year-round

Palooka is a global literary magazine of daring prose, art, photography, comics, and chapbooks drawn exclusively from unsolicited submissions. We champion underdog voices, read anonymously, and only publish what we love. Bold voices. Brave stories.

palookamag.com



Seeking Submissions on Recovery

Deadline: Year-round

The Awakenings Review publishes poetry, short stories, and nonfiction by writers with lived experience of mental illness, their own, a family member's, or a close friend's. Based in the Chicago area but international in scope, we're one of the nation's leading literary journals in this genre. Now in its 26th year, *AR* has built a reputation for pairing serious literary craft with an unflinching honesty about what it means to live with, and alongside, mental illness. We recognize that mental illness is painful and often frightening, but we're drawn to work that finds hope, renewal, and healing on the other side of that suffering. We do not publish work that is angry, alarming, vulgar, or demoralizing; we're looking for pieces that carry the reader somewhere, even if the road there is difficult. Please read our full guidelines at www.awakeningsproject.org before submitting.





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

P.O. Box 358396

Gainesville/Florida/32635-8396

<https://writersalliance.org/>

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.

