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President’s Article

The Need for Structure

by Ann Gordon

Beginnings are Easy

For years I wanted to move from writing technical documents to writing thrillers. Even though writing non-fiction always paid the bills, the desire to pen entertaining stories and novels continued to pull at my heartstrings.

As it turned out, when I finally found the time to write fiction, I discovered that I could complete short stories with ease, but novels—not so much.

When I’d give novel writing a try, I’d pen exciting first chapters that contained the all-important hooks, followed by second chapters that fleshed out the characters. In time I completed and edited the first six or seven chapters of several promising spec fiction novels, but that’s where each story bogged down. Although I liked these stories and their characters very much, completing a book-length manuscript remained out of reach.

After a hundred pages or so, my ideas faltered, the flow dried up, my characters lost their perkiness, and actions felt contrived. When I couldn’t figure out how to proceed, I stuffed the notes and pages into a file and put the projects aside.

Within several years of writing fiction, I had published and won awards for short stories and creative non-fiction, but had not completed even half of a novel.

Where’s My Table of Contents?

Completing large tech manuals is a straight-forward process. From various pieces of information about complicated systems, tech writers design the backbone of every tech manual: the blessed Table of Contents. With that most excellent outline in hand, the author explains every aspect of the system until the subject has been exhausted and the manual is complete.

I wanted freedom from that rigid structure and sought to find it writing fiction. I envisioned allowing my imagination to flow unfettered onto a page. I didn’t know it at the time, but I was dreaming of being a pantser. Now that I’m here, I find it’s not so great.

To Plot or Not to Plot

Eventually I learned that being a pantser works fine for writing flash fiction and short short-stories, but often fails when trying to write a novel. Reluctantly I had to admit that my wannabe novels came to a disconcerting halt because they lacked structure...the very thing I had been trying to escape. Did this mean I had to give up pantsing? *Yikes*. For short fiction—No; but for novels—Yes.

I hoped this didn't mean I had to create long, detailed plots. I considered selling hamburgers for a living might have more appeal. Leaving heel marks in the carpet, I sought information about constructing the plot for a novel.

### Plotting When You Don't Want To

I watched videos about plotting on Udemy and YouTube. Although they were interesting, they failed to convert me. I trusted my characters to lead me where they wanted to go, then I would follow them and document their journey. How could I create a plot when I wasn't sure what the characters would do next?

Back when I wrote about widgets, I knew exactly what they could and couldn't do. I faced no unknowns. But that hasn't been the case with my characters, who continue to surprise me.

In desperation I searched the Internet for "...how to plot when you hate it" and found this gem: "Plotting When You Hate Plotting" by Dale Lehrman. Hooray, Dale understood my dilemma. We both felt that plotting a character's every move in advance, for twenty chapters no less, was akin to placing him or her in a strait jacket. We liked giving our characters their freedom. According to Dale, all I had to do was open a dialog with my main character – a character who was a figment of my imagination. It sounded loco.

### Structure Works

I resurrected a spec fiction work-in-progress that I'd put aside at 31,000 words. I envisioned talking to my hero, asking him what he planned to do after he pulled out of his current crisis. Then I asked him what he'd do after that, including how he planned to get back to what he did best. And what about the girl? How was he going to react when they ran into each other?

Within days the questioning process gave me working titles for the remaining chapters. It was a miracle! I didn't have much more than the chapter titles and a few sentences for each, but these provided enough structure for me to resume work on the novel. I didn't know every step of the way yet, but having an idea where the hero was going helped a great deal. With Dale's help I found a new way to work with Structure!

*Happy writing!*

Ann

## Upcoming Events

Utah Authors Day  
December 7, 2024



The Quills Conference 2025 – "Creating Hope"  
August 7-10th, 2025

## New Members

Welcome to the following new member of Just Write:

- ❖ Annika Deutsch
- ❖ Keegan McClure
- ❖ David Packard
- ❖ Chalene Wells



**"Keep asking 'Who wants something?' 'Why do they need it?' and 'What will happen if they don't get it?'"**

**– Unknown**

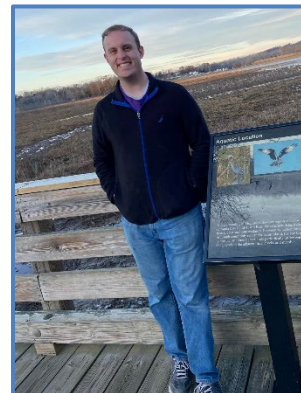
## Member Spotlight

### Alex Hugie

Alex grew up in Salem, Oregon. He graduated from BYU with an English degree. He is a content editor working in Salt Lake City. He lives in Utah with his wife and enjoys running, hiking, and also lazy things like watching Disney movies and eating cookies. Alex proudly drank three gallons of milk a week in college, stole a blade of grass from the White House lawn, and went to Hell and back—*twice*.

Some of Alex's past written works include a picture book called *The Hoppin' Eyeball* he wrote in first grade, 700,000 words of perfect fanfiction written under a secret alias, and a collection of short stories called *The Nine Circles of Stupidity*.

Alex was the Diamond Quill Winner in 2024 for *Loophole*.



## Member Article

### Using Character Perspective to Enrich Descriptions

by Jessica Gustafson

A story is more engaging if the scene is vivid, but descriptions can feel like an info dump if you're not careful. How do you keep a reader's interest while still bringing the scene to life? How much description is too much? This was a struggle of mine for years before I heard advice that changed everything.

It's not about the length of your description, it's about your character's perspective.



If you're writing from a specific character's POV, it's really that simple. Instead of worrying about whether you've described too little or too much, focus on how your character sees things. If you do this right, your reader won't even realize you're painting the scene (goodbye boring info dumps). For example, if a child is observing the Lincoln Memorial, they might notice the details of the statue all while wondering why the adults are making a big deal out of it. They might think the nearby pool is more intriguing than the statue and wonder why there's not a crowd around that instead (this would be a good point to mention the length of the Lincoln Memorial Reflecting Pool). Showing your character's opinion of their surroundings will allow you to give descriptions while keeping your story engaging.

To reiterate, stay in the unique perspective of your character even when setting the scene. If your description sounds like it could be given by anyone, edit it further.

Last but not least, remember to have fun. If you're enjoying your descriptions, chances are your reader will too. Isn't entertainment what writing novels is all about? Don't overthink it. That's what editors are for.

Enjoy getting inside those characters' heads, and happy writing!

## Beta Readers Needed

**David Armstrong** is looking for a couple of beta readers for his middle school romance *Never Been Kissed*. Word count is 113,000 (420 pages). Contact David at [lineuponline.dc98.12@gmail.com](mailto:lineuponline.dc98.12@gmail.com).

## Awards

### The Quills Awards

#### Diamond Quill Winner 2024

Alex Hugie

*Loophole*

#### Silver Quill – Nonfiction

Haley Cavanagh

*Adulging: The Ultimate Cheat Sheet*

### The Typewriter Awards

#### Silver Typewriter – Short Stories

Jessica Gustafson

*The Manhunt*

### The Olive Woolley Burt Awards

#### First Place - New Voices: First Adult Chapter

Jessica Gustafson

*Lady Unknown*

#### Second Place – General & Literary Fiction

Linda F. Smith

*The Ham Sandwich*

#### First Place – Mystery & Thriller

Josie Hulme

*The Gamer*

#### First Place – Romance

Megan Condie

*Under Dover Skies*

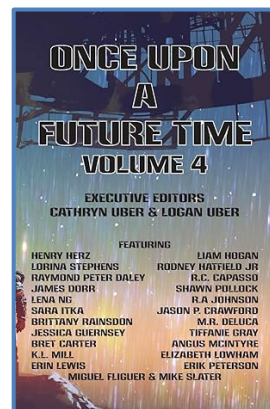
## Who's Penned What

**Shawn Pollock's** *The Smell of Your Doom* was in the August issue of Cinnabar Moth Literary Collections. Genre: crime. Mary Devereaux spends her entire life being careful, until the moment she's confronted by a murderer. Escaping him will mean upending everything she thought she knew. You can read it at [this link](#) (skip to page 46).

**Shawn Pollock's** *The Blue Fairy* was in Once Upon a Future Time Vol. 4.

Genre: sci-fi, crime. On Mars in 2199, androids in synthetic flesh are used for thievery, assassinations, and other crimes. When Nova Collodi is accused of being a synthetic flesh cook known as "The Blue Fairy," she'll find out who she can trust and who she can't.

[Purchase on Amazon.](#)



**Linda Allison's** publications:

- CNF flash piece entitled *Just Swim* was published in the summer edition of Moon Park Review [Linda K Allison Moonpark Review](#)
- A poem entitled *Ochre* was published in May in The Bluebird Word [Linda K Allison Bluebird Word](#)
- Photo entitled *Tear Drops* published in Persimmon Tree [Hunger – Persimmon Tree](#)
- Two photos were featured in August in The Sunlight Press [Linda K. Allison - The Sunlight Press](#)
- 100-word story *Fountain* was published in August in Flash Fiction Friday <https://www.fridayflashfiction.com/100-word-stories/fountain-by-linda-k-allison>

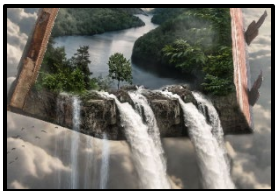
**“I’m always pretending that I’m sitting across from somebody. I’m telling a story, and I don’t want them to get up until I’m finished.”**

**– James Patterson**

## Link to Website

### Link to Website

by Ann Gordon



#### Crafting Worlds: 12 Novels That Teach the Art of Fantasy Writing

Discover 12 essential fantasy novels that every aspiring writer must read to master the art of crafting compelling, magical worlds.

<https://www.novelpLOTS.com/blog/crafting-worlds-12-novels-that-teach-the-art-of-fantasy-writing>

## Member Article

### How to Brainstorm Effectively

by Nicole Klunder

Feeling stumped on a piece of writing that you've been staring at for the past month, year even? Not sure where to start or continue that short story or novel? You have X number of words written, outlines created and thoughts with scenes running through your mind. You wonder, should I focus on writing more chapters to finish what is here, write my ending, add to my outlines, start plot or character, or read some writing craft books.



Here are six ways that I have come up with finding solutions for these speed bumps in my writing process:

#### 1. **Brainstorm:**

Anything! What do you want in your story? Create character characteristics, quirks, scenes, dates, events, holidays, milestones and supportive characters- good and detrimental. If there are things you are passionate about or just love or enjoy, incorporate it in your story! Don't forget about the senses, moving the reader through the sensory experience!

#### 2. **Character interviews:**

Get to know your characters! Not sure where to start? Ask basic questions and let it flow. Maybe include questions about their childhood and upbringing and then move to their struggles and what their goal and motivation is. Maybe start with what if? Then, move to how they feel about their new love interest and future ahead. How will they face their hurdles?

#### 3. **Plot:**

Map it out using a map on paper. Create the main plot and then develop sub plots from there. Use colored pens to make it stand out and that way you can have a better understanding of it.

#### 4. **Create setting:**

The five senses create realism for the reader. Whether it is colors, items, sentimental things/ideas/objects, weather, symbolize, or anything that has a scent throws you into the past at a memory. This is helpful in your world building! I started a brainstorming draft relating to setting and it already creates a visual, and some new ideas I hadn't thought of before this!

#### 5. **Conflict:**

Make it rough! Add depth by including other smaller conflicts for both main characters. You might include supporting characters conflicts that can affect the main characters in some way.

#### 6. **Story Structure:**

Depending on your story word count and number of chapters you have, you can structure the story pertaining to what you already have written. Then, add scenes and see if it flows well. Always plan out an act one, two and three. Better yet, plan out the six sections to a story- opening scene, inciting event, act one problem, midpoint, act two disaster and the ending. If you fall into trouble, start brainstorming again and re-structure.



## Website Author Bios

**Just Write Members:** Please check out your website bio page and let Ann or Nancy know if you would like any changes to your writing bio. <http://justwritechapter.org/MemberBios.html>

**If your bio isn't on the website, and you want it to be included, send Nancy or Ann a picture of yourself and an author bio no greater than 125 words.** Questions you could answer include:

- When did you realize you wanted to write? At what time in your life, etc.
- What genres do you like to read?
- What are you currently working on?
- Do you have a writing schedule? If so, what's that like?
- Links to social media.

## Critique Sessions and Submission Guidelines

Critique sessions run twice a month. Invitation emails are usually sent the first and sixteenth of each month; these invitations include an RSVP deadline. Once the deadline has passed, the spreadsheet with current group information is sent. Each session is generally divided into two or three groups with three to six participants each, depending on how many members participate.

Submissions are then emailed to each member of the participant's group and returned by the end-of-session deadline, usually the fifteenth or the last day of the month. If you want to read a submission from someone in a different group in addition to those in your own group, you may request their work, but please do not expect them to read yours in return.

Fiction and non-fiction chapters, short stories, articles, and poems are all welcome in our critique sessions...query letters too.

### Submission Guidelines

- 3,200 words or less (not including any synopses at the beginning)
- Include a synopsis if there are chapters/ sections prior to your current submission
- 12-point or larger serif font (such as Times New Roman or Cambria)
- Double or 1.5 spaced lines
- Word document format (.doc, .docx)
- Include your name or initials in the filename
- Submit within three days of receiving the group spreadsheet

### Critiquing Guidelines

- Please make at least six suggestions or comments in your reviews (AI grammar programs should not be used)
- Be honest, kind, and encouraging
- Corrections and comments are made using the "Track Changes" and "New Comment" features under the "Review" tab in Word
- Include a note at the end of the document or in the email with an overall review or comment
- Ideally, return your reviews by the last day of the session

## Chapter Officers

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|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Ann Gordon, President<br/>(<a href="mailto:ann@gordoncomputer.com">ann@gordoncomputer.com</a>)</li> <li>▪ Tim Keller, PR and Voting Proxy<br/>(<a href="mailto:writerscache435@gmail.com">writerscache435@gmail.com</a>)</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Critique Session Facilitator, Michelle Backman<br/>(<a href="mailto:mlbackman67@gmail.com">mlbackman67@gmail.com</a>)</li> <li>▪ Website: Ann Gordon</li> <li>▪ Nancy Roe, Newsletter Editor<br/>(<a href="mailto:Newsletter.JustWriteChapter@gmail.com">Newsletter.JustWriteChapter@gmail.com</a>)</li> </ul> |
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**"Those who keep learning will keep rising in life."**

**– Charlie Munger**