It's Not Complicated - Just Write!

A popular writing workshop exercise will open the first meeting of our new CWC-SFV fiscal year. It’s called “Just Write.” This workshop will guide us through a fun and stimulating hour of spontaneous writing.

We writers often need a boost to get our creative juices going and to silence that ‘inner critic.’ Believe me, “Just Write” will spark your muse. Here’s how it works: I’ll give you a prompt, an unfinished sentence perhaps, which might trigger ideas, images or memories in your mind. You’ll quickly write down your thoughts or reactions in whatever genre you choose—prose or poetry. Your work can be fiction or nonfiction. With this exercise there is no right/wrong, nor good/better/best. It’s about getting down a rough first draft that suddenly popped into your mind. We’ll write in ten-minute spans and then share what we have written. You’ll read your draft to someone sitting next to you and then your partner will read his/her work to you.

If an idea clicks for you, you might expand, refine, and edit it into a finished piece later on. Great essays, short stories, and memoirs have developed from just a nugget of an idea. Remember, Walt Whitman wrote an entire book of poetry from short notes he made while walking in the woods.

Please join us for a fun hour of writing and sharing!

— Rita Keeley Brown

CWC-SFV member, author and lecturer, Rita Keeley–Brown
This past July, newly elected SFV President Rafael Beer and CWC-SFV Board members met twice to make plans for the coming year. In the first meeting, Rafael announced that he planned to increase and diversify our club’s membership.

The Board wholeheartedly seconded these goals and voted to update our social media and use new PR resources to promote our upcoming August Social and future monthly meetings.

At this time the Board anticipated further discussions with Rafael on ways our group could become a more prominent resource for the Southland’s writer community. Meanwhile, Rafael determined that he wasn’t comfortable in his Presidential role and drafted a letter of resignation. Upon receiving his resignation, SFV officers immediately consulted the CWC-SFV charter to find guidance on how to fill the vacated office.

As per our bylaws, upon the vacancy of the President position, the Vice-President automatically moves into that position to fulfill the term. Therefore Bob Okowitz, our experienced and hard-working vice-president, took the position. Voila! The Veep stepped up and became our new Prez for 2018-2020. Then the Board appointed former president Nance Crawford (2013-2015) Interim Vice President.

All crew members up on deck! The Captain’s at the wheel and we’re ready to set sail. Who knows what adventures await us? Here we go …

— KH
While acting as your Veep, I sent many messages and email blasts to my fellow SFV members. But this month marks the first time I’ve composed a President’s Column for the newsletter.

I first want to say that I look forward to helping our club grow in positive directions. With the Board’s help – and YOUR input - I hope our branch can increase our membership and add more critique groups to the several that are smoothly operating today.

As I prepare to lead our club into this coming year, I’ve found myself contemplating a favorite author and Buddhist monk, Thich Nhat Hanh.

Thich Nhat Hanh grew up in Vietnam and came to the States in the 1960’s to work for a ceasefire in Vietnam. He is a remarkable teacher.

He once said, *In the way that a gardener knows how to transform compost into flowers, we can learn the art of transforming anger, depression, and racial discrimination into love and understanding. This is the work of meditation.*

I see writing as a kind of meditation. When we start to write a new work, we go into ourselves, meditate, and use our personal feelings and experiences to create new stories and verses.

Our critique groups help us edit and perfect this work, as do the Saturday workshop lectures.

The Board and I are determined to find new ways for the CWC-SFV to be a valuable resource to writers in the San Fernando Valley and surrounding communities. That’s why I decided last June to represent our group in Meetup. Also, our Board members and directors have begun to email quick announcements and updates on Mailchimp.

In the coming year, let’s all work together on our common goals. Together we can produce new creative works and be a positive force in our community.

And to paraphrase JFK’s famous quote, “Ask not what your club can do for you; ask what you can do for your club.”

Sail on! — Bob Okowitz
Jerry Corley sees method behind madness. More aptly, he’s learned the science behind comedy. After years of doing stand-up in comedy clubs, and a gazillion hours writing comedy jokes and skits, Corley, our June speaker, decided to take time off from his stand-up comic career and teach comedy writers what he’d learned about getting laughs.

In this town, thousands of writers are paid to write jokes and many have studied their craft at Corley’s comedy workshops. Even funny folks want to hone their writing skills. After all, there’s lots of competition in this genre.

People will congregate in theaters, night clubs, and tune in on their own televisions to get a laugh. And our funny bones get tickled in a variety of ways. It’s a somber-sided soul who doesn’t enjoy a pratfall, relish an ironic observation, chuckle at a shaggy dog story, wince at a pun or guffaw at a cutting putdown.

People who study human behavior such as sociologists and canny comedy writers, theorize that we need humor to relieve a pressure points in our lives. We gotta have a jester to step forward into the spotlight and say something wickedly funny.

In his June lecture Jerry listed his nine prime laughter triggers:

1. Surprise
2. Embarrassment
3. Recognition
4. Incongruity
5. Release
6. Configuration
7. Coincidence
8. Superiority

For the definitions and examples of the other seven categories, please check out Jerry’s website. There’s not enough room on this page to ‘splain, as Desi famously demanded of Lucy, all the laughter lore that’s represented by Jerry’s nine laughter triggers.

Finally, ladies and germs, I’ll finish with a quote from SFV member Rita Keeley Brown, our September speaker of the month. I discussed with Rita why our club’s writers—who might not be active writers in the comedy trade—would use Jerry’s methods in their own stories. Here’s what she replied:

“For me, understanding how to use humor helps to spice up one’s writing. I see humor as a tool that can make your writing more interesting if used properly. Many situations in a memoir are rather dull to peruse—but a little humor could make events more interesting and memorable to the reader. It’s like ‘bling’—a little goes a long way and should not be overdone.”

In other words, lighten-up, everybody! Slip a few jokes into your writing and make ‘em laugh.

—Kathy Highcove
In the spirit of the easy ambiance of our annual August Social, we invited travel journalist and author, Karin Esterhammer to join our summer party. She came and told us an engrossing story about her family’s two-year residence in Ho Chi Minh City. As she spoke, her colorful slides showed scenes of everything she described.

Her life-changing adventure began with bad news: unemployment. She suddenly lost her job writing travel pieces for the L.A. Times, which meant that her family’s home might go on the market. So she and her husband made a very daring decision: They would rent out their house and accept two-year teaching jobs in North Vietnam. Karin had toured this country before and had enjoyed herself immensely and wanted to return. This move would pay the mortgage and give the family an exotic travel adventure at the same time.

Karin confided, “I decided if I was going to be poor somewhere, I wanted to enjoy the food.”

And if she had to live without AC in a hot humid climate, we learned, she planned to thoroughly enjoy the culture of her second home. So they went East.

As it turned out, Karin, her spouse and their young son found their immigrant status in Ho Chi Minh City a remarkably fortuitous experience. No longer regarded as rich American tourists, they felt accepted, like part of the home crowd. They had a second home.

When their two-year job was done, and their savings replenished, the family reluctantly returned to L.A. Using her journal notes, Karin wrote a book about their extended time abroad and found a publisher. Then So Happiness to Meet You won the Nautilus Book Awards Silver Medal for 2017. This author’s story is a reminder that misfortune can often become a writer’s blessing in disguise. —KH
This website offers writers a place to receive free critiques for their creative work. Whether a writer sends in a short story, a poem, a chapter from a book-in-progress, there is no charge—only a request to take a turn critiquing the work of other members. In a year this site has attracted many members, but I’m still scouting for more authors.

Interested? Simply submit a short bio and a writing sample. A photo is optional. Send your information to AuthorsPreview@gmail.com You will receive back an Author’s number which is all you need for every submission. Under your submission you’ll receive feedback from your peers. Send in as many submissions as you like, but remember that you must contribute your own share of critiques—positive or negative—to stay active in the website. Remember, your critique is the power of AuthorsPreview.

Don’t forget to add an ‘s” after Author as in Authors. Plural tense!

—Alan Wills
Davida Does a Webinar

Last spring I was asked to be interviewed on a Webinar that would be available nationally as a byproduct of my new book, *Senior Services for the Financially Challenged*. Webinars are the new online version of a ‘seminar’ or Ted Talk or Q&A broadcast on the Web.

I was contacted by an editor for an online financial website called CentSai - [CentSai | Learning money through personal stories | Find financial freedom](https://www.centcai.com) - that does blogs, articles and now—for the first time—a Webinar focused on financial literacy. CentSai reportedly has 60,000 newsletter subscribers.

The editor had discovered my book on Amazon. Her CentSai group asked if I would like to be their first featured “expert” speaker on this type of Webinar. I would be interviewed on the subjects in my book and for some other pertinent information which could help millennials learn ways to aid their aging parents and prepare for the day their parents need assisted living or other types of care.

I agreed to do the webinar. We taped it via Skype with a moderator asking me questions. It aired on Thursday, June 28th. This is the title: *Everything You Need to Know To Help Your Aging Parents (in 30 minutes!)* After it aired, I did a 10-minute live Q&A as well.

After the interview I wrote a separate article on "the reverse side of reverse mortgages" that’s also posted on CenSai.com: [What Is a Reverse Mortgage, and Is It a Good Idea? | CentSai](https://www.centcai.com) If you or someone you know has an interest in this topic, my research on reverse mortgages can be a great help.

Please watch my CenSai Skype interview on the reverse mortgage topic—here’s the URL: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ygxiMvMppfc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ygxiMvMppfc)

—Davida Siwisa James

A Message for All Critique Group Members

Starting in next month’s October issue, this newsletter will repeat a favorite feature: the Critique Group Focus.

I’ll be partnering this project with Critique Group Coordinator Geri Jabara and the critique group leaders. Each month, I will feature a group in The Valley Scribe.

If you were in a critique group six years ago, you know the drill. For those who’re newer critique group members, here’s how it works: I’ll visit your group, take notes and prepare a short report on your group’s genres and ambiance. And I’ll sample your treats. Yum. That’s MY job.

But each critique group member also has a job. You’ll select for me something you’ve written: a fiction or non-fiction story, memoir piece, or verse. You’ll share it with your group, then edit it for publication in The Valley Scribe. In the coming weeks, each critique group leader will help his/her group members prepare for the focus month.

See you soon. —Kathy Highcove
All of the literary journals in this list accept around half of what is submitted to them. So the odds of your work being accepted just went up. These are not the most prestigious journals; publication in them will in all likelihood not change your writing life in any way, but they’re not a bad place to start if you are new to submitting or writing. Carefully read the guidelines before submitting your work.

Not all literary journals in this list are currently open to submissions, but most are. Note that this information is subject to change.

The Plum Tree Tavern — They only publish poetry about nature and ecology. They publish a little under half of the work they receive.

The Moon Magazine — They publish poetry, non-fiction, and fiction online. Every issue is themed, but they read for several themes at once.

Scarlet Leaf Review — They publish a wide variety of poetry and prose, including genre work. They accept about 80% of what they receive.

50-Word Stories — As their name suggests, they publish only 50-word stories. They read submissions every month between the 1st and the 15th. They publish over 50% of what is submitted to them.

Eskimo Pie — If you are a poet who really hates rejection, submit to this online literary journal. They accept almost 100% of what is submitted. They only publish poetry.

Page & Spine — Page & Spine is an online literary journal that focuses on the work of emerging authors. They accept poems, limericks, micro flash fiction (under 150 words), flash fiction (up to 1,000 words), short stories, articles, essays, and poems. They accept approximately half of the work they receive. They pay.

Mused — This is an online journal of upbeat and warm fiction, poetry, art, and essays. They accept over half of their submissions.

Literary Yard — Literary Yard is an e-journal that aims at widening literary horizons. They publish well over half of what they receive.

Quail Bell — They publish a wide variety of writing and visual art. They have a well-designed website and a rather high acceptance rate.

Califragile — This online poetry market accepts about half of what they receive.

Ekphrastic Review — An Ekphrastic work is writing or art about another work of art. The Ekphrastic Review publishes fiction, creative nonfiction, and poetry.

What Rough Beast — They publish a poem a day by a different poet exploring and responding to the US’ political reality.

Corvus Review — A literary journal dedicated to the strange, wonderful, and downright weird. They publish fiction, nonfiction, flash fiction, and poetry.

Soft Cartel — An online journal that publishes fiction, non-fiction, analysis and poetry.
Meet Varak Kaloustian, a new member who joined us last June. He’s completing a sci-fi trilogy, *The Legend of V*, aimed at young teen readers. The first two volumes are already on sale and the third one is nearly ready for publication.

I asked Varak how he found our club at the MPTF. He responded, "I found CWC-SFV through my own research on the Internet. I knew I wanted to be part of a writer’s club to further my marketing strategy, and this is the first club I ran into."

Varak is eighteen years old and starting his freshman year at Cal Poly Pomona. He began writing when he was seven years old. At that young age he loved writing comic books and illustrating them. Two years later, he tried writing a book—four times—and failed each attempt. Undeterred, he kept trying.

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When he was a freshman in high school, Varak wrote *The Solar System’s Prophecies*, the first book in his series. It was published in 2015.

Two years later, he published *Triangle Corruption*, the second book of his trilogy. *The Solar System’s Prophecies* is now mandatory summer reading at Laurel Hall School, Varak’s alma mater. His third book is now in development.

This summer, Varak tutored Board members in Mailchimp usage and attended lengthy Board meetings. He helped Board members sort out our social media issues and offered his youthful POV on future club plans.

Thanks, Varak, for all your help.

—KH
Review and Refresh

Modifiers (call them adjectives and adverbs if you will) alter the view of nouns and verbs. With a modifier, a dog can become a vicious dog. A cat meows, but with a modifier she can meow plaintively. And modifiers come in larger sizes—call them phrases and clauses, if you wish—but they alter the view the same way.

Growling viciously at the salesman, the dog leaped at the screen door.

The cat meowed as if she had lost her best friend.

Use care in the placement of modifiers. Otherwise confusion and sometimes unintended humor can result. Grammarians classify the most rampant errors of this kind as misplaced modifiers, squinting modifiers and dangling modifiers.

Misplaced Modifiers

A misplaced modifier gives the impression that it modifies something other than what was intended.

We have some new bicycles for serious riders with adjustable seats.

(Adjustable tushes? Try ... We have some new bicycles with adjustable seats for serious riders.)

Bobby continues teasing the goat with a smile of satisfaction on his face.

(A goat with a smirk? Try ... With a smirk of satisfaction on his face, Bobby etc.)

Squinting Modifiers

When a modifier "squints," it might be taken to modify either of two words.

Mr. Holburn said on the first day of class he would ask us to keep a journal.

Did Mr. Holburn say it on the first day or did he want the journal on the first day?

(Try ... On my first day of class, Mr. Holburn etc.)

I thought all this time you were in Grand Forks.

Did I think it all this time or were you in Grand Forks all this time?

(Try ... All this time I thought you were in Grand Forks or I thought you were in Grand Forks all this time.)

Dangling Modifiers

A dangling modifier is a modifier with nothing in the sentence for it to modify.

Driving across the range, some buffalo came into view. Buffalo at the wheel?

(Try ... As we drove across the range, some etc.)

Cleaning the garage, the shelf collapsed. Who's cleaning the garage?

(Try ... When I was cleaning the garage, the shelf collapsed.)

— Dave Wetterberg
I hear the sound of a whistle in the night... it’s not a train, a bell, or a harmonica. I’m afraid. The house is dark and the night is sliding quietly under my door and darkening my windows. There is a faint movement of old lace touching the square glass panes, and the heavy-lined drapes are whispering an old song between their folds.

I sit up, covering my body all the way up to my neck with the heavy feather eiderdown quilt Dad brought over from Europe long ago. It survived even though some of the ship travelers advised him to throw it all into the sea as they were destined to cross part of the equator where everything burned with sparks of fire.

An ecru-colored embroidered tablecloth held together with feint stitches soaked with sibling-tears, came as well inside Dad’s old-wood steamer trunk. Its top made of corrugated laminates of thin metal held together with rusty metal nails in different sizes. Colorful oversized paper stamps in foreign colors and shapes announce the port of entry and departure of faraway places.

The trunk almost drowned several times in the furious seas. It traveled with Dad all the way down to Argentina where ‘La Punta de Fuego’ ends in a point of glacial ice instead of fire. The shivering passengers all felt like frozen icicles, but they all spoke different languages, and couldn’t understand each other’s cries of misery.

Tempted by my curiosity, I try to pry open the trunk lid but it’s stuck with rusty laminates of European dust, salty sea and water rust. I struggle and rock it back and forth. I can hear old books and family photo albums moving inside. They feel heavy as if they contained real people waking up from a long slumber.

I imagine pictures of Dad’s parents, brothers and unknown relatives staring straight ahead like they’re in a trance, obeying a photographer’s snapping fingers as he orders them not to move during his count of one, two, and three! They seem to be holding their breath, waiting for the explosion of his photo flash. After he’s done, I picture them exhaling, letting go, relaxing their poses to fill the loose material of their garb.

Mid-calf dark dresses with faint dots cover the women’s bodies. Girls wear old-style short boots with tiny buttons on the side. Boys wear extra blousy shirts --held in the middle with wide belts, and stare at the camera like they’re taking a dare. One of them is my very young Dad, dressed like an old man in black clothes. His father wears a big hat with fur around the rim like a Rabbi.

Dad left the ship soon after they arrived in South America. On his own he discovered that (Continued on page 12)
Argentina was a beautiful country but riddled with old Nazis. He soon left to explore other small countries like Chile, Peru, and Colombia, and then slid down a bit into Quito, Ecuador, where he decided to stay. He’d noticed that the mild climate kept everything looking a healthy green.

For many years Dad’s steamer trunk lived with us, like a focal point of all it represented. As we moved from house to house, we schlepped it with us like a precious heirloom. Inside the trunk Dad kept rare ancient books written in Hebrew and other foreign languages. It also contained large colorful portraits of beautiful society ladies dressed to kill, as the saying goes.

I never knew what the ‘dressed to kill’ meant and never really found out even though I scanned the newspapers trying to read about famous murders committed in the heat of passion.

I guess I was too young to understand any of it. If I ever had the nerve, I would have asked Mummy in a nice way to see if she would share the mysteries with me. Even when I was a younger child my hands gently played with empty matchboxes, hats, and scarves, rescued from the dust that holds Dad’s memories inside the old trunk.

Today I find that time spills out in a blur. Then glowing scenes of summer days take shape in my thoughts; my eyes brim with tears of delight. I hear voices as clear as a bell. I hear my Mom saying, “Do not climb trees, nor roll on the grass. Your white dress will stain green.”

A clear breeze comes through my open window, and I hear church bells in the distance. I reach out to touch the glass panes but the glass suddenly turns to water, inviting me to plunge through it to discover hidden mysteries of yesterday.

What I see is a vision of a time when I lived in the very middle of the world—right where Dad landed in the very center part of the equator. He planted himself in Quito, the city of eternal spring. I remember curling smoke from chimneys rising over red-clay roofs, and I can still see La Compania, a very old Jesuit church sweating liquid gold down its walls and its heavy front carved doors held together with enormous rusty-metal-nails.

In my mind I open a heavy door just a small crack to look inside. The door screeches loudly from years of neglect. I peek in and see ebony saints with blank eyes staring at flickering candles, dancing shadows in the night.

Each saint wears dark silk clothing, studded with genuine rubies, sapphires and necklaces of gold. Walls that surround the cold space show lines of Hebrew writings just like in the old books that were packed inside Dad’s steamer trunk.

I stand on the rim of time, staring at the ruins of ancient places still connected with relics of then and now. For a moment I hang suspended in air, floating into forever like in my dreams … dreams that make Dad’s old steamer trunk rock back and forth, spilling out photos of my aunts, uncles, cousins, friends, Mom, Dad, brothers, sisters, grandparents and furry pets.
This poem was written in tanka, a classical genre of Japanese poetry.

FOUR SEASONS

Spring
Judean hillsides
Covered with red cyclamen
Moving in light breeze
Majestic Hermon Mountains
Proclaiming spring’s arrival.

Summer
Tehran summer nights
Sleeping outdoors by the pool
Hot and humid air
Poetry on radio
Swept away by its beauty.

Fall
The wild wind shrieking
Crying despair and anguish
Skies looking dreary
Foretelling still colder times
Shedding of leaves, naked trees.

Winter
Snowflakes drifting down
Towards Yosemite Valley
Dancing in a spell
And I am spinning inward
Intoxicated, no cure.

—Pirhiya Goldstein
Driving west on the 101 freeway to the Woodland Hills area, exit at the Valley Circle/Mulholland off-ramp. Coming east, exit at Calabasas Rd./Mulholland off ramp and move left with traffic onto Calabasas Rd.

West bound travelers go south over the 101 freeway you just exited and drive straight on until you see Spielberg Drive on your right.

Eastbound motorists must be in the far right lane on Calabasas Rd. so you can easily turn right onto Mulholland road. Continue to Spielberg Drive.

Drive along Spielberg Drive, turn left at an intersection and continue along the road to a kiosk with a gate across the road. Inform the kiosk attendant that you’ve come for the California Writers Club meeting and ask for parking directions.

The parking lot for our meeting is near a statue of a trombone player. (Buddy Rogers) When you leave your car and look around, you should spot a group of buildings nearby. That’s where the Katzenberg Pavilion is located. There’s a large koi pond and small bridge over the pond right beside an entrance to our meeting room.

Another clue—if you’re lost, wandering around the facility’s campus, Katzenberg Pavilion is directly across from the Stark Villa. Look for our sign-in tables set up outside the Pavilion. Club members are waiting to welcome you into our gathering.