

January 2025

Creative Writing Subject Adviser:

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Happy New Year.....let's hope 2025 is full of good writing by u3a groups throughout the UK.

At the end of last year, I thoroughly enjoyed, a book called 'Jews Milk Goats' which was featured in u3amatters magazine. I managed to track down the author, Gillian Freedman (St Neots u3a) and she has kindly written an article which appears on page 2. It gives good insights into self-publishing a book and achieving a high level of sales.

On page 5 you'll find an updated version of my list of recommended books and resources. It reflects the fact several groups have recommended 'Creative Writing for Dummies'. One group worked through it because they felt they needed new insights, and say it transformed their writing.

Writing prompt :-

Victorian drama

Marcia

Change of contact details ?

Please let me know if your address or group leader changes, or you no longer wish to receive Newsletters. I will alert u3a Office, which sends them to you.

E-mails are the simplest way to collect Newsletter entries. Please find someone willing to copy your work & e-mail it to me if you have no access to a computer.

If you write a letter that needs a reply, please remember to enclose s.a.e.

If you'd prefer a Word version of the Newsletter, please let me know.

Marcia

How I Published 'Jews Milk Goats'

Gillian Freedman, St Neots

I remember nervously reading out my first piece in front of 15 strangers in our Writing group. The response was positive and supportive. Over time, reading my short pieces to the group, and listening to theirs developed my critical facilities. I could tell from their responses whether or not my words were effective. I cut out a lot of the waffle and learned that less can definitely be more as far as writing is concerned.

As time went on, I realised I wanted to write a book. Another group member, Chris Andrews, was working hard on her own book (From City to Valley, the War Children, now available on Amazon). We compared notes, chivvied each other along, and were thrilled when our books were self-published. En route to that, I used a writing coach to help me shape the book. He suggested less description and more dialogue. My son proof-read it and found 8 pages of spelling mistakes and typos.

My book, 'Jews Milk Goats' tells of the trials and tribulations of our day-to-day activities on a busy smallholding, while maintaining our Jewish way of life. It interweaves the Jewish calendar with the rhythm of the farming year.

I used my blog and LinkedIn to publicise. Through that I linked up with a regional Bedfordshire radio reporter. They asked me to go in for a live interview on BBC Three Counties Radio. I contacted all the Jewish newspapers and wrote to American and Australian and Canadian websites and papers. I contacted the Church papers too and got a piece in 'The Tablet'. I did an online interview with an American website - Bookishly Jewish. I gave a talk to a synagogue and thereafter others contacted me. Plugging away like that has led to over 1000 sales.

Don't write and self publish to make money; you're unlikely to make a profit. If you cover the costs you will have done well, but the value is in the experience.

Buy Jews Milk Goats on Amazon or order at Waterstones and other booksellers

Thinking of Writing Your Memoirs?

Lichfield u3a members have created a template that could help. The writing pack is called 'Everyone has a Story to Tell' & provides an ABC guide to getting started.

Step 1 helps you think about creating a title page.

Step 2 provides timeline grids you can fill in, covering decades from birth to now.

Step 3 encourages you to write freely, choosing what you want to record.

The Appendices contain a lot of useful information.

If you want to compile your story on line, a digital copy is on the Lichfield u3a website under Projects/Memoirs: u3asites.org.uk/Lichfield/page/131291 Printed copies of the guide, template & appendices cost £8.50 +p&p from Veronica Birkett veronicabirkett7@gmail.com

Learning to be a Duck

Susanna Beard

Nobody likes rejection. Throughout life there are many occasions when we feel its pain: not being included in friendship groups at school, being excluded from that party, not getting into the school you longed to attend. Not getting the grades you needed for your first-choice university, being dumped by your first boyfriend/girlfriend (and many more after that). It hurts. Time after time we get knocked back, our self-esteem dips, our confidence wanes. Yet repeatedly we get back up, stand tall, gather ourselves and try again. We learn to say: "It's not me, it's them/you/him/her/the market." Or: "It wasn't to be, there will be other chances," or just "Meh." We become a bit of a duck, and let it all flow off our backs, as if we're rejection-proof. Or we do if we can. It's all part of life's learning process.

For a creative writer, learning to be a duck is particularly important. Is it more important than for any other job? Yes, I think it is, for a number of reasons.

First, when you set out to write anything that is creative, you put your soul on the paper. Even if it's rubbish at first, you work hard at it, you bare your inner self, you invite people to read and review. And when they don't like it, it's a blow, even though you know in your heart not everybody is going to like your work. Even the most successful writers aren't read and enjoyed by a hundred per cent of readers; that would be ridiculous.

Second, if you're looking to be a published novelist, there are squillions of other writers out there looking for the same thing. If you go the traditional route, you need an agent. I heard a statistic about this: literary agents accept about one in one thousand submissions. Yes, one in one whole thousand. So nine hundred and ninety-nine people out of a thousand experience rejection. Looking for an agent is only the starting point, but it's a huge hurdle. Then, if you're lucky enough to be accepted by an agent – wait for it! – you have a massive mountain to climb to get a publisher. Agents, despite years of experience, their contacts, their selling-in skills, only place two in three manuscripts with traditional publishers. So the rejection process starts all over again, and many would-be authors never see their novels published.

You have to be not a duck but a rhinoceros, not to feel the agony of rejection as an author. Your manuscript, which you've laboured over perhaps for years, is being scrutinised by the most exacting, experienced editors in the land, and they don't like it. It's very hard to take.

And finally, once your precious novel is out there – oh joy! – in the published world, there are the comments from readers and reviewers which leave you crushed. The one-star reviews on Amazon, the top blogger who really didn't get into your story. More rejection – and there's nothing you can do about it.

Yet, while writers are knocked down all the time, they get up again and again, and nothing stops them writing. If you accept that we're not all masochists with something to prove, then it must follow that we love writing more than we hate rejection.

This is a massive simplification of the process we undergo to become published authors, but it's true. As a writer, I've had to learn many things. Handling rejection must be one of the most important. To all those writers out there still struggling to get their work out to readers – keep going, keep writing, get back up again. It is worth it.

After a long career in public relations, Susanna took the six-month Writing a Novel course at the Faber Academy, and her first psychological thriller was published in 2017. Since then she has published 8 more. All are available on Amazon. She writes dark, contemporary stories with strong female characters, often set in interesting places. She is a regular interviewee on radio, at literary festivals, in libraries and book club meetings. She is willing to speak at monthly meetings or help at workshops within say an hour's distance from her home in Marlow (Bucks). Visit Susanna at www.susannabeard.com; email her on info@susannabeard.com; like her page on Facebook: [@susannabeardauthor](https://www.facebook.com/susannabeardauthor); follow her on Twitter: [@SusannaBeard25](https://twitter.com/SusannaBeard25); or on Substack: susanna-beard.substack.com.

GROUP NEWS

**Northumbria Region****Cecilia Coulson**

Last summer, we ran a short story competition with the theme Weather. The winning entry was 'The Storm' by Olivier Nash (Newcastle). She was presented with a book token by Newcastle Chair, Terry Kirkham. Runner-up Dorothy Hullah's book token was presented by South Durham Chair, Ruth Beckett for her story 'Life Afloat'. I presented a token to Leigh Murphy, another runner-up, for her story 'A Walk in the Rain'. The stories are in the October online magazine Messenger-Northumbria Region (u3asite.uk)

Wolverhampton**Tess Fitzsimons & John Ellard**

We finally have our Anthology printed! There is something for everyone, comedy, tragedy, poetry, reviews & memories from 11 of our members. There is also a potted biography of each writer. The 60 page book costs £4 a copy +£1.70 p&p. All proceeds go to Compton Hospice, Wolverhampton. Cheques (payable to T.Fitzsimons) to Tess at 18, Pendrell Ct, Wolverhampton Rd, Codsall, Staffs WV8 1NZ email - fitzytess@hotmail.com

Beeston**Helen Stewart**

Recently, we have successfully introduced what we call an Inspiration Morning. We visit a beauty spot accessible by public transport, where we can be inspired by what we see & hear.

Stockton/Sedgefield**George Clarke**

We wrote the script for a Christmas pantomime broadcast on Radio Tyneside. 'Snow White & the Geordie Dwarves' was also featured in December's u3a Radio Podcast. Although following the general storyline of the historic pantomime there were subtle differences. The King was Vinnie King, owner of Newcastle nightclubs called the Magpies. His wife was a plastic & botox filled bimbo called Chardonnay. Her stepdaughter Snow White was a young, beautiful, talented footballer, never parted from her mobile phone. The Geordie Dwarves had a business making 'replica' goods & at one stage went off to a u3a meeting. If you now blend in an iPad instead of a Magic Mirror, the use of a storage container & a handsome paramedic you'll have some idea of this 'off the wall' panto.

Porthcawl**Marcia Humphries**

In 2025, our u3a reaches its 25th year. The 3 Writing groups wanted to produce a book of our stories & poems to mark the occasion. Our committee kindly agreed to lend us the money to pay printing costs. We had the books ready in time to catch the Christmas market & were quickly able to repay the loan from sales, with a small profit for the funds.

Every year, on the first Friday of December, we read some of our work to a paying audience at a seafront inn, with a buffet lunch to follow. It is always a sellout & gives us a valuable platform for our work.

Claudette Evans, who leads one of our writing groups, wrote the following account which appears in Porthcawl u3a's January Newsletter:-

The annual Christmas Readings from our 3 Writing groups brought festive cheer, heartfelt stories & plenty of laughter. From touching reflections & comedic poems to quirky stories, each reading warmed our hearts & reminded us of the joy of creativity during this special time of year. United in this shared passion, be it poetry, memoirs from the past or pure fiction, the room, adorned with baubles & balls, sparkled with the scribblers' magic. Thanking the readers was the wonderful Mrs Gladys Jones (aka Marcia), leaving us all inspired & eager for another year of words, whimsy & wonderful company.

RECOMMENDED BOOKS & PUBLICATIONS.

Back to Creative Writing School, by Bridget Whelan. This is like having an informal chat with an expert. It shows you the basics & makes you believe you can write.

Wannabe a Writer, by Jane Wenham-Jones. This book is chatty & full of humour, but packed with sound, practical advice, delivered in a way that makes it an enjoyable read.

Creative Writing for Dummies by Maggie Hamand great basic course.

365 Ways to Get You Writing by Jane Cooper loads of one-off exercises

A Novel in a Year, by Louise Doughty A frank and funny approach to the practicalities and techniques of novel writing.

From Pitch to Publication by Carole Blake Everything you need to know to get your novel published. By a literary agent who knows the publishing world inside out.

Creative Writing Handbook (u3a) Ideas & exercises on the elements of creative writing. Useful to work through with a group. Download (free) from the Creative Writing Subject Adviser's page on the u3a website.

Leading a Group I've come across a book that explains all possible aspects of leading.

Chapters include:

Are you teaching or facilitating?

Gathering ideas, information & resources.

Planning the first session.

Giving feedback.

Setting boundaries.

Managing the group.

Dealing with inappropriate/offensive behaviour.

Tackling poor attendance.

Dealing with complaints.

'Teaching Creative Writing' by Helen Stockton, is available on Amazon.

Books on Play Writing

The Art & Craft of Playwriting by Jeffrey Hatcher

The Dramatist's Toolkit by Jeffrey Sweet

FREE ON-LINE RESOURCES

TED TALKS Brief talks on lots of subjects. Make a search for TED talks on Creative Writing. The initials stand for Technology, Entertainment & Design.

MOOCS (Massive open on-line courses) Make a search for MOOCS on Creative Writing.

FUTURE LEARN Short, free on-line courses supported by OPEN UNIVERSITY, some aimed specifically at Creative Writing. Highly recommended.

Crime Writer Pauline Rowson Answers Two Frequently Asked Questions

1. What has been your greatest struggle as a writer?

Without doubt the struggle for most writers is getting published. It took 18 years before I achieved this. Along this journey I had countless rejections & false dawns. Even when I managed to get an agent she failed to get me a publisher & therefore quickly gave up on me. I admit that at that time, I was still learning my craft & my novels weren't polished enough.

I ploughed on undaunted & hopeful. I learned my craft, perfected my style of writing, found my voice & homed in on the crime genre. Before this I had written some sagas & a suspense novel, but it wasn't until I created DI Andy Horton that I finally hit on it. I always write from the single point of view & that of the male. Don't ask me why, it's just what I am comfortable writing.

During all this time I was also running a successful marketing & PR agency - there were the mortgage & bills to pay & I loved my work & my clients.

The first DI Andy Horton failed again to find a publisher, so I turned my hand to writing 2 standalone thrillers 'In Cold Daylight' & 'In for the Kill'. Neither of these secured me that publishing deal. As by this time my company was also publishing business books, I decided to branch into fiction publishing with my own efforts. Therefore my first 3 novels were in effect self-published. Fortunately they did so well that I was talent spotted by a publisher who signed me up to write my DI Andy Horton crime novels. From this I have gone on to write the Art Marvik mystery thriller series, the Inspector Ryga 1950s set mysteries & many more DI Andy Horton novels.

Recently, in an exciting twist, a highly respected enthusiastic independent publisher, Joffe Books, is republishing the entire DI Andy Horton series as the Solent Murder Mystery series, with new covers & titles, ensuring Andy's investigations & troubled life reach a brand new world wide audience.

2. How Do You Overcome Writers' Block ?

Wikipedia says writer's block is *'a condition, primarily associated with writing, in which an author loses the ability to produce new work, or experiences a creative slowdown. The condition ranges from difficulty in coming up with original ideas to being unable to produce a work for years.'*

Many writers have suffered this, & I have been asked at my talks if I have ever experienced the condition. At present, I am pleased to say I haven't.... & long may it last. There are however times when I'm not sure how to develop a character or plot & grind to a halt. When this happens there are 3 techniques I use that might help other writers:-

1. I work through this barren spot, thumping out words on the keyboard knowing they are rubbish but that eventually I will come out the other end with an idea which can be developed.
2. I take a walk, usually around the harbours where I live, or into the countryside. This is not only great for thinking through plots but helps give me energy, not to mention toning the muscles & keeping off the weight. As my novels are set around the sea, walks can at the same time stimulate plot ideas for future novels.

I pick up my knitting... great for stimulating the creative juices. Hand, eye & mind work together, & there is something soothing yet invigorating in the rhythm of the needles. It helps me think through plots & characters & I get a nice product at the end of it!

Pauline is a regular speaker at u3as, talking about life as a crime writer. She can be contacted via her website: www.rowmark.co.uk The website is interesting (you can sign up for her free newsletter) even if you don't want to contact her. She has a You Tube Channel showing videos of her interviews & talks. <http://www.youtube.com/paulinerowson13> You can follow her on Twitter and she has a Facebook page.

I have self-published on Amazon a series of 6 novels under my pen name, Guy Rolands, www.guyrolands.com Whilst writing this series & formatting the novels as e-books & paperbacks, I realised I was not using my word processor in the most efficient manner. I researched a better way, & documented it in the non-fiction book - Boring but Essential: A Handbook for Authors <https://amzn.eu/d/42t05TW> To help my group, I produced the following on correctly formatting text for competitions & submissions to publishers:-

General Ensure your dictionary (and grammar checker if available) is set to UK English. Exclamation marks should be used sparingly: they can be considered to be in poor style. Those of us who learned to type on manual typewriters will probably use 2 spaces between sentences. Since the advent of word processing, the double space is frowned upon. Only one space is now used between sentences. New paragraphs in creative writing (but not the first paragraph) are indented. A change of place, time or viewpoint in a passage is represented by a blank line (hit Enter) & a new paragraph (hit Enter again), which is not indented.

Indenting The simplest way to indent a paragraph is to place the cursor in the relevant text &, with the mouse, grab the top arrow in the text ruler at the top of the page & drag it 5 mm (1/2 a cm) to the right. Subsequent paragraphs will all be indented. To remove the indent from one paragraph, place the cursor before the first word & hit the Backspace key.

Most competitions and submissions for publication insist on the following:-

Double line spacing In Word, from the Home tab, launch the Spacing option & select 2.

Text in 12 point font size Font should be Times New Roman or similar eg Helvetica, Arial.

For a new document apply any changes before you begin writing. To apply a new font/size to an entire existing document/text hit CTRL + A before making the changes. Submitted files should be in the Word for Windows docx format.

Saving Documents Make a point of saving the document that you are working on often. Computers can crash, & the latest version of your work could be lost. Just hit CTRL + S every time you pause. Word for Windows is the universal file format for the interchange of creative writing. Files in this format end .docx. If you are working on a word processor that does not automatically create files in the format, use the Save as option and select the .docx suffix. Note the Save as option can also be used to save a new, differently named version. For work that you consider important & worth preserving, make a point of saving a copy, if possible, to a separate computer, hard drive or memory stick. Saving to the Cloud can be used as a back-up; however, beware: Microsoft Drive particularly has had problems recovering files. Also, make a point of saving your documents with meaningful names. If you are working on a lengthy project save (Save As) each version with a different number or letter, eg The Kitten Version 2.docx.

Dialogue. In the UK, single quotes are used while double quotes are used in the USA and Canada. Final punctuation of a line of dialogue, should appear inside the final apostrophe.

When a new or different person speaks, their dialogue should appear on a new, indented line.

If a sentence of dialogue is preceded by a phrase like He said, a comma should follow the word said.

If the dialogue is followed by a phrase like – he said – she whispered – etc. the following punctuation should be used. 'Here is the note,' he said. 'What?' she whispered. Note the use of the comma to end the dialogue in the first example & the lower case beginning of the word, he. In the second example, question mark at the end of the dialogue is followed by the lower case beginning of the word, she.

Note, however, the following example.

'What?' She frowned, not understanding his question.

This example requires the word She to begin with a capital letter as it starts a new sentence, whereas the previous examples do not.

When a person's name is in a piece of dialogue to indicate to whom the dialogue is addressed, a comma precedes and or follows the name.

'Emily, don't do that.'

'Don't do that, Emily.'

'Don't do that, Emily, or I will be cross.'

STUDY DAY SPEAKERS

Patrick Forsyth (Maldon & Dist) has had numerous books & articles published. He has spoken at u3as on "A Journey into Print", about his struggle to get a light-hearted travel book published. He has been a tutor at various workshops for (aspiring) writers. He can be contacted on: patrick@touchstone28.com

Author Anne Ludlow is available to speak to u3as &/or to work with South East Region groups, in person or by Zoom. Anne can cover general writing, writing novels & self-publishing. Let her know what might suit & she will try to fit in! www.anneludlowauthor.com
anneludlowauthor@gmail.com

Jo Livingston, u3a Living History Adviser, will talk to your group (however large or small) by Zoom on historical letters & documents.... why some have survived, often by chance, but some intended to survive have not. The talk is called Write it Down, & you can contact Jo at jo_livingston@hotmail.com

NEED HELP GETTING PUBLISHED?

Dr Alan Corkish, (Maghull & Lydiate) has experience as a senior editor & in typesetting & cover design. He is willing to advise u3a members or groups (including editing) free of charge. www.erbacce-press.com

Patricia Feinberg Stoner (Arun East) offers a free taster editing service to members writing or planning a book. Patricia, whose own books have won awards, has set up Perdisma Edits, a proofreading, copy editing & creative editing service. She will take a look at the first 1,000 words of your book.

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Facebook (Paw Prints in the Butter) Twitter (@perdisma). Website www.perdisma.com

Player Playwrights has provided space for writers to try out work since 1948. Professional actors read your work before a knowledgeable audience. This London-based group also holds regular play competitions & talks with agents, casting directors & theatre professionals. www.playerplaywrights.co.uk
tonydiggle@cainct.co.uk



Handbook for u3a Writing Groups

Available to download free from the Creative Writing Subject Adviser's page of the u3a website. Lots of exercises & material to use with groups.

u3a has a Facebook group where members can discuss writing & share books they have written. <https://www.facebook.com/groups/137742514769904>

COMPETITIONS

Free e-mail bulletin Chainlinks is a good way to keep abreast of what's on. Email Steph McGill & ask to be put onto the mailing-list. artswest@cheshirewest.gov.uk

WRITING PROMPTS

There are lots on the website www.creative-writing-beginnings.com

Items for next issue.

Please send me items, however brief, as email attachments, unless there is no-one in your group who can do this & you have to send by post.

Please include: group news, comments, ideas, useful websites, magazines, books, competitions....anything worth sharing.

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DEADLINE FOR NEXT ISSUE

15th April

Marcia

