



# News & Views

▶ Empowering authors and publishers to create and market books

NOVEMBER 2008

## NOVEMBER 12 MEMBERSHIP MEETING:

### It Takes a Village to Write a Good Book

You've worked months, even years, to write your story. Is your message concise, clear, and appealing? Don't risk negative reviews of your finished work because editing is lacking.

**Editing is what distinguishes a professional book from an amateur one.** Editors do much more than simply fix punctuation and grammar mistakes. These behind-the-scenes publishing specialists can guide you through the entire production process—from content development to manuscript preparation to copyediting, indexing, permissions, and more—so that you present a professional book to the marketplace.

Come learn how editors can help you transform your work into publication-ready material. **Editors Christine Frank and Ligaya Figueras** will discuss the ins and outs of the editorial process. They will tell you how you can find an editor and develop a strong author-editor relationship so that the publishing process flows and your product shines.

#### Featured Speakers:

**Ligaya Figueras** has been an independent publishing professional since 2001. She provides comprehensive editorial services, and specializes in small press educational materials. She has edited dozens of foreign language textbooks and ancillaries for EMC Paradigm/Symtalk, and has worked with K-12 educational materials publishers Teacher Created, Frog Street Press, and McDonald Publishing.



Ligaya is also a freelance journalist who covers small business management, food/dining, fine art, travel, outdoors, and general interest. She is a columnist for *Sauce*, St. Louis' food and dining magazine, and a contributor for *Art Calendar*, a nationally-distributed business magazine for visual artists. Her credits have also appeared in *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, *St. Louis Magazine*, *Missouri Life*, *The Writer*, *Children's Digest*, and *Silent Sports*, among others.

"As a writer, I know the anxiety that comes with handing over your raw manuscript to an editor. But the author-editor relationship does not have to be strained or combative. When you

understand how to work with an editor, the publishing process is smooth and readers hear and understand your unique voice."

**Christine Frank** has been an editor her entire life, and established Editing & Indexing in Virginia in 1997 after serving as a house editor in the non-profit, retail, and architecture and engineering industries. Clients needed more than scrubbing and organizing, though, and so Christine Frank & Associates came along, the associates being designers, printers, illustrators, cartographers, and more. Now, as a full prepress book production company, they take a project from the author's manuscript to a bound book, a beautifully crafted, saleable product. Typical clients are associations, organizations, institutions, and foundations, with a need to publish to get out to their constituents and without a publications department.

Her special concerns in editing are manuscript preparation, fact-checking, and correcting word usage.


**Join us the second Wednesday evening of the month, November 12, at the Lodge at Des Peres. Doors open for networking at 6:30 PM; meeting begins at 7:00 PM. The formal meeting concludes around 8:30 with networking continuing till 9:00.** 📖

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## Thought for the Month

Good editors are worth their weight in gold. Have you ever noticed how a tiny speck of dirt can muddy a whole glass of clear water? So it is with small mistakes in an otherwise worthwhile manuscript. Often our human nature allows us to see the big picture, but small errors escape our closest inspection. Why expend enormous energy in creating a book when small mistakes can bring the whole enterprise into question? You need an experienced partner in the development of your book; another pair of eyes to aid you in making your book as perfect as it possibly can be. Without an experienced and involved editor, it is almost guaranteed that your book will be much less than you hoped for and it might even be hurt in sales, as your credibility will be called into question.

(Excerpted from *The Book Publishers' Handbook*, by Eric Kampmann)  
We have copies of this excellent book available for purchase at our monthly meetings. 


## Helpful Links to Find Editors

These sites give you access to many different editors and could be a good place to begin your search.

**Book Editing Associates:** is a network of professional writers and editors. The freelance editors and writers who apply to join must have over five years of experience and a track record of editing traditionally published books (as opposed to vanity or self-publishing). Applicants take several editing and writing tests. In this network, editors may offer only the services in which they excel.

**[www.book-editing.com](http://www.book-editing.com)**

**Gropen Associates:** Financial Specialist Marion Gropen provides affordable expertise and outsourced services to small and medium size publishers. Her site also contains a wonderful list of editorial resources (and more) on the page called Reference Desk. **[www.gropenassoc.com](http://www.gropenassoc.com)**

**Book Central Station:** Brian Jud's site contains lists with hundreds of resources, all rated by those who have worked with them. A two-week trial membership is free. Once you've sampled the lists, you can join for a small annual membership fee which gives you full access to not only the continually updating lists, but also the generous supply of tips, articles and more. **[www.bookcentralstation.com](http://www.bookcentralstation.com)** 

## PRESIDENT'S CORNER BY ED SYLVIA

I would never publish a book without first having it read by a professional editor. I often tell people that I did not consider my first book project "real" until it had been edited by an expert.




Edward Sylvia

This month's meeting is an important one, focusing on the topic of editing your book. Our two expert speakers this month, Christine Frank and Ligaya Figueras, are editors who happen to be members of SLPA. It should be a really useful meeting for everyone. Our membership is filled with people you should get to know. Be sure to make the most of the opportunity to network at our meetings and on our new blogs.

I also want to tell you that this is my last President's column, as I am stepping down as President after our SLPA Board election this month. Having served as your President for three of the last seven years, I am proud of the topics of discussion and the programs we've been able to bring you and very grateful to all our talented and dedicated board members for volunteering their time and energy to SLPA.

This year, we had good turnouts at our How To Publish workshops last March at Borders (during Small Press Month) and standing-room-only attendance at our presentation at The Big Read this past October. The SLPA Co-op Booth also had a great location and was the best-looking booth there. Our members' books were beautifully displayed and the booth had good traffic. Thanks to the dedicated volunteers who took care of the booth and gave presentations at the workshop.

I'd also like to thank those who spent much of this past year building our new SLPA web site. The site will continue to improve as we finish up the features. In addition to the great new member marketing features you can see online, it has tools in the background that will help us to make sure your membership experience is a good one. You'll even be able to register for events and join and renew memberships online now. Members will have another chance to submit their books and bios for the Online Catalog and Speakers Bureau in December.

I will continue to stay involved with the organization and I know the SLPA Board will continue to improve your membership experience in the years to come. Be sure to participate in the online member survey November 8-14, so we know what will help you the most. *Thanks for your support and best of luck to you all.* 

— Ed Sylvia, President  
**[slpa1@staircasepress.com](mailto:slpa1@staircasepress.com)**

## Picture Book Secrets

by Margot Finke

There is a big myth out there in the ordinary world. It says writing a picture book is easy—a snap! We've all heard a doting mother exclaim, "My little Ralph always does the cutest things. I'm going to write a picture book about them." And she does: sending it off to languish in a slush pile, waiting for some poor assistant editor to cringe over.

I know you readers are far smarter than that doting Mom. You understand that writing a picture book takes special writing know-how: a flair for choosing perfect words, the same way an artist knows how to choose the perfect colors. Writing a picture book is all about painting word pictures: a marriage between artwork and writing. When these two talents come together, they make a delightful book children beg you read to them, again-and-again.

Look below for the secret clues to writing a really wonderful picture book:

### Checklist for writing picture books:

- **CONFLICT:** The main character needs to be in conflict with something or someone for the story to grip small readers. Have some problem that bothers, or gnaws, or leads to trouble. The hero/heroine gets to solve the problem over the course of the story. The solving is the meat in your story
- **DIALOGUE:** Kids like realistic fast action dialogue. It brings things up close and personal.
- **READ** lots of picture books. Ask your librarian to point you in the direction of classics, as well as those published in the last couple of years.

### A good way to plot a picture book:

- Something happens to someone  
*and*
- this leads to making a goal  
*and*
- that needs a plan of action  
*but*
- forces try to stop the main character  
*yet*
- he moves forward because there is a lot at stake  
*then*
- things get as bad as they can  
*and*
- he learns an important lesson  
*however*
- when he is offered the prize he had sought so hard, he has to decide whether to take it or not

*thus*

- in making this final decision he satisfies a need created by something in his past

### The 5 "C" rules for writing compelling fiction:

- **CHARACTERS:** both you and the reader care about
- **COMPLICATIONS:** something happens: crises, conflict
- **CHOICES:** your character makes
- **CONFLUENCE:** tie it all together at the end
- **CONCISE:** make the writing tight (don't waffle on about things that don't move the plot forward)

### Prune out those overused words that will not be missed:

Such as: just, that, seemed, suddenly, felt like, some, nice, very (add some of your own to this list).

### Search out active and powerful verbs and evocative

**adjectives.** Because of the word restrictions (1,000 or less – preferably a lot less), every word you choose must earn its keep. Weak or ho-hum verbs will not do. Use your Word Thesaurus (Shift F7) to find verbs that shout action, reek of power, and paint an active word picture in your reader's head. Make sure your verbs fit the actions. Verbs do rule!

### Choose adjectives the same way you would choose a

**valuable gem.** They must resonate with clarity and sparkle. Forget: nice, happy, good, bad, and other dull and overused adjectives. Exchange them for: pleasurable, overjoyed, exceptional, or ghastly. Make sure the adjectives you choose are the right descriptive words.

**Tight writing is mandatory:** "Picture Book" is a two-word description for a reason. It is a book that is 50% words and 50% illustrations: and it all must fit into 32 pages. This works extremely well, when the writer leaves a trail of clever word clues on every page. The artist uses these word clues to expand the story into many delightful illustrations that amplify the clues, and the rest of the story.

### A Summary to write by:


- Craft your story without wasting one word.
- Keep the plot simple
- Find powerful verbs and evocative adjectives.
- Use fun and humor – kids love that!
- HOOK your reader in the first paragraph.
- Limit the number of characters
- Always let your young POV (point of view) solve the problem
- Write in specifics. Young children do not grasp ephemeral ideas.
- Use only one POV (point of view) character.
- New writers usually work better in third person past tense.
- SHOW what happens, by the use of action scenes and sharp dialogue – Telling is a big yawn!
- Think of your story as a garden: prune hard, and treat unnecessary words and sentences like weeds—DIG THEM OUT!

*Continued on page 5*



## Picture Book Secrets ... *Continued*

- Plan your plot and writing, so you end up with approx 14-15 evenly spaced illustration opportunities.
- A 32-page picture book (the usual size) needs approx 14-15 illustrations.

Writing a really wonderful picture book is one of the hardest, trickiest things a writer can tackle. However, the satisfaction and pleasure you feel, when it is finally published, is worth every rejection, every rewrite, and all those obsessed hours you spent waiting beside your mailbox. *You Did It!* 

## Voice, Focus, POV: How to Make All Three Pop

by Margot Finke

Okay, you ask, “*What the heck are Voice, Focus, and POV?*” Well, I’ll tell you. They are three elements you must get right if you want to become a published writer.

**VOICE: The reader’s personal involvement with your characters.** Your character’s “voice” makes him human and real to your reader. It also makes readers care about him and the problems they share. Every character in your book needs a unique voice. You can accomplish this by giving them individual quirks that identify them. Specific and repeated speech patterns also help characters become individuals in their own right: living, breathing people, so wrapped in the fabric of your tale that readers really care what happens to them. Use actions and reactions after dialogue, instead of the usual said. This paints a more intimate picture of the character’s emotions, and enriches them. The goal is for your reader to know, by the character’s actions, reactions, and speech, which character is speaking, without the need for attribution. If you can make this happen some of the time, you have nailed voice.

### **FOCUS: How to keep your finger on the pulse of your story.**

Focus is similar to juggling a number of balls in the air. As a writer, you must juggle various elements of your story. You begin with the characters, and their impact on the plot, plus a host of small interconnecting details you need to keep in mind. If you put one character in the wrong place at the wrong time—that’s one ball dropped. If you forget that character A had a fight with character D in chapter 4, yet both seem buddy-buddy in chapter five, that’s ball number two down. Then, if you send your main character down a sidetrack, without giving him a realistic option of finding his way back to the main story path, you have the makings of a domino effect: a chain reaction that can have all those balls bouncing around your feet. Disaster!


As they say in sports, “Keep your eye on the ball!” For writers, this means knowing where your plot is headed, keeping your characters pointed in the right direction, and tracking the small details that often become lost, and doom new writers to rejection.

**POV: The character through whose eyes readers see the story.** POV means point of view, and usually applies to your main character. This means that your plot needs to unfold through their eyes. Everything that happens, is either seen, heard, or experienced by your POV character. However, having two POV characters is not unheard of for middle-grade or young adult books. Two characters, who take on the POV role in alternating chapters, can grip readers with their different slant on events. Their wildly different responses to a variety of plot stimuli can also make exciting reading.

Beware of “head hopping.” This term is used when several different POV characters are introduced, willy-nilly, within one chapter. If you do attempt this (for YA books, and older mid grades, I suggest introducing no more than one new POV), you must set up the preceding paragraph in a way that prepares your reader for the POV change. The same applies when you go back to your original POV character.

### **To sum up these most important factors:**

Rules are made to be broken, and no one says you can’t break these three particular rules. You can. Yet, unless you break them brilliantly, editors frown, and rejection letters flood your mailbox.

*Happy Writing, Mates!* 



Margot Finke is an Aussie. She has lived in Oregon with her husband and family for over 25 years. Margot writes midgrade adventure fiction and rhyming picture books. *Kangaroo Clues*, an adventure in rhyme, has recently been published. Other books in her series of Aussie and American animal rhymes are to follow. Margot’s manuscript critique service offers personal guidance to beginners and

others seeking a fresh opinion. Visit her website for further details. Her “Writer’s Retreats & Conferences” column appears regularly in the *Smart Writers Journal*. [www.margotfinke.com](http://www.margotfinke.com)

Next Deadline

November 21

### **Don’t be late – no kidding!**

Send us news on your new releases or upcoming appearances or anything else you wish to share.


Get your news and articles in EARLY! Send your information, articles and announcements to [newslettereditor@stlouispublishers.org](mailto:newslettereditor@stlouispublishers.org).

## Why Do I Need a Book Editor?

By Michael Garrett (Stephen King's First Editor)

From his FAQ at <http://www.manuscriptcritique.com>

**If you plan to submit your manuscript to traditional publishers,** you should eliminate all possible errors in advance. Manuscript submissions may be rejected for the simplest of reasons. Likewise, you could be unknowingly committing major errors. You have only one opportunity to make a first impression on a publisher; a professional edit will maximize the impression you make.

**If you plan to self-publish,** you'll want your printed book to compare favorably with traditionally published books, all of which are subjected to thorough edits; that's what assures consistent quality from one book to the next. To maximize your self-publication experience, have your manuscript professionally edited and avoid potential embarrassment by correcting all errors prior to printing. 

## SLPA Board 2009 Election

November is the month when we elect the Board of Directors who will lead SLPA in the upcoming year. The election to confirm these volunteer nominees will be held at the November meeting on Wednesday, November 12, 2008. All current members in attendance are eligible to vote.

### The nominees for the 2009 Board of Directors are:

President – Lynnette Schuepbach

Vice President – Natasha Moore

Secretary – Linda Austin

Treasurer – Susan Whinnery

Membership Chairman – Christine Frank


Communications Chairman – Ligaya Figueras

Webmaster – Sue Sylvia

Publicity Coordinator – Danielle Alexander

Display Coordinator – Barbara Davis

Newsletter Co-Editor – Peggy Nehmen

These board members are stepping down at the end of their current term: Ed Sylvia, Bill Collier and Farzad Wafapoor. We thank them for their contributions to SLPA. 

## Questions About SLPA?



Contact Membership Chairman:  
Christine Frank at 314-205-2679 or  
Assistant Membership Coordinator:  
Linda Austin at 314-822-1170

## Application Time is Here! The 2008 IBPA Publishing University Scholarship

Every year, our parent group, IBPA, The Independent Book Publishers Association, holds an educational event for publishers called Independent Publishing University, or IBPU for short. It's an incredible event, and we highly recommend it for both educational and networking opportunities. This year, the big IBPU will be held at the end of May in New York. IBPU University is held each year right before Book Expo America, the premier trade show for the publishing industry, which attracts a global audience. It's very worthwhile to check it out while you're there.

Every year, IBPA awards a scholarship for one member from each affiliate group (like SLPA) to attend Independent Publishing University. The scholarship recipient then brings back what they have learned and shares it with their affiliate group.

The scholarship is generally awarded to a publisher who can benefit from the networking and education opportunities in growing his/her publishing company and giving back to SLPA. The scholarship includes free registration to attend the entire Publishing University, plus a \$500 stipend to help pay for travel expenses. (Together, this is an opportunity worth over \$1,000)

The criteria for applicants is as follows:

- Must be a member of IBPA as well as SLPA.
- Must be a publisher, preferably in the early stages of developing his/her company.
- Has not received the scholarship in the past.

To apply for the scholarship, fill out the following form and send it to:

Sue Sylvia, Staircase Press Design, PO Box 83, Troy, IL 62294  
(email is also fine) [slpa@staircasepress.com](mailto:slpa@staircasepress.com) 

## We Welcome Our Newest Members

**Tom McClarren:** [tommclarren@charter.net](mailto:tommclarren@charter.net)

**Chris McClarren:** [wildreturn@charter.net](mailto:wildreturn@charter.net)

Father and daughter author team Tom and Chris collaborated on their book, a clever account of one gutsy boy's experience outwitting boredom and adversity with imaginative chutzpah in a Catholic orphanage from 1945-1954.

*Morsels of Mischief: Orphan Tales from my Childhood* 

SLPA Monthly Newsletter design by SLPA member Peggy Nehmen.  
Nehmen-Kodner Design [www.n-kcreative.com](http://www.n-kcreative.com)