

S C B W I

S O C a I

NEWSLETTER



NOVEMBER 2021 / ISSUE 7



Hannah Sease - www.hannahsease.com

A LOOK INSIDE

Seeking Feedback on Your Work : Input vs Instinct	2
My Take on Queries	3
Vegetables and Sugar	4
Podcast Highlights Part II	5
Member Spotlight	6
Hello and Goodbye	7
Grammar Nerd	8 - 9

LOCAL ARTISTS FEATURED ON EVERY PAGE!

SEEKING FEEDBACK ON YOUR WORK : Input vs Instinct

By Lauren Ranalli from the SCBWI Michigan chapter

Lauren Ranalli is an award-winning self-published children's book author, the Director of Marketing and Communications for an international non-profit, and the mom of two high-spirited children. Visit her on Instagram at [@lauren_ranalli_author](https://www.instagram.com/lauren_ranalli_author) or at www.laurenranalli.com to receive 2 FREE resources, [Finding Social Media Success](#), and [Daily Marketing Strategies for Authors](#).

As all authors know, receiving feedback is an important part of the writing process. But what happens when the feedback isn't helpful or doesn't align with your gut instincts?

I was scrolling through some Facebook groups for authors this past weekend when I saw an aspiring author post this question to a group:

"I gave my book draft to someone and their feedback was that it should rhyme. Can anyone recommend resources on how to write a rhyming book?"

My immediate thought was, "Wait, you're changing your entire book because of what ONE person said?".

And then I realized that I've done this too. Not this exactly, but I've done some form of this. I think we all have.

Seeking Input

Who here has felt a little uncertain when first starting out at a new job, taking on a new opportunity, or writing a new book? (Hands up, people!) During those moments, we often reach out for feedback or advice. And when we receive a particularly "decisive" piece of feedback, it can be tempting to jump in and agree. After all, we sought out this person's advice because they are an expert or we trust them, right?

Here is some of the feedback I have received in the past year:

- Your character should be a girl instead of a boy.

- You shouldn't include elephants in your zoo book. It's too polarizing.
- I prefer Cover Option #1 instead of Cover Option #2.
- Your book needs to feel more fun. You should change the ending.
- The rhyme on page 16 seems to be missing a syllable. It doesn't flow as easily as the other pages.

Seeking input is an incredibly important part of the writing process. You should never write your book in a vacuum. Good writers enlist professional editors, beta readers, and trusted friends to look over their work. And by doing this, you will receive a lot of feedback. Some of it will be very useful (my editor was right, there WAS a missing syllable on page 16), and some should be taken with a grain of salt (the elephants remained in the book).

Trusting Your Instincts

Remember that your books should reflect YOUR vision. If something doesn't feel right, it isn't right. If you need to ask for another round of edits on your book cover, invest in the edits. If your book launch team isn't following the agreed upon marketing plan, revisit the plan or rework your team.

You know your book better than anyone else so trust your instincts!



Hannah Sease - www.hannahsease.com

MY TAKE ON QUERIES, and Why You Should Stop Procrastinating

By EJ Lagerberg

EJ Lagerberg has been a member of SCBWI since 2020. She dreams in all genres but writes mostly MG. Her professional writing was all business, and not very much fun. Or tasty.

I am new at this. Super new. Only started querying this year. I've listened to speakers, read every blog, vlog and sample query until my eyeballs screamed and the words ran together in an alphabetic mush. Everybody has a take on what to include, where to start, and how to catch an agent's attention.

I have learned two things that stay true no matter the style of query letter or manuscript:

- 1. Everyone gets rejected.** Many great, acclaimed, made-into-a-motion picture novels were rejected. A lot. Because of Winn-Dixie wins the rejection prize, with over 400. Chicken Soup for the Soul checks in at 144. Jack Canfield posed a great question – "What if I'd quit at 100?" Catcher in the Rye, Lord of the Flies. Carrie. All rejected enough to cause their authors a pang of eroding self-confidence. And to Think That I Saw It on Mulberry Street – 28 rejections. Didn't stop Dr. Seuss.
- 2. Literature is a potluck.** Sending out queries is like taking your favorite dish to a worldwide picnic: not everybody wants grilled vegetables. Or potato salad. Or mac and cheese. Or burgers. Or sturströmming, Sweden's famous stinky fish.

I have set a personal goal of 100 queries for my first work. I will not consider the quantity of rejections until I hit that number. (And then I'll remind myself of Jack Canfield.) That's not to say that I don't reword and rewrite my query and synopsis – my query changes with the tone of the agent I'm sending it to. One included odd tidbits of personal information in his agent blurb and asked the same in submissions. So I told him that I have had poison oak more times than I can count. One of my odd tidbits.

The point is, just because someone doesn't like my

salted silk cabbage doesn't mean it's not good. Of course it's good. I love that recipe. I just need to keep offering it, and I will find another person who feels the same way, maybe even someone who's never tried salted silk cabbage and is delightfully surprised at how delicious it is.

So send out your pickled herring. Your pasta salad. Your organic fruit bars rolled in roasted quinoa. Your rolls and butter. Someone wants it. Someone is going to exclaim at the deliciousness of that surprising recipe, and appreciate how long it took you to make it. And then you will have your agent, that person who will take your recipe to the next potluck, offering it to the editors and publishers of the world. "Have you tried this? It's absolutely delicious!"



Gabriela Vega - gabrielvega.myportfolio.com

Vegetables AND SUGAR

By Ilana Rogel-Wieder

Ilana is the owner of Beyond Fitness Yoga. She has been practicing yoga for the last 20 years. Ilana received her M.F.A. in Theatre, where she was trained as an actress, director and storyteller. Ilana is on the SCBWI SoCal Region planning committee.

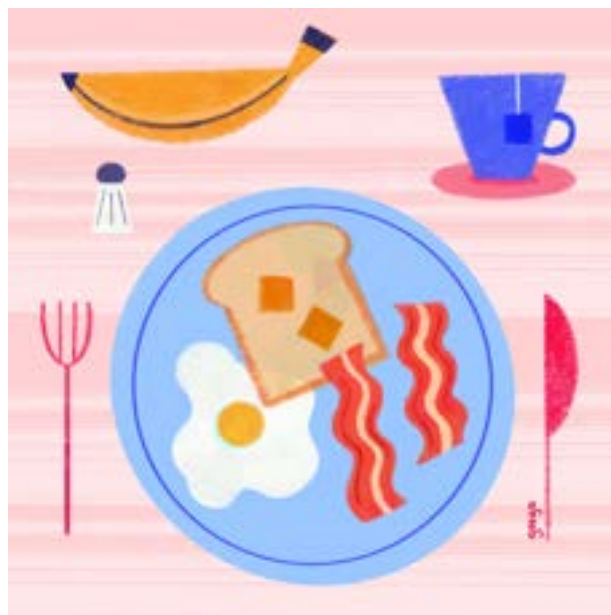
Her yoga website is www.beyondfitnessyoga.com Twitter: [@IlanaRW1](https://twitter.com/IlanaRW1) Instagram: [@ilana_rw](https://www.instagram.com/ilana_rw)

In the last several critique meetings I've attended, both through SCBWI and other venues, I've listened to many picture book and middle grade stories. Some stories aimed to entertain and were cute and bubbly in nature. Other stories aimed to educate or represent a point of view and were quite serious in nature.

My personal writing style tends to gravitate towards writing the serious, the dramatic, the moral. And can you blame me? I come from a country where Leo Tolstoy wrote WAR AND PEACE. Though, recently, I had an editorial consultation with the amazing Heather Montgomery, author of BUGS DON'T HUG and WHAT'S IN YOUR POCKET? She taught me a very important lesson which changed the way I think about writing forever. She said, "In order to feed children vegetables, you have to add some sugar."

So what does sugar have to do with stories? Sugar is the fun, cute, bubbly and relatable details that children of all ages need in order to digest the vegetables, the hard core morals or the serious part of the story. If we try to feed children only vegetables, only the serious stuff, they will quickly toss the vegetables (and the book) aside and run to play. If we feed them only sugar, it might give them a quick rush but that, too, won't last for long and soon they will be on the lookout for the next sugary treat.

This is not to say that either style of writing is better than the other. I believe all styles have a place for true expression and voice. The shift in my own writing, however, has been to balance the metaphorical vegetables with the sugar in all my stories. Whether I'm writing an entertaining story or a deep soul searching drama, I try to see where I can add some fun or light humor so I can have a good balance of both the vegetables and the sugar.



Gabriela Vega - gabrielavega.myportfolio.com



Podcast Highlight

By E. L. Tenenbaum

E. L. Tenenbaum, aka our amazing Esther and social media maven, is the author of the End Ever After series, the Sapphire Legend series. In addition to giving unselfishly of her time and talent to the SCBWI Newsletter and critique group, she also produces and co-hosts the Oh My Word! Podcast. More about Esther at [@ELTenenbaum](https://www.instagram.com/ELTenenbaum) Podcast host [@oh_my_word_podcast](https://www.instagram.com/oh_my_word_podcast) Take a book off the shelf at ELTenenbaum.com

Greetings Fellow SoCal Chapter Members!

The (almost exact) quotes to follow are from BONUS! episodes of my podcast Oh My Word!, which are interviews spotlighting all kinds of people from the book world: librarians, writers, agents, editors, and more. Many so far have also featured fellow chapter members, in addition to the wonderful theme music composed by Tim Burke!

(See all podcast episodes [here](#) and look out for ones marked BONUS! or visit [this](#) YouTube playlist. [Subscribe](#) or [follow](#) for instant release updates of the even more awesome guests coming up!)

"I could've aged up the character, it would've been a little bit different story...I really connect to this age, and I think that this middle grade age, when most of us think about our favorite books growing up or our first favorite books that made us love reading, we often think of those middle grade novels."

Lynne Kelly - [Song of a Writer with Lynne Kelly](#)

"I really spent a lot of time thinking about what would make a perfect middle grade...I'd never really concentrated on a sense of place, so I'd never written a place and tried to bring that into the character. So, I try to write characters that the reader would want to spend time with but I'd never created a place that the reader would want to be while the reader spent time with the characters."

Thomas Taylor - [Into the Sea with Thomas Taylor](#)

"Especially when I was in high school in Alabama... and I didn't know English, so I tried to draw and then just hand it to people. I know it sounds awkward, and that's how I made friends."

Shiho Pate - [Talking Through Pictures with Shiho Pate](#)

"The cover is the first point and call, the selling point, and then once you pick it up there's the blurb and that's the other selling point. So yeah, visually, you absolutely should judge a book by its cover, otherwise the cover's failed to do its job."

Leo Nickolls - [Cover Love with Leo Nickolls](#)

"I was still sharpening those skills and figuring out what I wanted to do...I would sort of always find a way to just exercise that creative muscle, but it was never really like a plan...It was more just like, this is just something I love to do, and then when opportunities came my way, I was prepared for them because I had spent that whole time practicing."

Tom Booth - [For Love of the Draw with Tom Booth](#)

"I really don't like when authors compare themselves to other authors, because every author and every author's journey is so unique, and I think it never ends well, comparing yourself to another person, in life, it doesn't even have to do with publishing, in life. We're all on our own unique journeys, and we should appreciate it and live in it and enjoy it."

Krista Vitola - [On a Journey with Krista Vitola](#)



Emmeline Forrestal - www.emmelineforrestal.com



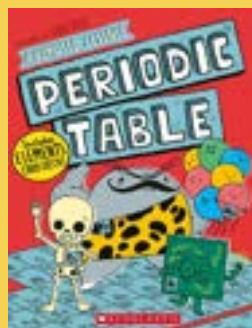
MEMBER NEWS

By Desi St. Amant

Jon St. Amant - jonsaintamant.com



Laurie Zaleski's novel, *A Young Person's Field Guide to Finding Lost Shipwrecks*, was selected as one of the top books in 2020 by Kirkus Reviews as well as winning numerous awards, including a 5 Star Review from Readers Favorite, 2 awards from Royal DragonFly – 2nd Place Winner for YA Nonfiction and Honorable Mention in New Author Fiction, A Finalist in American Book Fest for Children's Nonfiction, and an 8/10 rating from BookLife by Publishers Weekly. Laurie has also been selected to be a mentee in the 2021-2022 SCBWI WWA Mentorship Program.
Twitter: [@LAZaleski](https://twitter.com/LAZaleski) LinkedIn: [lazaleski](https://www.linkedin.com/in/lazaleski)

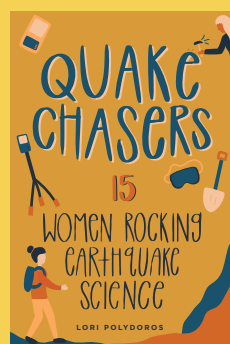


Shiho Pate's new book *Animted Science: Periodic Table* (Scholastic) is out now. Buy it anywhere books are sold.

Website: shihopate.com
Instagram: [@shihopate](https://www.instagram.com/shihopate)



Heather Buchta's new book, *CHASING AFTER KNIGHT*, published by Penguin Workshop, will be released April 26, 2022. Heather describes her latest novel as a YA Romance Adventure and it can be pre-ordered [anywhere](#).



We are excited to announce that *Quake Chasers: 15 Women Rocking Earthquake Science*, the new book by Lori Polydoros, is due to be released April 12, 2022. This YA non-fiction book explores the lives of 15 diverse, contemporary female scientists with a variety of specialties related to earthquake science, and is a part of the Women in Power Series at Chicago Review Press. Available for pre-order through [this link](#)

Lori Polydoros has been writing for children for over 20 years and educating for 30. She currently teaches high school and community college English while writing both fiction and non-fiction for children. She is the author of books, articles, and short stories for newspapers, magazines, small presses, and educational publishers. She lives in Orange, California and is a long-time SCBWI/SoCal volunteer.



Desi St. Amant is a high school English teacher and an aspiring middle grade novelist. Send your member news to her email at dstamant07@gmail.com.



HELLO AND GOODBYE



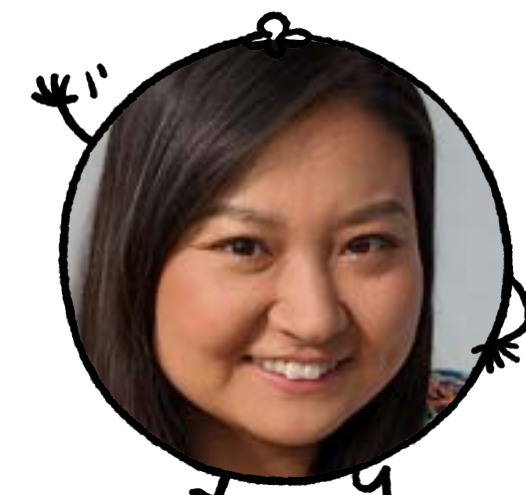
REGIONAL ADVISOR

Thank you
Tim Burke
Hello
Bev Plass



ILLUSTRATOR COORDINATOR

Thank you
Cynthia De La Torre
Hello
Shiho Pate



NEWSLETTER

Thank you
Susanne LaBrake
Shiho Pate
Hello
Samantha Winkler
Carlene Griffith



Grammar NERD

By Tim Burke

Dialogue and Dialogue Tags

I'll assume you know how to punctuate basic dialogue. Here are more advanced situations followed by other conventions.

1. Interrupting in the middle of the dialogue. RULE: Separate sections with commas and use lowercase.

"Your problem," she said, "is you're disorganized."

2. Dialogue interrupted by a full sentence in the middle. Use em dashes and lowercase.

"If you ever say that to me again"—she stood up and slammed her mug down on the desk—"we'll never work together again."

3. Common mistake of using a nonspeaking verb as if speaking

Wrong: She smiled, "Well, hello there." "What the heck?" he frowned.
 "No way," he scowled.
 One cannot smile, scowl, or frown words. These words don't make sounds.
 Correct: She smiled. "Well, hello there." "What the heck?" He frowned.
 "No way." he said, scowling.

4. Inner dialogue. Use italics and punctuate the tag the same way you would if spoken aloud.

Don't use quotation marks even if you use a tag like "he thought."
 CORRECT: *Why in the world is he staring at me*, Angelica wondered.

"You and me, honey—we was made for each other."
 Sally kept her expression neutral. *Oh for sure, dude. Like a fish and a bicycle or a snake and shoes.*

About Tim Burke

Regional Advisor for the SCBWI SoCal chapter, Tim Burke also teaches ESL in the classroom and has his own private tutoring company. Tim writes adventure tales for the MG and YA audience with slashes of humor, a bit of a dark side, and a few robots and dung beetles thrown in for good measure. Tim is also the regular and generous contributor of our grammar column.

Check out Tim's wild and wacky site at: www.timburketales.com

Craft issues related to dialogue

The above points are pretty cut and dry, reflecting the commonly accepted conventions of the language. Now, however, I'd like to push this column's boundaries from strict grammar into the mechanics of craft.

Let's look at dialogue tags.

However, before we leap in, let me preface this exploration by saying, "Whenever someone lays down rules for making art—whether it be painting, dance, music, writing, and so on—you should at least be on your guard if not outright running for the hills." Creativity ignores rules, so consider the following discussion to be merely an interesting topic to think about, to experiment with—not hard and fast Laws of Writing. Yes, do consider these ideas. But then decide what is best for you and your own writing. OK, here we go.

Bob: Why can't authors just use said?
 "Huh?" intoned Sheila vocally.
 "Sorry. That was a strange thing to ask," Bob generated sonically from his speech organs.

1. The common position among editors and agents is to stick to said or asked and to avoid verbs that call attention to themselves as the dialogue above parodies. The rationale is that readers skip right over said and asked, focusing—and more rightly so—on the dialogue itself.

"Get out of here," he bellowed/vociferated/boomed/yelled/shouted/etc.
 Instead, try to let the dialogue itself do the heavy lifting. "Get out of here!" he said. Most readers would already understand these words to be shouted.

But you might need the special verb if the tone is not readily apparent.
 "I love you," he whispered. Versus "I love you," he shouted.

Or check out the difference in tone here:
 "You're my sun and moon," he said.
 "You're my sun and moon," he whispered.
 "You're my sun and moon," he hissed. [Ooh, wow. Creepy.]

Bottom line: does your dialogue already do the heavy lifting, making the special verb unnecessary?

"I can't. It's too hard," she whined. The spoken words already sound whiny, right? Maybe trust your dialogue here and use she said.

Grammar NERD

By Tim Burke

2. The other area of contention is the overuse of adverbs. Make sure they provide necessary clarification.

"I'm going to kill you," he said angrily/he growled angrily. [The spoken words pretty much convey anger, so maybe just use said and no adverb. And *Growled angrily* is redundant.]

Likewise, the following seem redundant, right?

"Don't," he shouted loudly. "Why?" she asked curiously.

However, this adverb adds something extra.

"I'm going to kill you," he said pleasantly.

Or clarify with action coupled with dialogue.

"I'm going to kill you," he said, drawing the machete from his belt.

3. Another area of conventional wisdom for writers is how to emphasize. The above example changes the meaning, so it is essential and useful to italicize. However, it doesn't serve a purpose in this example: "I *really* like the song." So are we laying down laws that must be followed in writing? Nope. We are simply laying out worthwhile food for thought, thereby ensuring your prose is as nuanced as possible.

- ALL CAPS: Most industry folks discourage the use of all caps to emphasize that the person is shouting. "I CAN'T TAKE THIS ANY LONGER." Instead, "I can't take this any longer!" [exclamation point] or a special verb like *shouted/yelled*.
- Italics: a great way to clarify how something is being said.



Hannah Sease - www.hannahsease.com



Emmeline Forrestal - www.emmelineforrestal.com

Mark your calendar for the 2022 TAHQUITZ RETREAT = APRIL 9TH 2022 =

Are you ready to take your manuscript and writing to the next level? Are you looking for professional insight into polishing your work? Mark your calendar for Month/Day for the Tahquitz Writer's Retreat, where you will work closely with a group of published peers, agents, editors and publishers in intimate critique groups and hear presentations on craft. Spaces are limited to 28 and fill up fast, so if you're interested, keep an eye out for updates on our website and in email announcements, SCBWI.retreat@gmail.com

NEWSLETTER STAFF

NEWSLETTER CHAIR

Tim Burke

Email: socal-ra@scbwi.org

Website: timburketales.com

Twitter: [@Frankenstrat88](https://twitter.com/Frankenstrat88)

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Susanne LaBrake

Email: sl.scbwi@gmail.com

ART DIRECTION AND ARTISTIC RELATIONS

Shiho Pate

Email: hello@shihopate.com

Website: shihopate.com

Instagram: [@shihopate](https://www.instagram.com/shihopate)

Twitter: [@shihopate](https://twitter.com/shihopate)

MEMBER NEWS COORDINATOR Desi St. Amant

Desi St. Amant is a high school English teacher and an aspiring middle grade novelist.

Send your member news to her email at dstamant07@gmail.com.

PROOFREADER Christine Henderson

A two-time Author of the Month for her stories in Highlights magazine, Christine Henderson is currently revising her first middle grade novel. During the school year, Christine works as an instructional aide for the Corona-Norco school district. Twitter [@cm_henderson](https://twitter.com/cm_henderson).

PROOFREADER AND TECH ADVISOR Niki House

Niki House is a YA writer who works in marketing and moonlights as an editor. She writes about witches, mermaids, and traveling storytellers. Twitter [@nikiblois](https://twitter.com/nikiblois)

Follow SCBWI SoCal Social Media!



Facebook:

Email Tim Burke at socal-ra@scbwi.org to join



Twitter:

[@SCBWI SoCal](https://twitter.com/SCBWI_SoCal)



Instagram:

[@scbwi_socal](https://www.instagram.com/scbwi_socal)