

May 2026

Creative Writing Subject Adviser:

Marcia Humphries **Porthcawl u3a**

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Hello again, in a month that may see some major changes for the UK. On a personal level, I too am planning some changes, as you'll read below.

In September, I will have served as Creative Writing Adviser for 13 happy years. Time to step aside & let someone else take over. Would you like to be that someone? To find out more about what the role involves, please visit the Subject Advice page on the u3a website and read the Subject Adviser Role Description linked at the top of the page. If you think it could suit you and you would like to express interest in being the new Creative Writing Subject Adviser, please email subjectadvisers@u3a.org.uk. I intend to introduce my successor in September Newsletter & leave the post when it has been sent out.

Remember please to forward the Newsletter to all your group members.....& to send me anything you think may be of interest or help to other groups.

Writing prompt :- The needle & the pin

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.

Marcia

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

How to Read (Contemporary) Poetry & Enjoy it...a possible study day for your group

A poem can feel like a locked safe to which you do not have the combination or key, creating a feeling of impatience, the urge to read quickly and get it over with. But there are a few conventions, a few 'rules' which can unlock the safe and open up a whole new world of pleasurable reading alongside the novel and short story.

Bert Flitcroft has huge experience as a poet, running workshops and giving readings both locally and on the national stage, but says he now finds more pleasure (and satisfaction) in opening up the joy of poetry to wider non-poetry audiences. Contact him if your group members would like him to speak to them.

email bflitcroft@btinternet.com www.bert-flitcroft-poetry.com Tel: 07583 362969

Bert was Staffordshire Poet Laureate 2015-17 and has three collections of poetry published. He has been Poet in Residence at the Southwell Poetry Festival and has performed at a number of major national festivals including The Edinburgh International Book Festival & The Birmingham Literature Festival. He has worked as resident poet with the Wedgwood Collection at the V&A, as resident poet with the prestigious R.I.B.A exhibition 'The Road Less Travelled' and recently as part of the University of Keele project 'Labelling the Museum'.

Could you become the next u3a Subject Adviser for Creative Writing?

The post is shortly becoming vacant. Interested? Have another look at the details on the front page. If it's not for you, but you know someone it might suit, please show the page to them.

"There's so much research to do." Is there, really?**Susanna Beard**

When I was around 17 years old, I mentioned to my father that I'd like to write a novel. I'm not sure whether I was thinking about a career in writing, or if I was simply interested in getting a book published, but I'd always enjoyed creative writing in my English classes at school, and relished using my imagination to make up stories. My father's response was to say: "Don't be silly. You won't be able to write a novel. There's so much research to do." I remember at the time thinking: "Well I like research, so what's so difficult about that?" Anyway the end result was that I didn't consider writing as a career, though ultimately I found one which required me to write every day – sometimes all day.

I don't know if I would have taken up novel writing earlier if my father hadn't said that, and I understand his reasons. He had a strange and deep reverence for books; perhaps he just didn't believe that 'ordinary' people had the ability to enter that world. Anyway, when I wrote *Dare to Remember*, my first novel, I didn't think much about research: my story is based somewhere in England, my towns, cities and villages are unnamed, coming from my imagination. My characters, too, are fictional. But my plot did need research – and yes, I did very much enjoy the learning process.

Having decided that my lead character, Lisa, would be suffering from PTSD, I needed to research both the condition and the treatment. I read a number of books and interviewed expert, qualified therapists with experience of treating the disorder. This gave me a body of notes and quotes, and in particular vocabulary and language. Some of these were incorporated into my story – not by any means in their entirety, but just enough to provide authenticity. It was important to know how both therapist and patient would be likely to react. I found that being an author allowed me access to the experts in a non-threatening way, and, as well as researching online, I met with leading organisations, who were so generous with their time and information. They gave me the knowledge and understanding I needed to write crucial scenes in a convincing and authentic way.

It's interesting how you can put many hours into research, only to find that very little detail actually makes it into your story. And that's the right way to use your research. As with your characters, it's your knowledge and understanding behind the scenes that's important. It gives you the confidence to hint at a deeper expertise, to use the right words, to demonstrate understanding without the need to explain. Which, I suppose, in a way brings us back to 'show, not tell.' But that's another story.

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 at book club meetings. She is willing to speak at monthly meetings or help with 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: [susannabeard.substack.com](https://www.substack.com/p/susannabeard).

GROUP NEWS

**Barnsley**

Our Writing group is going well. Our 'Anthology of Words' is now available for £5. On a personal note, I'm featured on the cover of the 7th May edition of 'The People's Friend' magazine. They have purchased nearly twenty of my stories in the last six months. I have had several books published on Amazon & have a traditional five book contract with an American publisher for Westerns. For expenses only, I am available to give power point presentations on Becoming an Author to u3a monthly meetings. Please contact me at mckechnie31@btinternet.com

Mac Mckechnie**Checking your work**

I usually use 'Playback' in Word. It is surprising how many things it highlights that I've missed, even when reading a piece aloud.

Jo Brooks, Porthcawl

More About Memoir Writing.

In the January 2025 edition of the Newsletter, I mentioned a book I'd read called 'Jews Milk Goats'. It was written by Gill Freedman, a member of St Neot's u3a's Writing group, and she generously contributed an article about the process of writing it and having it published.

In January this year, Gill brought out another book, which is available on Amazon. Entitled 'Cohencidence', it's a memoir of her parents, Sybil and Lesley Cohen, drawing on their diaries, letters and memories to preserve their story.

Gill says:-

The book may be valuable - to encourage others to record and document their family history before it is too late. Each person and family will have their own stories. Some may only be of interest to the immediate relatives and others will have wider appeal. In these days of smart phones and devices we will be doing a disservice to our descendants if we leave information and particularly photographs simply stored in a cloud or on our computers.

See the item on page 2 of this Newsletter, maybe send off for a template and make a start.

Marcia

The u3a Essay Competition 2026

The u3a Essay Competition is coming soon, launching on 1 June, with an interesting new theme to inspire your research and writing. See last year's winning entries on the national u3a website, and check the Learning Activities page there on 1 June for all of the details.

A Log Fire**Marcia**

A log fire was the writing prompt I gave you on the front page of the January Newsletter. When I looked at this prompt, it struck me that the thoughts it would bring-up were very different from what we'd think of if I'd just said A fire. A fire can be a good thing, but can be a frightening event. A log fire is, I think, generally unthreatening. A log fire might be outside or inside, but in either case, feels safe. Not necessarily so in the case of a fire.

We sat around the log fire & told stories of the lives that had led us to that evening. Doesn't that hook you in? Could you feel yourself settling down to listen? But what if that opening line had said, 'We sat in front of the gas fire,' or 'We sat in front of the electric fire' or 'We sat in the warm room'? A completely different set of feelings is evoked.

It was so cold that evening that we lit the fire. But what about 'It was so cold that evening that we put a match to the log fire that had been laid ready for us.' Much more of a cosy & interesting feel to it all.

A chocolate Swiss roll might be delicious, but what about tucking into a traditional French yuletide log? There's a lot more to ask about that second one; it creates interest.

The captain entered the events of the day into his notebook. But what about the captain writing-up his log? Captain's notebook, captain's log. Which intrigues the reader more? Maybe captain's journal would do it.

He had a good night's sleep.....or he slept like a log.

They spent their holiday in a caravan.....but would 'They had two weeks in a log cabin in the woods' sound better?

Not he put more wood on the fire but he added another log from the basket by the hearth.

Now, I'm not saying the word log is to be popped into every piece you write, to ensure success! What I am trying to show is that choosing your words carefully, looking for the best words, does make a difference. The Welsh writer Dylan Thomas sometimes stayed up all night looking for the right word to use. The late Victoria Wood spent a lot of time looking for the best word to use. She thought some types of biscuit sounded funnier than others. The counter to this is Pam Ayres.....not 'Put another log on the fire & let's be cosy,' but 'Put another chair leg on the fire Mother,& pull yourself up to the blaze.' The chair leg is much funnier here.

As writers, words are your currency. Choose them thoughtfully, spend it wisely.

Think you could be the Creative Writing Subject Adviser?

Have another look at page one of this Newsletter, & make some enquiries.

The Role of Clues in a Mystery Novel

Pauline Rowson

A mystery novel is, at its heart, a riddle. As reader, you are meant to solve it. Clues are the building blocks of the puzzle. Without them, there's no challenge, no tension & no satisfaction in reaching the final reveal. But here's the catch: If the clues are too obvious, the mystery falls flat.

The Art of Misdirection in Crime Writing Creating a compelling mystery requires more than just dropping hints—it's about misdirection. As a writer, I guide you through the story while carefully leading you away from the truth. Clues are rarely straightforward. They can:

- Point to multiple meanings
- Seem insignificant at first
- Lead you in the wrong direction

Your job is to interpret them correctly... even when they're trying to fool you.

Hidden Clues: Right in Front of You The best mystery novels share one thing: The clues are always there. But they don't always look like clues in the moment. Only when you reach the ending do you realise: "It was there all along." That's what makes solving a mystery so satisfying.

Fair Play in Mystery Writing A good crime writer plays fair. That means every clue matters. Nothing is random or meaningless. By the end of the story, everything should connect logically. However... That doesn't mean it should be easy. The challenge is finding the perfect balance: Too easy → predictable Too difficult → frustrating

The goal is to keep you guessing without making the solution impossible.

Why Readers Love Solving Mysteries

Part of the joy of reading a mystery novel is the mental challenge. As a reader, you:

- Analyse the clues. Form your own theories. Change your mind (more than once!) Even when you take a wrong turn, you're still part of the story.

That's the magic of a well-written mystery.

Final Thoughts: The Joy of the Puzzle

Clues, riddles, & hidden connections are what bring a mystery novel to life. They create tension, spark curiosity, & reward careful readers.

For me, creating these puzzles is incredibly fun. And for you? I hope solving them is just as enjoyable.

Pauline Rowson 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 also 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 and talks. <http://www.youtube.com/paulinerowson13> You can follow her on Twitter and she has a Facebook page

The Emotional Stages of Writing a Novel

Pauline Rowson

Here is the gauntlet of emotions I run while writing one of my crime novels:-

1. Excitement. Starting a novel gives me a real buzz. The idea, the victim, the location or theme is there. I work up the beginning, create character sketches, conduct research. Ideas begin to flow. At this stage I'm not sure where the novel is going or how it will end, I plot as I write. I can't wait to get going on the creative writing and do as soon as I possibly can, usually within a week or two of coming up with the idea. I'm off!
2. Frustration. I wish I could wave a magic wand so the first draft would be dumped directly from my brain on to the computer without all the effort of having to key it in. I try to write the first draft as quickly as possible, with minimal editing, because that slows down the creative process. While writing the first draft I'll also be conducting more research, which often sparks new ideas. Frustration also when I come to a point where I don't know where the story is going next. Then I need to do more research, think through my characters' motivations, do more plotting.
3. Relief. Once that first draft is written, usually after two/three months, comes a sense of relief. I've got anything between 80,000 and 100,000 words on my computer screen. The story is there, with all its faults and flaws, and I have something to work on, to shape and mould. It's revision time. I go through the novel and flesh it out, check the structure clues, red herrings, motivations and personalities of the characters. Make sure the story holds together and the plot is the best I can make it with plenty of twists and turns along the way. This may take several revisions and often further research until finally I check that everything hangs together, all the unanswered questions have been answered and the words and phrases used are the correct ones.
4. Doubt .Now come the doubts which can come at any stage throughout the revisions. Is it good enough? Could I change this chapter, this scene, this phrase or word? Could I improve the entire novel, perhaps I should re-write the wretched thing. Help! By now I am so close to it that it is difficult to be objective.
- 5.Fear.Having gone through several revisions I'm now at the stage where I feel I can no longer change anything. It is as good as it's going to get and I desperately need a fresh eye over it. With a rapidly beating heart, hesitating for several minutes, my finger poised over the send message button, I take a deep breath and off it goes to my editor.
6. Hope and Anxiety. Hope that my editor will like the novel. Anxiety that this book might not be good enough for publication.
7. Depression or anti-climax..... what writers experience after completing a novel. Some become depressed, others experience a sense of anti-climax. Having lived with their novel for so long it has become part of them and now they have to let go. My antidote is to have multiple writing projects on the go, which means when I have finished writing one novel I can go straight into writing or revising the next.

We are looking for a new Creative Writing Adviser.

Please read page one of this Newsletter for details.

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

A Speaker for your u3a's Monthly Meeting

Mac Mckechnie, leader of Barnsley's Writing group is available (for expenses only) to give a power point presentation on Becoming an Author. His only stipulation is that your group must be in reasonable travelling distance of Barnsley! Contact Mac at mckechnie31@btinternet.com



WRITING PROMPTS

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

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.

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

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.

u3awriting@hotmail.co.uk

DEADLINE FOR NEXT ISSUE

15th August

Marcia

