

President's Message

Catherine Magill, PhD



It's time to get ready for summer, already! It's been a quiet spring and I'm ready for things to liven up.

Our chapter is getting set up to offer another live installment of the ever-popular "Word Tips and Tricks," offered by our own Maggie Norris. This workshop will be held at a computer lab, most likely in Berkeley, in mid-July. Keep your eyes open for an announcement soon.

And although the National AMWA organization has been quiet, too, they are gearing up for the 2008 Annual Conference, October 23-25, in Louisville, KY. As usual, there will be a huge variety of workshops offered as well as a wide-ranging and ever-interesting collection of breakfast roundtables and coffee klatches.

Event organizers have also planned a nice selection of tours which cover many of the interesting sites that Louisville has to offer, from horse-racing to bourbon-tasting. Registration will open soon, so keep your eyes open for this, too.

Due to the growth of our endowment fund, AMWA now has enough interest income to fund a couple of new initiatives. One of those initiatives is to hold several webinars a year.

This new benefit for AMWA members was inaugurated on Thursday May 29th, with a webinar featuring Edie Schwager, of "Dear Edie" fame in the AMWA Journal. Edie, in her highly entertaining style and relying on her her wonderful collection of cartoons, answered a variety of questions on English usage and abuse. We expect to hold another webinar later this summer on a topic related to regulatory writing.

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Details will be announced at a later time. Please let us know if you have an idea for a webinar that you think would be of interest to the membership; your ideas are always welcome.

Another topic of interest at the National level: A larger office space in the same complex as we currently occupy has become available. A mid-year budget change was proposed that would permit AMWA headquarters to take advantage of this unexpected opportunity. A specific motion was made to set aside an "office moving fund" of \$45,000 to cover unbudgeted expenses in the '08-'09 budget. This money would come from maturing CDs in the short-term reserves.

Twenty YES votes were received from 18 chapters (including 2 each from Delaware Valley and Empire State-Metro New York). (One chapter did not vote; none voted NO or abstain. All 13 members of the executive committee also voted YES and the motion was passed. Donna Munari and the headquarters staff will begin planning the proposed move. An update will be provided by headquarters when the plans are firm.

We will start the process of soliciting nominees for Chapter Board positions later this summer, so it's time to start thinking about how you'd like to serve the chapter next year. There will be a variety of positions open and we'd love to have new members participate in keeping this chapter alive and active. Please let us know when you have suggestions or ideas for events that you think would be of interest to other members of the chapter.

Pacific Coast Conference a Wrap

The annual Pacific Coast Conference ended on a high note at Asilomar on April 2. Sponsored by the Northern California Chapter in even years, the conference drew a total of 83 attendees, said co-chair Naomi Ruff. The tally included 57 paid registrants, 13 speakers, six committee members and seven guests.

Total income for the event was about \$35,200. Total expenses had not been tallied at deadline, but the chapter should come close to breaking even financially.

The 2009 Pacific Coast Conference is already scheduled for April 26 to 29 at Asilomar. Information will be available later this summer at the Southern California chapter website, <http://www.amwa-pacsw.org/>. Registration opens in the Fall.

Tax Tips For Small Businesses: Savvy Ways For Writers, Photographers, Artists And Other Freelancers To Trim Taxes To The Legal Minimum by Julian Block, self-published.

Ruth Winter

Block is not only a lawyer, an accountant, and a former Internal Revenue Service (IRS) special agent, he is also a freelance writer, and he provides invaluable hints that your accountant may not know.

For example, freelance writers have choices on how to claim expenses for furniture, computers, and so on, but the rules take some twists and turns. Block explores the circumstances in which it is advantageous to employ children in a parent's business (and those in which it is not).

He answers what he says is the most frequently asked tax question: "How long should I hang on to records?" and gives exceptions to the "three-year rule."

He also recounts more complex questions from writers, such as the following: "For the past few years, my writing income has been meager. But this year's income will soar because of a six-figure book advance. According to a fellow writer, income averaging will lower my tax tab by many thousands of dollars. When I file next spring, do I need to complete some form for averaging that has to accompany the 1040 form?"

Block's response: "The rules provide no break for someone whose income jumps. A top-to-bottom overhaul of the IRS code, the Tax Reform Act of 1986, included a provision that abolished averaging for nearly everybody.

"My advice is to focus instead on easy and perfectly legal ways for writers to trim taxes. A standard tactic is to stash some of the advance money into one of those retirement plans for self-employed persons."

The book also includes several chapters on practical advice, including tips about making payments at the end of the year, keeping records, sending checks to the IRS, extensions of time to file, and making refund claims.

In addition, Block provides a list of helpful booklets from the IRS such as Pub.463 Travel, Entertainment, Gift and Car expenses.

Block has humorous quotations at the beginning of each chapter.

For the chapter "Big Breaks for 'Small' Freelancers," he includes a quote from President Ronald Reagan: "If our current tax structure were a TV show, it would either be 'Foul-ups, Bleeps and Blunders'...or if it were a movie, it

would be 'Take the Money and Run'...and if the IRS ever wanted a theme song, maybe they'll get Sting to do 'Every breath you take, every move you make, I'll be watching you.'"

In the "Get Car Smart" chapter, he includes the bumper sticker quote: "IRS: We've got what it takes to take what you've got."

Block and his book are available at www.julianblocktaxexpert.com.

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Contests! Enter and Win!

The Bastiat Prize 2008 Closes at the End of June

If you have not yet entered, or if you have colleagues who you think should enter, please make sure to act before the deadline on 30 June in London. It only takes a few minutes to fill out the online application form.

The prize fund is \$15,000, awarded for articles published in print or online that wittily and eloquently explain, promote and defend the principles of the free society: limited government, protection of private property, the rule of law brokered by an independent judiciary, free markets, free speech and sound science.

Up to three articles, published between 1 July 2007 and 30 June 2008, can be entered. They must not add up to more than 4500 words, and should have been published in English. Full details are on the Bastiat Prize website.

Previous winners include Amit Varma (Hindustan Times) Tim Harford (Financial Times), and Mary Anastasia O'Grady (Wall Street Journal). This year's judges include Matt Ridley, Lord Lawson and Anne Applebaum.

For information about the contest, please contact Bastiat Prize Administrator Marc Sidwell in London at info@bastiatprize.org

AAAS Science Journalism Awards Deadline Aug 1

The American Association for the Advancement of Science Science Journalism Awards have honored distinguished reporting on science annually since 1945. Awards go to individuals, not to their institutions, employers, or publishers,

for coverage of the sciences, engineering, and mathematics. The awards are an internationally recognized measure of excellence in science journalism for a general audience.

Prizes will be given for news or features published in large U.S. newspapers, small U.S. newspapers, magazines, television, radio, online, and children's science news published worldwide in any medium. Each category winner receives \$3,000 and reasonable expenses to attend the AAAS annual meeting in Chicago in February, 2009.

Details, entry guidelines, and an entry form are available at www.aaas.org/SJAwards. The awards are sponsored by Johnson & Johnson Pharmaceutical Research & Development, L.L.C.

HOW TO WRITE

Tabitha M. Powledge

I despise Microsoft Word.

No, I take that back. What I hate is that Word masquerades as software for writing.

The pathetic term "word processor" is exactly the right description for Word. This is a program that cares about form, not content.

Word is a monster, poky to load and rapacious with memory. I never use it unless I must, usually when I'm editing someone else's manuscript or a publication insists on tracking changes.

Fortunately, there are nimble alternatives, some of them free. A few are even designed for writers.

I discovered some of these programs on the site devoted to what many people think is the best writing software for the Mac, maybe the best writing software there is, Scrivener. A 30-day trial is free; \$39.95 to keep (www.literatureandlatte.com/scrivener.html).

You can write in Scrivener, even huge documents, but the program also claims to be an outliner and a project manager. From the site: "keep all of your research - image files, PDF documents, movies, sound files, and web pages - right inside Scrivener."

I can't evaluate these claims because I can't test Scrivener. In another life I'll get a Mac, but for now I'm stuck with Windows.

The Scrivener folks generously devote a page to alternative writing software (www.literatureandlatte.com/links.html), both Mac and PC.

Thus I went to the Scrivener site to drool and found Windows writing programs. The site particularly recommended PageFour and RoughDraft.

Each is fast to load and not greedy.

Each is organized around tabs so you can keep several projects in front of you at once - or notes and interviews related to the piece you're working on.

Each generates .rtf files, which permit most of the formatting options you'll need (like italics and boldface). RTF files can be imported by pretty much any word processor, even Word.

Each includes a choice of fonts and document formatting. You shouldn't have to default to Word to tweak its appearance.

Each has tools such as word count and spellchecking. Each incorporates file management and keyword searching.

Each is optionally a two-pane program. Do your writing in the larger window and put other stuff in the smaller one. The programs differ in just what other stuff.

PageFour keeps lists of your documents (the program calls them notebooks) plus outlines of the document you're working on, including any related folders.

RoughDraft calls its small pane a side panel. It has four content tabs: **Files** (a tree view of your drives and content, plus file management); **List** (file searches); **Insert** (automatic word completion plus insertion of special characters and text); and **Pad** (for outlines, notes, interviews or outtakes).

Either of these programs will fill your basic writing needs. I lean toward RoughDraft because it's less authoritarian.

RD lets you store documents anywhere you like on your hard drive. PF wants to store all your work in one specific folder. Storing documents elsewhere is a bit of a big deal involving a number of steps. On the other hand, PF has a very nice Snapshot feature that lets you save multiple versions of what you're writing nearly automatically.

The program differences are traceable to a philosophical difference, illustrated by PF's Help: "When you use PageFour, you do not need to know about files, file locations, saving under different names, etc." PageFour wants you not to bother your pretty little head about trivia like where to store a file and how to save different versions of it.

RoughDraft doesn't want to complicate your writing life either, but it doesn't assume you're a complete n00b who can't be trusted to protect your work.

While it's perfectly possible to park notes, interviews, and other miscellany in individual tabs in the main window of either program, you still must hop back and forth between tabs. That's why I like RD's Pad. It puts your outline or source material in front of you while you're writing in the other window. No hopping required.

RoughDraft (www.richardsalsbury.com) is free. One caveat: RD development stopped in 2005. That age gives me pause, although it seems to be a mature program. I've used it often and had no trouble.

PageFour (www.softwareforwriting.com) is still being developed. The full version is \$34.95. You can use the free trial version for as long as you like, but the amount of content is limited.

I had intended to write only about these two programs designed for writers, but I recently acquired a client who insists on plain text files. That meant a hurried reacquaintance with text editing software.

There are dozens of text editors, programs that generate plain text (.txt) files. All are superior to Windows Notepad.

Most are perfectly OK, even though their target users are folks who write code. You probably want an .rtf program too. That lets you italicize species names for the benefit of editors who have no clue.

Wikipedia has a long list of text editors, far more than you want to know about, at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_text_editors. A long chart comparing their features is at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Comparison_of_text_editors.

I have space to discuss only one text editor, so I picked one I've used for years, NoteTab (www.notetab.com). NT is feature-rich, sophisticated and pioneered the tabs and twin panes that are now so common.

It comes in three flavors, two paid and one free. Unless you're a programmer in your other life, you probably don't need NoteTab Pro (\$29.95). But if you want spellchecking and a thesaurus, you'll want NoteTab Std (\$19.95).

Those are about the only writerly tools missing from NoteTab Light, the free version. Otherwise, Light is hardly crippled at all. And it possesses a valuable feature that I have not seen in any other text editor: autocorrect. You'll never type "hte" instead of "the" again, and you can also add all those pesky words you're apt to misspell. A chart comparing features of the three versions is at www.notetab.com/chart.php.

But be warned: NoteTab has the defects of its virtues. It's easy to plunge in and start writing, but the program does a lot of things, and mastering the extras you want may take a bit of effort.

The valuable clipbook feature was pretty frustrating when I first encountered it several years ago. It's easier now. NoteTab is under constant development, so today it includes something it lacked back then: a useful Help file.

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Like What You See?- Want to Make it Better?-

The Pacemaker, our Northern California chapter newsletter, needs your help!

Please send your suggestions and submissions to editor Fred Gebhart, pacemaker@amwancal.org.

Our newsletter depends on your help, your input and your great ideas for the future.

2008 Northern California Board of Directors

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