



## Boise Nonfiction Writers

**Jill Kuraitis,  
Idaho editor, NewWest.Net  
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**Notes by Cindy Salo (Your Humble Scribe)  
Quality Control by Jill**

Jill Kuraitis started her career in Hollywood, where she maintained continuity in films. Copious notes, large numbers of photographs, and her persnickety personality assured that all scenes in a film formed a coherent whole. Jill brought that personality to Boise 21 years ago.

Since moving to Boise (“the best place to live in the known universe”, according to Jill), she has written for advertising agencies, public relations firms, and alternative presses. In addition to editing the Idaho page of NewWest.Net, (NewWest.Net/Boise) she continues to write for a variety of outlets and to coach other writers. NewWest.Net has bureaus in seven western cities and focuses on the changing landscape, economics, culture and politics of the Rocky Mountain West.

### **Jill’s advice to aspiring writers**

- ✍️...“Believe me, you don’t need any credentials. If you can write, that’s all that’s important.”
- ✍️... Write, write, and write. At least 3,000 words per day, or six to 10 single-spaced pages. You’ll need to write 4-5 stories per week in order to sell two or three. (Two or three a month, that is.) Very few people are able to keep up that pace, which is why so many writers have one main job and then freelance on the side.
- ✍️...Get to know a publication before pitching a story idea. Read it, all the pages, for 2-3 weeks, so that you understand its tone and point of view. An inappropriate story just won’t fly. Read freelancer’s stories (writers *not* on the masthead) and ask yourself why they appeared.
- ✍️...Be flexible in the subjects you write about. Intensely personal stories can be intensely boring; fact-rich stories about issues people care about make money. Even Jill’s visit to a local quilt shop yielded a story about the economy, an important issue. When she learned the shop was downsizing to a smaller space, she followed the human story deeper to learn that even the \$9 billion per year quilting industry in the U.S. is affected by the slowing economy.

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- ✍️....Let your quirky, unique self show when pitching a story and you'll be noticed. Show your funny old grandpa side, or, as in Jill's case, your Lithuanian side.
- ✍️....Find submission details for hundreds of U.S. publications in Writer's Market. The online version gives the most current information.
- ✍️....Read several web pages each day to stay current on the news. Jill subscribes to Daily Kos, Yahoo headlines, and the front pages of the New York Times, the Washington Post, the National Review, and the New Republic.
- ✍️....After reading the headlines, play a game of solitaire. It focuses you, gives you a sense of accomplishment, starts you organizing things, and transitions you into work.
- ✍️....Don't start with your opening sentence; just plunge into the middle of the story, if you have trouble getting started. Your opening will emerge as you work.
- ✍️....Don't use indents; skip the tabs. Rather, use double returns between paragraphs.
- ✍️....Try working with two documents open, cutting from a previous version and pasting into your current version. Remember to save both documents. Also working with two different stories open at the same time can help keep you focused: if your attention wanders, it may wander to the other story.
- ✍️....Use a large font or zoom in to make individual words more visible, increasing the chances you'll recognize a misspelling or a misused word.

### **Contact Jill; she will help us by...**

- ✍️....Assigning practice stories and homework.
- ✍️....Allowing us to practice pitching ideas to her.
- ✍️....Suggesting story ideas if we run out -- she has not!

### **Jill's Pet Peeve: trouble with the basics**

If you have trouble with the basics, it shows you're not trying. These include grammar ('that', 'which', and 'who' cause trouble, as do 'less' and 'fewer'), tenses (inconsistencies), punctuation (commas and semicolons: know them and use them), and titles (Lt. Gov. Risch was governor for a short time, so he will always be 'Governor Risch'). Jill and her pickiness have retired from the Apostrophe Police; she no longer tags offenders with stickers or writes about particularly egregious infringements.

The Associated Press Stylebook is the bible for technical elements, construction, and copy editing. The Associated Press Reporting Handbook covers interviewing techniques and organizational skills (<http://www.ap.org/pages/product/order.html>). The Harbrace College Handbook is also appropriate, but The Chicago Manual of Style is best for academic writing.

Your Humble Scribe notes that the BSU English Dept. offers *Grammar, Style and Writing*, Monday through Thursday, 2 to 4 pm, July 14 to Aug. 17, 2008.

## Questions and Answers

### Do you submit pieces to more than one publication?

Yes, now that she is an established writer. Jill keeps all rights to her work and will resell a piece after consulting the original buyer. She would not resell a piece to a first buyer's competitor, although competitors occasionally bid against each other for first rights.

### What about copyrighting your work?

Jill includes a ©, copyright symbol, at the bottom of her pitch letters. Although this will not protect you, it shows you are aware of copyrights. Copyrighting your work is a simple process, but the large backlog makes it a lengthy one.

<http://www.uspto.gov/main/profiles/copyright.htm>

### Do we *really* need to write that much?

Yes. But don't let the fact that you should be writing twenty times more than you are frighten you; work up to it gradually.

### What sort of money are we talking about?

You can make money writing medium to long magazine articles of 1000 to 5000 words; NOT by writing books, and not by writing shorter pieces.

NewWest.Net uses freelancers for many stories and pays \$25 to \$50 each; the Boise Weekly pays 12 cents per word. This couldn't even support you living in a one bedroom apartment. National markets pay much better and trade magazines can pay extremely well for articles.

### Do you have a writing routine?

- "No. We're all writing in our pajamas."
- "If the words are coming out your fingertips, it doesn't matter what's on your a\*\*."
- An organized desk is not a requirement either.
- Coffee keeps Jill going, but she does not recommend mixing alcohol and writing.

Boise Nonfiction Writers: - Nonfiction writers learning from guest speakers and from each other in Boise, ID

<http://www.sageecosci.com/Writers.html>