

## SPEED GRAMMAR FOR CREATIVE WRITERS

Steve Flick, Writing teacher and author of both fiction and nonfiction.

Wednesday July 2, 2008, 6:30-8 pm, Rediscovered Bookshop

Notes by Nikki Leonard

Steve won two prestigious fiction awards which have kept him writing to this day: The Wallace Stegner Creative Writing Fellowship at Stanford University, and the Book of the Month Club College English Fellowship. He discovered, in his MFA Program in Creative Writing at the University of Montana, that he had a problem with "pronoun referent", according to his American Literature teacher. He didn't know what that was.

He was a teaching assistant for two years and, after graduating, went to Humboldt State University and got into a Redwood Writing Workshop. Part of this workshop included units on what he vaguely remembers as sentence trees. From there he taught in Hawaii where he discovered a book called "The Least you should Know about English" by Teresa Glazier. This is the book upon which the evening's presentation was based on.

A followup 3 hour workshop may be offered on Saturday, July 26, from 10-1. The cost will be \$35 and the location is 8601 W. Emerald, Suite 150. The contact information for this is:

Steve Flick  
208-869-7638  
SAXMANFLICK@HOTMAIL.COM

A handout was distributed and these notes are largely drawn from its contents. The focus of the class was learning sentence structure; most particularly, the identification of subjects, verbs, and prepositional phrases. He noted that the sentence is about something or someone, and that is the subject. What the subject is or does is the verb. We did a brief exercise on identifying subjects and verbs.

Five initial rules were offered:

1. Often the verb doesn't show action but tells what the subject is or was.
2. Sometimes the subject comes after the verb.
3. The words "there" and "here" are never subject of the sentence.
4. In a command in English, the subject is often an understood "you."
5. Subjects and verbs are never in prepositional phrases.

We then worked on identifying and isolating prepositional phrases. Prepositional phrases start with a preposition. The mental trick we learned was, "A cat can do anything a preposition can do" and the question to ask is, "Can a cat go.....?" For example, using the prepositional phrase "over the rainbow" the question would be, "Can a cat go over the rainbow." We followed this with an exercise on identifying prepositional phrases.

Following this, two new rules were introduced:

6. Sometimes the verb is more than one word.
7. These words are never part of the verb, even though they may be in the middle of the verb: already, also, always, before, even, ever, finally, just, never, not, now, often, only, really, sometimes, usually. These are adverbs.

The handout contains a list of sample prepositional phrases. We consolidated our learning up to this point with an exercise in identifying subject, verbs, and prepositional phrases. Based on this, we worked our

way into identifying the distinction between phrases and clauses, which led into a discussion on punctuation. The next rule is:

8. Between independent clauses (each with a subject and a verb) you must have punctuation or conjunctions stronger than a comma. The comma is the 90-pound weakling of punctuation.

We learned about coordinating conjunctions, adverbial conjunctions, and subordinating conjunctions. The handout contained a comprehensive list of each. We finished with two exercises on punctuation.