

Toastmasters 4 Writers Club #748804

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From Pen to Podium: Toastmasters 4 Writers featured in Toastmaster Magazine

Toastmasters 4 Writers featured in October 2011 Toastmaster Magazine

From Pen to Podium



FROM PEN TO PODIUM

How a writer journeys into public speaking.

By Beth Black, CC

If you're a writer, or you're close to one, you know the drill. The writing life is a secluded endeavor. Hours spent alone, by choice, where the only speaking you do is in your head, and the only discussions you have are with the characters you've put down on the page. Phone calls, neighbors' visits, lunches with friends — all must be set aside to allow your brain the sanctuary it needs to manufacture a universe of possibilities.

Writer and editor Robert Yehling, of Word Journeys and numerous other projects, is familiar with this territory. "When writing alone, it is very solitary and insular, almost like being in another world," he says. "Especially when writing fiction, when we should be in another world, the world of our story and characters. Everything happens between the creative and thinking minds."

However long it takes, the next step in a writer's life often brings some culture shock: *Speaking. Aloud. To other people. Real people. Together in one room!*

Speeches and Conversations

Breaking the silence can be enough to send many writers into fits of fright. These days, publishing industry executives advise writers to use social networking and build a "platform" to connect with their audiences. But even that leads to readings, signings, interviews or other situations where you, the reticent writer, must give a presentation. With public readings, the speaking assignment is more than merely reading a portion of your work. You must also reveal your creative soul, describing your book, writing process, successes — and even failures. Then, after sharing all that's

noteworthy about the process, you're finally able to read a portion of the work aloud. And, of course, for some writers that can be a challenge in itself.

Charles Allen, a fiction writer and past member of ADP Toastmasters in Roseland, New Jersey, says, "Public speaking has always been my biggest fear. As an author, I knew it was something I had to conquer if I really wanted to sell books. Speaking in front of an audience just goes with the territory."

Toastmasters provided the help Allen needed. And here's good news for writers: You don't need to be in a specialty club to practice for these events. Table Topics in any club will prepare you for a radio interview, and several assignments in the advanced manuals can help with nailing down your performance technique for readings and book signings. "What I have learned

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in my eight months of membership is priceless," says Allen. "I feel like I am being transformed into a new person, empowered to take control of my future and give my books the exposure they deserve."

The Writer's Other Job: Teaching

Often, a writer's life resembles that of a club mentor. Even the most successful writers frequently turn to public speaking to share what they have gleaned from years of putting words on a page. Some writers teach to boost their income, but others do it for the art, to make sure that new, emerging talents benefit from their experience.

Yehling has contributed significantly to the latter effort. He has spoken at nearly 200 workshops and events for writers and writing students. "We have to carry all this information out-

writers, especially the quiet ones. "I've learned not to underestimate anyone," says Alessandra. "The most unassuming person might have an incredible story to tell."

Alessandra's original speaking style tended toward long lectures, but she has learned to apply some writing rules to teaching. "'Less is more' is a great lesson for any writer ... and an even better lesson for a public speaker," she warns. "I try to keep my lessons to the point, backed up with examples and translated into useful writing tools that a writer can immediately apply to his or her own project."

When Toastmasters Focus on the Writing

Rough Drafts Toastmasters in Irvine, California, is a specialty club "for people working to improve both writ-

too, meetings sometimes center around writing. Past District 52 Governor Gilstrap, a Distinguished Toastmaster and Executive Director of the Universal City North Hollywood Chamber of Commerce, mentors new members on success in today's writing world. "Instead of traveling to promote a book, authors are interviewed in podcasts," she says. "They need to know their books inside and out. The best way to do that is to present a speech on each chapter as you write it."

This sound advice and other helpful activities attract members from all over. "The club is filled with district leaders," says Gilstrap. "They come to visit and stay when they see our banner covered with President's Distinguished ribbons."

Finding the Way to Toastmasters

Robin Spano, a mystery writer from Richmond, British Columbia, Canada, found Toastmasters after her book sold to a publisher. "My agent was describing all the promotional work a writer needs to do to make their book visible, including readings, panels and other public speaking," she says. "I must have looked as terrified as I felt, because in the next breath she suggested, strongly, that I join Toastmasters." Spano joined and overcame her speaking hurdles. "Now I love the stage," she notes. "I enjoy what butterflies I have left."

If you're embarking on a writer's life, consider your membership a part of the necessary training. Then, when you possess the skill to communicate with words — on the page *and* on the stage — you'll know you've finally arrived. 🦋

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"Public speaking has always been my biggest fear. As an author, I knew it was something I had to conquer." — Charles Allen

ward and be crisp and confident," he says, "because attendees are seeking to apply your experience and knowledge to their work."

For those who write film and TV scripts, the challenges remain the same. Pilar Alessandra, director of the Los Angeles writers' studio On the Page, worked as senior story analyst for DreamWorks Studios and Radar Pictures, along with other major entertainment companies, before moving into roles at movie studios that required speaking to larger audiences. She has trained writers at the Disney/ABC Television Group, UCLA's writing program, the National Screen Institute and the Los Angeles Film School.

Making the transition from analyzing scripts to analyzing student works has brought her a new perspective on

ten and communication skills," according to its website. In one meeting, the club enjoyed a unique version of Table Topics where the Topicsmaster asked a question and gave members two minutes to *write* a response. The *verbal* portion? Participants took turns reading their responses aloud.

Another club, Toastmasters 4 Writers, meets in Burbank, California, where it is hosted by a screenwriting software company. Writers Michelle Gilstrap and Barbara Schiffman, both from Burbank, started the club to help screenwriters learn how to "pitch" their screenplays after noticing at one event how poorly other writers communicated with producers and agents. The club was a hit as soon as it was announced. Though it welcomes non-writers

