

# Stet

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THE NEWSLETTER OF THE INDEPENDENT WRITERS OF CHICAGO

## JANUARY MEETING

### *Get the Scoop on the State of Today's Print Journalism from BusinessWeek Insider*

BY LAURA STIGLER

It's just good business to come to the next IWOC meeting on Tuesday, January 8th. For the third installment of the organization's year-long program series, "Get Hired!", BusinessWeek's Chief of Correspondents, Joe Webber, will be giving freelance writers the inside scoop on what one of the nation's largest weekly business magazines requires content-wise.

Since joining BusinessWeek in 1987, the multi-award-winning Webber has managed news coverage from Dallas to Chicago to Toronto, making him one of the

definitive experts on news, ideas and trends affecting print media today. What are those latest ideas and trends? How is print faring in the face of the Internet Age? Will print circulation continue to decline? These and a myriad of other hot topics sure to be on the minds of writers—and all news junkies—will be addressed, with plenty of time for your cogent questions. So bring those questions and of course, your business cards.

The IWOC meeting will take place on Tuesday, January 8th at National-Louis University, Room

5008, 122 S. Michigan Ave., Chicago. (This is a new room on the 5th floor. Please make a note of it; it will be our permanent room.) Networking begins at 5 p.m. The main program is at 6 p.m. Admission is free to IWOC members, \$15 to nonmembers. Following the meeting, attendees are invited to go to a nearby restaurant for a buy-your-own dinner to further discuss writing-related topics or to continue networking. For more information, call 847-855-6670 or visit [www.iwoc.org](http://www.iwoc.org).

### *New IWOC Online Discussion List is Up and Running*

BY RUTH E. THALER-CARTER

So you have a question about freelancing that just can't wait until the next IWOC meeting. Where you gonna go? To IWOCers Online, the new IWOC discussion list!

I'm active on discussion lists for several of my professional memberships, as well as a few that are independent of an organization, and I've found them to be invaluable sources of advice, information, colleagues, new clients and even good friends. I thought IWOCers might like to try the concept, so I proposed it to the board, got the go-ahead, and now IWOCers Online is ready to go. For the moment at least, I'll serve as moderator. Since IWOC is a relatively small group, we may not need a discussion list as much as larger groups that are national in scope, but it should be fun to see if such a connection will be of interest and value to members. And you never know; the list might help IWOC generate new memberships.

At least for now, the list is only open to IWOC members. Appropriate topics are anything relevant to freelancing: finding and keeping work, coping with difficult clients, resources, advice, work styles, etc. Rates and fees may be discussed but only in the context of advice; neither the list nor IWOC itself is intended for setting rates collectively in any way. Feel free to

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## PRESIDENT'S COLUMN/ROGER RUEFF

# Survival of the Most Cooperative

If you're over the age of 10, you have probably heard Darwin's theory of biological evolution summed up by the phrase "survival of the fittest." This simple phrase not only serves as a quick-and-dirty sound bite for the complex process of natural selection but is also often invoked by those who seek to justify acts of selfishness on the grounds of evolutionary imperative. They reason that the eons-long process that created us favors the aggressively self-interested (read "strong") and rewards them with bounty. The fact that the bounty might come at the expense of others less actively self-interested or less empowered to pursue their self interest (read "weak") is irrelevant. Those are just the breaks inherent in natural law.

Sometimes the justification for selfishness is individual—like that of the backstabbing opportunist on his way up the corporate ladder. Other times, it's collective—unspoken "ismatic" policies such as racism, sexism, or ageism—or coercive, state-sponsored discrimination such as that practiced in Nazi Germany.

Interestingly, the phrase is also sometimes invoked by critics of Darwin's theory in order to portray it as a heartless notion capable of spawning the very selfishness mentioned above. Its moral dangers, this argument goes, stem from its exclusion of Deity in the process of biological creation. (Natural selection is, in fact, heartless... but then so is gravity.)

So the phrase turns out to

be quite handy for both sides of the selfishness debate. There's only one problem...

It's false.

To put it simply, the process of natural selection is not now nor has ever been about "survival of the fittest." The process is about "survival of the best able to survive." Fitness, as it happens, is only one of many survival strategies. And evidence suggests that it's inferior to a strategy you won't hear summed up in a sound bite—cooperation.

In the 1970s, Robert Axelrod, a professor of political science at the University of Michigan, invited game-theory experts from around the world to submit computer programs for a competition based on an iterated version of a game called "The Prisoner's Dilemma." The Prisoner's Dilemma is a two-player game wherein each player is given a binary choice—to "cooperate" or "defect." Its premise can be illustrated by the following tale.

One day Thief A and Thief B steal a large amount of money from a small-town bank and hide it deep in the forest where only they will know where to find it. On their way back to town, they discover that they are about to be captured and questioned by the police, so they make a pact to maintain each other's innocence. There is no other evidence against them. If they both keep the pact, they'll both go free, rendezvous in the forest, divide the money, and go their separate ways.

The police question the thieves separately and ask



each if the other stole the money. Now, each has a choice. He can either keep the pact (cooperate) or point the finger at the other guy (defect). The questioning, therefore, will result in one of four outcomes:

- A and B both cooperate; they both go free and split the money.
- A defects and B cooperates; B goes to jail, and not only does A go free, he gets all the money.
- B defects and A cooperates; A goes to jail and B gets all the money.
- A and B both defect; they both go to jail, and neither one gets the money for a very long time.

Variations of the game have been used for years to study behavioral strategies in everything from marital relationships to international trade negotiations. The game works for such studies because it rewards self-interest. That is, it does pay to be selfish... unless the other player is selfish, too—in which case, both lose out.

So Axelrod invited the game theorists to submit computer programs that could be matched one-on-one with other submitted programs in an iterated version of the game. In each round of any given match, each of the competing programs would be called on to make the binary choice—cooperate or defect. If both programs chose "cooperate," both would be rewarded with three points. If one chose "cooperate" and the other chose "defect," the defector would get five

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# Want to Write for Crain's? Be Prepared.

BY RUTH E. THALER-CARTER

If IWOC members want to write for Laurie Cunningham of the prestigious *Crain's Chicago Business*, their stories should be specific and detailed — and they can't write for the Chicago edition of *BusinessWeek*.

Cunningham spoke at IWOC's November 2007 meeting, as part of the current



Laurie Cunningham

program-year focus, "Get Hired!" She supervises major feature sections and trav-

els constantly on her own stories: When asked if she wanted to be editor, she was in middle of a special feature section on Brazil.

"My favorite thing about writing is that it's a craft, so you can always get better," Cunningham said. Because she believes in continual improvement, "I'm always referring to my 'bibles:' William Zinsser's *On Writing Well*, James Stewart's *Follow the Story*, and William Blundell's *Art and Craft of Feature Writing*." Those works are so important to her that she brought copies to show IWOC members.

## Pet peeves

To write for Cunningham and *Crain's Chicago Business*, IWOCers should avoid her pet peeves:

- **lack of specifics:** "He likes to play board games. Which ones? Give examples."

- **jargon:** "My job is to be the guardian of the reader, and jargon tells me the writer is lazy or afraid to say 'what do you mean' (to an interview subject). My rule of thumb is, if I don't know what it means, our readers won't. Editors get annoyed (when writers over-use jargon) because you're making (us) work too hard. I use myself as a barometer and try to make stories as clear as possible; they should be easy to understand, (but) don't talk down. When a source can't talk without jargon, you have to move on (to someone else)." She did acknowledge that "there is a time for jargon — there is good jargon; for instance, when it's colorful."

- **clichés:** "Don't use 'skill set' or 'at the end of the day.' Clichés are crutches. We all have our own (clichéd) ways of structuring stories, such as ending on a quote. End in your own voice."

- **over-quoting:** "Quoting can become a ping-pong match. Get to know (your sources), paraphrase, and then quote."

- **wastefulness in writing:** "Use economy. 'He says he likes' should be 'He likes.'"

- **fillers:** "Write lean," Cunningham said. "In my own and others' work, I prune and prune and prune. Don't say someone earns 'about so much' or did something 'around two years ago.' Be exact. Don't say the subject 'heads up' an organization; use 'heads.' Don't be redundant ('absolute

disaster') or contradictory ('minor catastrophe.')

## Making it better

Cunningham offered several tips for improving one's writing, starting with reading the works noted above.

"Print out your stories and read them out loud," she suggested. "If you stumble over a sentence, your readers will, too. We read with our ears."

She also stressed the importance of structure. Citing what her boss tells her, she said that "writing is thinking; if you aren't clear, writing

won't help you figure it out. Put the point of the story in

one sentence. Once you have all your material, read through it and find the core themes."

While indexing is "torture for journalists," she also recommended creating headings and sections, and then putting relevant notes into each.

To Cunningham, "it's really important to trust your instincts (about what's important to include). Details are really important to a story, but not just details for details' sake." She likes anecdotes and scene-setting when those techniques are done well.

Because Cunningham also believes in the value of research and knows that freelancers may not have the funds for their own Lexis/Nexis or Factiva accounts, she gives her reporters access to her Factiva account.

## Getting in the door

Approaching Cunningham

is easy: Send her an e-mail message with a résumé and five clips (copies of published work) attached, preferably representing journalism or newspaper work. "We'll start slow — a 'first date' — one story," she said. "If I really like you, I will use you and pay you well. I assign a whole section to one reporter, and the reporters we like get about a month to write (their sections)."

It's worth making that approach, because working for Cunningham can be "very lucrative," she said. "About \$1 a word, but we

**Those who meet the challenge are well rewarded. A section—a typical assignment—pays up to \$8000.**

pay by the project, which is about \$7,000–\$8,000 for the whole section."

Cunningham does accept pitches (story ideas), although "I've found that pitches don't work out." Writers are better off referring to Crain's editorial calendar, which is available online. "The model I like is to come up with a grand idea and tell a reporter to go out and find the story, sources, etc.," she said. She maintains folders on various topics, so she can provide leads and background material.

Be forewarned: Freelancers interested in writing for Cunningham can write for other business journals, but not — ironically, given IWOC's January speaker — for *BusinessWeek*. Whether *BusinessWeek* sees it the same way remains to be seen at the January IWOC meeting. ♣

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# January's Question of the Month: What are your work goals for 2008, and how do you hope to achieve them?

BY KAREN SCHWARTZ

**Chuck Coffin:** In 2008, I would like to at least double my income from 2007. That's really a very modest goal, since I am retired and only freelancing part-time.

 During much of 2007, I was dealing with family issues that kept me from accepting several assignments, and for the same reason, for much of the year I did not actively seek work. Generally speaking, I have had good results from using the IWOC job line, and I have also been contacted by clients who got my name from the IWOC website. In 2008, things should be a little different: I should have time to seek work, and I should not have to decline any opportunities, so I expect to have a much better year.

**Ruth E. Thaler-Carter:** My main goals for the new year are to get published in at least one new national magazine and to get assign-

ments from at least one former client or publication for which I haven't worked in a while. The only way I know of to accomplish this is to brainstorm story ideas with myself and then get off my duff to do the necessary query letters and follow-up.

 That's going to be my main focus in January, 2008.

I also aim to be more efficient at filing. That's just a function of discipline in moving things from the pile on the floor into file folders. I have no idea how to accomplish this goal; it might take hypnosis to get me to put away receipts and research notes as I go along.

I plan to devote more energy toward building my secondary business, Communication Central. My partner and I have hosted two successful, but small, national conferences. We would like to build the busi-

ness by offering more programs throughout the year that could give the annual conference more visibility. We've come up with several topics and just have to get off the dime and DO IT!

I also hope to do more public speaking, which I really enjoy. Specifically, I've been trying to organize a Chicago offering on my "Getting Started" workshop for the past couple years. I'll try to achieve that goal by working with IWOC to see if we can pull that together in conjunction with what should be an annual November trip to the Windy City for another organization in which I'm active.

Another goal for 2008 is to overcome procrastination. I meet my deadlines, but I often futz around until the last minute to get started and then feel stressed over finishing something on time.

**Chris Benevich:** In 2008, I plan to complete my first

novel. I'm currently exploring publishing, distribution and promotional options. If anyone in IWOC can introduce me to a NYC agent looking for metaphysical thrillers, I would be most grateful and happy to return the favour.

**Dave Epstein:** My key goal for the coming year is to develop ongoing working relationships with three to five small to medium-sized business clients and to enjoy

 a variety of projects and relationships. Right now, I'm setting up my web "storefront," spreading the word about my services to existing and new contacts, and doing a focused search for companies and organizations that can use a communicator with a broad business background who can understand their messages and help them reach their target audiences. 🐾

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## IWOC Online Discussion List (continued from page 1)

announce recent triumphs—new clients, awards, etc.—and upcoming activities of interest to colleagues, but please keep these short. Direct listmates to further details and sign-up info through links.

This is a YahooGroups list, which means that members can opt to receive it as individual messages or batches called digests. If you opt for the message mode, you should be able to respond to a message simply by clicking your Reply button. If you opt for digest, you may have to open a new e-mail window, enter the digest address (see below), copy and paste the Subject line of the message to which you're responding or type in a new Subject, and hit Send once you've written your message.

To join the IWOC list, send a message with SUBSCRIBE in the Subject line to: IWOCers-subscribe@yahoogroups.com. Once you subscribe, you can post messages to the list using: IWOCers@yahoogroups.com. (Copy to your e-mail address book also.) There are a few guidelines for proper etiquette. They are simple, but please do follow them so the list will be as useful as possible:

- Set your e-mail program to Plain Text. Do not send messages in HTML, MIME or any format other than Plain Text.
- Include a Subject line for every message. If responding to a previous message, please use the same Subject line.
- When responding to someone else's message, please "snip" (cut the original message down to what's essential for others to make sense of your response.) Don't "reprint" an entire, lengthy message unnecessarily and never reprint an entire digest.
- Do not send attachments to the list. If you want to share an article from somewhere else with listmates, copy and paste it. If it's a lengthy article that is available online, provide the title, first sentence or paragraph, and a link to the original.
- Do not include entire sign-up/registration materials for conferences, etc. Just provide a link, even if it's your own e-ddress.
- Do not flame (insult) other listmates or colleagues.
- Do not report viruses or hoaxes to the list.

If you have any questions, feel free to contact me, Ruth Thaler-Carter, at [Ruth@writerruth.com](mailto:Ruth@writerruth.com). 🐾

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## The Internet's Wordsmith Delves into More Word Origins

This is yet another review in an irregular series devoted to books and Internet sites that are popularly classified as reference source material.

BY RICHARD L. EASTLINE

*The Dord, the Diglot, and an Avocado or Two* / Anu Garg / 180 pp. incl. index / Plume Books, a division of Penguin, 2007 / \$13.00 (small format paperback) / ISBN- 9780-0-452-28861-4

Why are we so inquisitive about the heritage of words and phrases? Is it because sometimes they have no outward connection to the size or shape or sound of the things or actions they're describing? Or because they suggest something familiar and mean something else? Whatever the reasons, the genealogy of words both familiar and strange can be the basis for an obsessive curiosity about what we say and write. And, possibly the most active practitioner in seeking out origins is the founder of Wordsmith.org, the Internet home to word lovers.

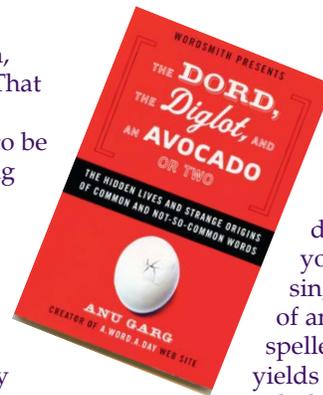
Anu Garg physically lives in Seattle but his presence is felt everywhere on the globe. Through his e-mailed newsletters, thousands of addicts get their regular fix,

discovering new facets of words they use—or may want to use. Right near the top of their curiosities is the matter of how and where common and not-so-common words originated. Garg has assembled a personal-choice anthology of some 300 examples in his latest book, and it's apparent from his palpable enthusiasm that no one likely does it better.

Assigning his examples among 17 loosely categorized chapters, he invites the reader to discover their parentage, usually logical but often bizarre, as he dissects a word's components or calls upon folk tales and historical characters to illuminate probable first usage. Among the chosen categories are: Tasty Words, Insults, Words That Have Changed, Words About Words, and Words That Sound Good. And,

within a section, such as Places That Became Words, there's variety to be found in moving from the logical ("laconic") to a "New York minute" (technically illogical, but wonderfully appropriate). As a successful Internet scribe, Garg has mastered the art of terseness, so the listings range in size from as little as a third of a page to no more than two full pages.

You'll also find an unexpected bonus in the form of trivia quiz questions that naturally are word-related and placed at the bottom of pages here and there. For the inexperienced or cowardly, the answers are at the back of the book. These queries



are like the small servings of sorbet that cleanse the palate throughout a lingering dinner. Think you're smart? What singular version of an English word spelled backwards yields a French word with the same reference, but in plural form? ("state" = "etats")—or how about identifying a six-letter word that uses just two characters of the alphabet? (Hint: the two occur sequentially in our ABCs—but if you're stumped, look for answer #16 on page 171).

All in all, it's a fun book. Best of all, you'll smile and snicker even as your IQ advances. ♡

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## Holiday Party Pics (more on the website)



## President's Column

Continued from page 2.

points, and the cooperator would get zero points. If both chose "defect," each would get only one point. At the end of the match (200 rounds), whichever program had accumulated the most points would be declared the winner.

Axelrod's invitation prompted 14 entries. Some contained complicated formulas designed to predict what the opposing program would do based on its performance in previous rounds; others were relatively simple. To his surprise, the winner was the shortest and simplest of all—a seven-line program called TIT FOR TAT that employed a "nice" strategy based on cooperation. Its approach could be stated simply as: "I will do to you this round whatever you did to me last round, and I will always begin by cooperating." Sort of an inverse Golden Rule.

Axelrod published the results of the tournament and issued an invitation for a second round of submissions. This time, he received 62 entries from six different countries.

The winner, again, was TIT FOR TAT.

Armed with these intriguing results, he conducted a follow-up experiment—an iterative multiple-match tournament in which each program's success in a given match determined its population in the next. Winners increased in number from match to match; losers diminished and died out. By doing so, he was able to determine which programs might represent stable strategies for survival.

What he discovered was this: that if the initial population of programs included only one isolated TIT FOR TAT, it would soon become extinct. But if the initial population included a small cluster of TIT FOR TATs, its numbers would grow until eventually it would outnumber all other programs. The "not-nice" programs based on selfishness would either be relegated to the minority or become extinct. In short, cooperation would not only win out, it would dominate.

Axelrod's results suggest something remarkable about the process of natural selection: in a competitive environment without central authority, it is possible for cooperation to arise on its own and to thrive. And that as a survival strategy, cooperation is not merely viable—it's robust.

I thought of this the other day when watching a rerun of the "Planet Earth" series. In one scene, a group of river otters harasses a large alligator and ultimately chases it away from their domain. The alligator is 20 times larger and stronger than any one otter but is overmatched by the group. Cooperation, in the natural world, prevails.

The implications are easily extended to our own species on all levels—from individual to societal to global. The impulse to cooperate—to play nice and thereby enhance everyone's chances of survival and prosperity—is innate. The "survival of the fittest" argument fails, and the selfish act is exposed for what it is—an individual choice lacking any kind of evolutionary justification.

We just came through the holiday season, when human beings across the globe expressed to each other the traditional New Year's hope of "Peace on Earth." In a competitive world without central authority, such peace demands cooperation. We might never actually see that peace come to pass, but Axelrod's work suggests that even in a world without Deity, the seeds for its sprouting are within us.

Here's wishing you a cooperative and prosperous 2008. 🐾

## Calendar

### January 8

**IWOC Monthly Meeting.** Joe Webber, who is chief of correspondents for *BusinessWeek* will speak. Webber will discuss his own publication, the future of print journalism, and other hot topics. See article on page 1 for details.

*The monthly food and networking get-togethers listed below meet at the same time and place each month unless otherwise noted, but call ahead in case of cancellation. The groups welcome nonmembers. If there's no group in your area, why not start one? Contact [webmaster@iwoc.org](mailto:webmaster@iwoc.org).*

### February 7 (1st Thursday)

**IWORP Monthly Breakfast.** Join the Rogers Park IWOC contingent for breakfast at 9 AM at the A&T Grill, 7036 N. Clark St., Chicago. For more info, call Esther Manewith at 773/274-6215.

### January 24 (4th Thursday)

**IWOOP Monthly Lunch.** Near-west suburbanites meet at noon on the 4th Thursday of the month for lunch at Poor Phil's, 139 S. Marion St., Oak Park. For more info, call Barb Dillard at 312/642-3065.

## IWOC Welcomes New Member Bill Harms

**Someone left a yellow umbrella at the Holiday Party. If it's yours, contact Karen Schwartz at 708/386-3044 or at [writersks@sbcglobal.com](mailto:writersks@sbcglobal.com).**

## It's Happening on the Web!

**Check Out Writers' Line**

**Browse Resources**

**See What's Doing in IWOC Events**

**WWW.IWOC.ORG**