**SPECIAL FEATURES**

**Pitchapalooza — American Idol for Books (virtual, free)**

**Pitchapalooza**

8 p.m. EST

Monday, Oct. 9

Arielle Eckstut and David Henry Sterry

A workshop favorite! Pitchapalooza is American Idol for books (only kinder and gentler). Twenty writers were selected at random to pitch their book ideas. Each writer received one minute — and only one minute! Known as the Book Doctors, Eckstut and Sterry helped these writers — and everyone in the audience — improve their pitches. They critiqued everything from idea to style to potential in the marketplace. Authors and audience came away with concrete advice as well as a greater understanding of the ins and outs of the publishing industry. Whether you pitched yourself or simply listened to trained professionals critique other writers, Pitchapalooza is educational and entertaining. At the end, Eckstut and Sterry selected [a winner](https://udayton.edu/blogs/erma/2023/10/pitchapalooza_champion.php) who will receive an introduction to an appropriate agent or publisher. Numerous authors have received publishing deals due to Pitchapalooza.

[*View a recording of the event here*](https://www.crowdcast.io/c/pitchapalooza2023)

***Beyond the Byline: Erma Bombeck’s Story* *(free and open to the public)****Feb. 1- June 15  
Rose Gallery, Roesch Library*

Attendees will have the opportunity to view the exhibit with the Bombeck family on Saturday, April 6.

At an opening dessert reception at 6:30 p.m., Thursday, Feb. 8, Gina Barreca, bestselling author, humorist and feminist scholar, gave the keynote address; Matt Bombeck, Erma Bombeck’s son and a screenwriter, delivered remarks on behalf of the family. [Click here for the recording](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mxojeCGbezQ).

Erma Bombeck (1927–1996) was a trailblazing humor writer, bestselling author and syndicated columnist whose creative genesis began as a University of Dayton student. In this engaging exhibit, her multifaceted life and legacy are told through the Erma Bombeck Collection, including correspondence, notes, photographs and even her typewriter. Bombeck’s witty observations and roles of writer, housewife, feminist, humorist, mother, activist, philanthropist, columnist and pioneer are inseparably linked and continue to connect us to her story.

**Erma’s Got Talent: The Stand-Up Auditions (virtual, free and open to the public)**

**Erma’s Got Talent: The Stand-Up Auditions**

7 p.m. EST

Wednesday, Feb. 28

Hosted by Nancy Berk, featuring celebrity judges Jane Condon, Wendy Liebman and Joel Madison

Put your business card in the ring for a chance to test your two-minute stand-up routine in front of an EBWW audience and three stand-up veterans giving insight and constructive criticism. Whether you get the golden buzzer or just some solid advice for taking it to the next level, this pre-workshop session helps participants and attendees craft better comedy and performances. Selected participants will be added to the Saturday night lineup. Others will be chosen randomly after the auditions, and Jane Condon will select three more from her Stand-Up Comedy Boot Camp.

This event is free and open to the public, but [registration](https://www.crowdcast.io/c/ermasgottalent2024) is required for participants and the audience.

To watch a replay of the 2022 event, [click here](https://www.crowdcast.io/e/erma_got_talent).

**You Can Write, Too: Finding Your Voice (free and open to the public)**

*Sharon Short*

*3-5 p.m. EST, Wednesday, April 3*

*Roesch Library Collab (Room 240)*

*Free, but registration is required.* [*Register here for the waitlist*](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSceosNVxfUFGeLwcPeaCUXOqUTSB7y5G1g0aKPQ8GRg0HSMOQ/viewform)*.*

Do you ever stare at your blank screen or page, filled with the desire to write yet stymied about where to start? Or do you review something you’ve written and wonder how to make it better?

Learn how to set yourself free of your writing fears and find your own compelling writing voice, just like Erma Bombeck did when a University of Dayton English professor told her, “You can write!”

Award-winning novelist and longtime columnist Sharon Short will help writers of all experience levels with writing tips and techniques to dig to the good stuff — a unique point of view to bring experiences and stories to the page in a way that will connect with readers. Using Bombeck’s columns as prompts, Short will guide you through brief writing exercises that will build your confidence as you tap into your humor, hone a distinctive voice, and find your path as a writer. Because *you* can write, too!

*Sponsored by the University of Dayton’s Roesch Library as part of special events surrounding the exhibit* Beyond the Byline: Erma Bombeck’s Story *in the Rose Gallery.*

**Erma Bombeck Writing Competition Awards Ceremony (free and open to the public)**

*7 p.m.*

*Wednesday, April 3*

*Woodbourne Library*

*6060 Far Hills Ave., Centerville, Ohio*

Erma Bombeck’s daughter, Betsy Bombeck, will give the keynote address. Sponsored by the Washington-Centerville Public Library, this event is free and open to the public, but registration is required. [Register here](https://wclibrary.evanced.info/signup/EventDetails?EventId=18038&backTo=Calendar&startDate=2024/04/01). The winners also will be honored at dinner on Friday, April 5.

**Keynote Talks***Dinners and Lunches, April 4-6*

Anna Quindlen in conversation with award-winning television anchor and broadcast journalist Marsha Bonhart, 6 p.m., April 4  
  
Zibby Owens, noon, April 5

Beth Lapides, 6 p.m., April 5

Jacquelyne Mitchard, noon, April 6

Wade Rouse, 6:30 p.m., April 6

**Robing of Humorist-in-Residence Winners**

*6 p.m.*

*Thursday, April 4*

*Marriott at University of Dayton (ballroom)*

Two grand prize winners of “A Hotel Room of One’s Own: The Erma Bombeck | Anna Lefler Humorist-in-Residence Program will be “robed” in plush, custom-embroidered bathrobes to kick off their two-week writing residency at the University of Dayton Marriott.

**Open Mic Night at Erma with Kathy Kinney and Cindy Ratzlaff**

*9 p.m., Thursday, April 4*

*Marriott at the University of Dayton (ballroom)*

**New!** Kathy Kinney and Cindy Ratzlaff (aka “The Queens”) will facilitate a fun, new feature. Bring your short work-in-progress, such as your Erma competition essay, and share it with the Erma writing community. The Queens will select readers randomly from the audience. The vibe: informal, supportive, entertaining!

**“Erma Made Me Do It!”**

*Kathy Shiels Tully*

*7:45-8:45 a.m., Friday, April 5*

*Riverview Café*

*Daniel J. Curran Place*

The magic of attending the Erma Bombeck Writers’ Workshop motivates many to make their writing dreams come true — at *any* age. Whetherwriting essays or books**,**even performing stand-up comedy, the Erma successes are stacking up. Join us to learn just how. Thisearly-morning session is an interactive warm-up to kick off the workshop for new attendees and be a welcome-back hour for those returning. Grab a cup of coffee and a bagel, then listen toa range ofsuccess stories from previous attendees inspired by Erma. And don’t be shy, share your own!  Jump-start your chance to start forming or renewing connections among a supportive community that believes in you. All roads lead to Erma. What’s your story?

[Share your written story](https://forms.gle/gsxMUxUJDiePYB266).

[Videotape your story](https://udayton.thankview.com/video/request/65d2258962f51).

Deadline: March 12

**Erma Poet Laureate**

*Barbara Fant*

*6 p.m., Friday, April 5*

***New!*** Los Angeles poet and performer Barbara Fant will perform an original poem she wrote for the Erma Bombeck Writers’ Workshop.

**Agent Pitch Sessions ($50; limited availability)**

*April 5-6*

***New!*** For an additional fee, we’re offering 15-minute one-on-one sessions to pitch your submission-ready work to a literary agent and receive professional insights. Come prepared with a focused, convincing pitch. You will receive supportive, insightful and actionable feedback to help you find a market for your book. You might even land representation. You don’t need to bring the manuscript, but you may upload a one-page query letter or synopsis in advance. [Register here](https://signup.com/client/invitation2/secure/1737680980110/false#/invitation).

**The agents:**

* + **Amy Collins, Talcott Notch Literary Services** (areas of interest: pop culture, fantasy, women’s fiction, humor, essays, memoir)
  + **Sam Hiyate, The Rights Factory** (areas of interest: debut fiction, memoir, narrative nonfiction, graphic novels, humor)
* **Maria Whelan, Inkwell** (areas of interest: literary and commercial fiction, speculative fiction, magical realism, fiction and nonfiction that straddles the cultural divide)

**Book Signings**

9 p.m. EST

Friday, April 5

Marriott Tradewinds

Book signings with keynoters will be held immediately after their talks. A book signing with all workshop presenters will run from 9 to 11 p.m., Friday, April 5.

**Erma Road Trip!**

Tours beginning at 3:30 p.m. EST Saturday, April 6

Featuring a drive on Erma Bombeck Way to Woodland Cemetery to visit Erma’s gravesite; photo opportunities at the Erma Bombeck historical marker and commemorative tree outside St. Mary’s Hall on the University of Dayton campus; and a viewing of the exhibit *Beyond the Byline: Erma Bombeck’s Story* in the Rose Gallery on the first floor of Roesch Library. Shuttle bus tours available. Attendees with cars are encouraged to carpool.

**Stand-Up Comedy Night**

9:30–11 p.m.  
Saturday, April 6  
Marriott at University of Dayton (ballroom)

Stand-up comic Jane Condon emcees the workshop’s traditional blowout conclusion featuring 18 attendees. Some comics are chosen at the pre-workshop virtual event Erma’s Got Talent. Others are chosen randomly after the auditions, and Condon chooses another three from her Stand-Up Comedy Boot Camp.

**CONCURRENT SESSIONS (SIX WILL BE OFFERED IN MOST TIME SLOTS. MOST PRESENTERS OFFER THEIR WORKSHOP TWICE.)**

**Craft of Writing**

**Fearless Writing: How to Create Boldly**

*William Kenower*

If you love to write and have a story you want to tell, the only thing that can truly stand between you and the success you’re seeking is fear — fear that you aren’t good enough or fear the market is too crowded or fear that no one wants to hear from you. Fortunately, you can’t write *and* be afraid simultaneously. The question is whether you will write fearlessly on purpose. In this workshop, you’ll explore techniques to keep yourself in the creative flow and out of the misery fear causes. Among other things, you will learn the only two questions writers should ever ask themselves; that writing is listening, not thinking; and why writers must pay attention to how they feel.

**Memoir: The Landscape of the Personal**

*Kelly McMasters*

Memoir is a strange animal, living somewhere between fiction and autobiography. Life doesn’t unfold in neat little plot packages, and a writer’s toolbox is required to bring our stories to life. Through short readings, generative exercises and observation, participants will stretch toward the universal by illuminating the particular.

**NaNoWriMo: How to Prepare, Survive and Succeed (one time only)**

*Eva Lesko Natiello*

With almost a half million writers participating in National Novel Writing Month, this monthlong creative writing challenge may be exactly what you need to start (and finish?) your novel. But, taking on a writing goal of 50,000 words in 30 days is not for the faint-hearted. The best chance for success is knowing what steps to take before November, strategies to get through it, and what to do once the month is over so you can call yourself a winner no matter how many words you achieve.

**Connect Through Setting: How to Build a World Readers Want to Enter**

*Julie Cantrell*

In this session, learn specific sensory strategies to connect with “the scene we’re in,” then use those tools to develop setting as an active character while exploring the power of story — on the page and in real life. Come ready to write and share.

**Getting Your Writing Noticed Through Micro Memoir**

*Estelle Erasmus*

This fun, fast-moving, hands-on workshop will show you how to write your smallest moments into big publishing success in 100 words or under. Estelle Erasmus will teach you actionable craft tips, strategies and tricks on opening a window into your past and scenarizing, not summarizing, so you can make an impact with micro memoir — often a precursor for getting a memoir published and the attention of agents, publishers, contests and other gatekeepers. You’ll leave the workshop with a draft of your short piece, plus each of the steps it takes to get you there.

**Essays Gone Wild**

*Susan Pohlman*

The literary world is abuzz about the modern essay form authors Brenda Miller and Suzanne Paola have nicknamed “the hermit crab,” which borrows known structures — recipes, how-to manuals, syllabi, drug facts, the pain scale, apologies, dating profiles, form letters — to tell a story or explore a topic. It’s a great choice for humor and human interest. In this interactive session, you will examine this emerging form and write your own.

**Jump-start Your Writing: Prompts to Get the Words on the Page**

*Katrina Kittle*

Writers of all experience levels can hit dry spells, ruts, the dreaded block — those times we face the blank page and it all feels miserably impossible. This session is full of tips, tricks and prompts to get you writing again or to keep you in shape between projects. The exercises are designed to inspire new stories or to enrich a work in progress. Participants will do some together, but you’ll get even more to take with you for those inevitable hard days.

**What’s That Smell? Five Tips for Using Your Senses to Bring Your Prose to Life**

*Sharon Short*

Our senses provide joy, warnings, guidance, memory triggers and more. Yet we often take them for granted — in our lives and in our writing. The senses of sight, hearing, smell, taste and touch can inject energy into your prose. This session will offer five tips and prompts to help you unearth sensory descriptions for memoir or personal essays or generate them for characters; integrate sensory descriptions for depth and texture; and use sensory description to trigger plot points, deepen character development and showcase theme.

**Mastering Voice: Finding the Magic Mix**

*Jessica Strawser*

In a crowded market, one thing can make your story stand out: Voice. It grips attention, makes your characters and their world feel real and signals that your readers are in the hands of a compelling storyteller. In an era of audiobooks and e-reading, it’s more important than ever. This workshop draws on art forms and entertainment to improve command of written voice and style; demonstrates how choices in point of view shape characters and build suspense; teaches you to hone voices for every character; and taps that “it factor” agents and editors seek.

**Essay Shakedown: Reported Essays and Op-Eds**

*Amy Paturel and Bonnie Jean Feldkamp*

*The Washington Post*, *The New York Times* and local newspapers are increasingly prioritizing reported essays and opinion pieces (op-eds) over straight personal narratives. In this session, you’ll learn how to approach reported essays and op-eds, which hinge on data, research and interviews with experts and often stem from things in your life that you want to investigate. You’ll explore marketable topic areas and dissect great essays — one reported and one that offers a strong opinion — and learn how to craft an essay that sings.

**Humor Writing**

**How to Be Erma Bombeck but You: Writing Funny Personal Essays**

*Elissa Bassist*

Why do you laugh when you read? Because you relate? Because you’re surprised? Because life is an absurd farce? In this session, you’ll learn what every funny personal essay needs in order to write, publish and promote your own. We’ll analyze funny personal essays by our favorites to use their tricks, and you'll brainstorm what’s unusual and universal in your situations to carve out your stories. We’ll also gossip about pitching and publication.

**Knock Three Times: The Three-Beat Technique Writers Use to Create Magic**

*Lori Jakiela*

Humor in American literature is often conveyed in the Rule of Threes. It guides everything from knock-knock jokes to Erma Bombeck. You’ll learn about classic humorists who knew the power of three and its somewhat covert place in American literature, then harness that power for humor writing and beyond. We’ll study the experts such as Bombeck, David Sedaris, James Thurber, Kurt Vonnegut and more.

**It's Funny Because it's (Not) True: Writing Humorous Fiction**

*Jane Roper*

A lot of fiction is described as being “witty” or “hilarious” but is it really? No, like, *really*? In this session, we'll look at what makes (actually) funny moments in fiction work, and how writers of all levels can use parody, satire, hyperbole, dialogue, detail and other elements of craft to bring humor to their novels or stories. We'll also talk about how to strike the all-important balance between levity and emotional weight, to engage readers on a deeper level. Whether you're looking to write an all-out farce or simply bring moments of comic relief to otherwise serious work, you'll walk away with concrete tips, techniques and inspiration.

**Humor on Tap: A Psychologist, Humorist and ChatGPT Walk into a Bar**

*Mark Shatz*

A psychologist, a humorist and ChatGPT walk into a bar filled with writers. After they leave, everyone, including the writers who tell themselves, “I’m not funny,” starts writing humor. The writers learn that imagination is the fuel of humor’s engine, which means everyone has the potential to create funny. During this interactive session, psychologist and humorist Mark Shatz teaches humor writing brainstorming techniques; explains how artificial intelligence can enhance one’s sense of humor; and identifies strategies for integrating humor into writing.

**Improv on Paper: How to Uncover Your Voice**

*Kathy Kinney and Cindy Ratzlaff*

With a series of improvisational writing techniques and a kitchen timer, this hands-on workshop will get you past your self-criticism, reveal your voice, and prove once and for all that you can write! Come prepared to write without self-editing and to give your imagination a good workout.

**You but Funnier (one time only)**

*Beth Lapides*

In an energized and highly effective workshop that kicks you into the next level of being the funniest version of the real you, veteran comedian and creativity coach Beth Lapides shares her system for finding your most unique comedic voice and the stories that are essential to it.

**Stand-Up Comedy Boot Camp (one time only)**

*Jane Condon*

Learn the basics of stand-up comedy. Nationally known stand-up comic Jane Condon will share writing techniques to make your stories funny and ways to deliver them to make them funnier. The workshop is open to stand-up performers and anyone who wants to learn. Scribble your own hilarious ideas and come prepared to laugh. Afterward, Condon will choose three participants to perform at Stand-Up Comedy Night.

**Publishing**

**I Want to Self-Publish; Now What?**

*Kerrie Flanagan*

Kerrie Flanagan has immersed herself into the world of self-publishing by publishing 19 of her own books and helping dozens of other authors through the process. Through her experiences, she came up with 18 steps to not only publish a great book, but also create a successful self-publishing career. This workshop will provide you with the information you need to begin creating, publishing and marketing a high-quality book that will rise above the millions of self-published titles out there.

**Pitch Your Book in Two Sentences**

*Ann Garvin*

Even the most skilled authors find distilling a book to a pitch difficult — not because the writer doesn’t know what the book is about, but because the writer doesn’t want to leave anything out. That doesn’t work when you’re selling your book. In this session, you will learn how to make pitches compelling and clear, to word them persuasively and hook the interest of an agent and editor. We will examine the most common pitch mistakes with examples that work well — and some that don’t.

**The Biggest Mistakes Writers Make**

*Tiffany Yates Martin*

Writers can’t be objective about their own work, which makes certain missteps almost universal. Learn to spot mistakes that may be keeping your story and your writing from peak effectiveness. Learn how to check your manuscripts for these trouble spots and how you can address them and make sure your story stands out.

**Build a Better Freelance Business (one time only)**

*Jane Friedman*

Many writers, especially those with a track record of publication, supplement their income with freelance editing or coaching. But writers can easily undermine their efforts by taking on too wide a spectrum of work. The key to success as a freelance editor is to go narrow. In this session, writers can learn how to be more successful in a freelance editing business with the three Ps: positioning, packaging and pricing.

**Marketing and Social Media**

**Find Your Readers: The Ultimate Book Marketing Workshop (one time only)**

*Eva Lesko Natiello*

When authors ask, "Do I really need to market my book?" There's only one answer: "Only if you want to sell it." Have you published a book but wish your sales were more robust? Are you about to publish and want to put marketing strategies in place to strengthen your launch? The truth is that no matter how you publish these days, authors need to contribute to the marketing. This talk is designed for all authors, indie or traditional, introvert or extrovert, fiction or non-fiction. Learn actionable marketing strategies that even the most introverted author will not balk at. Instead of thinking of marketing as a negative, grab ahold of the power you have, and get your book noticed.

**Social Media Bliss: How to Engage With Meaning Without Losing Your Mind (one time only)**

*Jane Friedman*

This session teaches a holistic approach to social media based on long-term reader engagement and sound principles of online marketing. Your writing is always central, and you have to enjoy what you’re doing on social media. You’ll figure out the questions that will help you uncover the best solution for you. We’ll eliminate guesswork and focus on an authentic approach. The class will use examples from Facebook, X and Instagram because of their size and popularity in the publishing community, but the principles can work on any social media platform.

**Creating Your Author Website: Shine Like a Pro**

*Laura Spinella and Audrey Bennett*

Every author needs an effective web presence that conveys their unique brand. With so many options available for creating a website, the choices can be daunting. In this session, we’ll use our experience gleaned from 20 years of building author websites to help you determine the best approach for you. We’ll demystify the jargon, provide do’s and don'ts and recommend best practices that can make your author website shine.