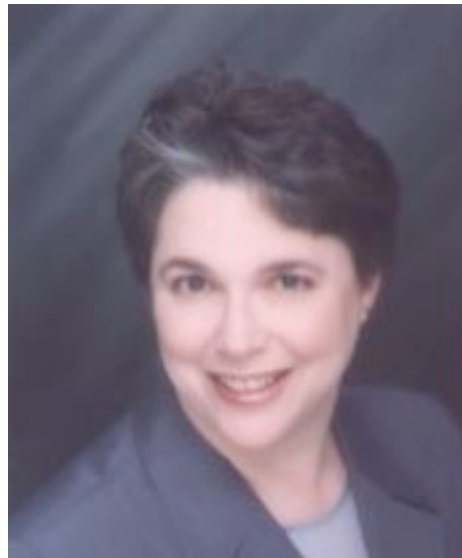


SLWG Spotlight...*We're pleased to present...*

Fran Santoro Hamilton



**Writer, Co-Sponsor of a Writing Contest for Students,
Columnist, Publisher, Teacher**

SLWG Member since 1998

Fran Santoro Hamilton believes that communication is the most important skill that a person can have. Communication allows each of us to receive information, solve problems, and express our thoughts and feelings. If we could not communicate with others, we would have to learn everything from our own experience. Because Fran believes that communication is so important, she has devoted her career—as editor, teacher, and writer—to helping people communicate more effectively and more easily.

The Early Years

Fran first became hooked on writing in second grade, when her story "The Hen That Wanted a Chicken" received an S+ from her teacher and high praise from her family. Early success had a disadvantage, however: the bar was set extremely high, and she feared that subsequent writing would not measure up.

Success struck again when, as a sophomore at Lindenwood College (now University), Fran won the Spahmer Award for creative writing. Her contest entry consisted of a short story titled "A Singing Lesson" and two poems. Fran also wrote an honors thesis in English titled *Portraits of the Artist*. It examined James Joyce's aesthetic theory as exemplified in three of his works—*A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, *Ulysses*, and *Exiles*.

Working for Publishers of Educational Materials

After receiving her B.A. degree, Fran worked for several years copy editing and creating educational materials. One of her projects involved generating manuscript for a vocabulary series. During this project Fran rolled about 900 sheets of paper into her manual typewriter and triumphed—once and for all—over the blank page.

Working on educational materials gave Fran the desire to implement such products in the classroom. Since she had taken no education courses as an undergraduate, she pursued an M.A. in Education at Washington University in St. Louis. With her degree she earned lifetime teaching certificates in English, Reading, and Learning Disabilities.

Into the Classroom

Fran first taught business letter writing and report writing at a technical school. Most of her students had hated English for at least ten years before they ever met Fran. After two years at the technical school, one year at a high school, and one year at a junior high, Fran began teaching at the level she had wanted all along: For fifteen years she taught English to fourth, fifth, and sixth graders.

Fran discovered that teaching English sharpened her understanding of English rules. During her days as a copy editor she had often come across sentences that didn't seem right, even though she couldn't explain exactly what was wrong with them. When she presented rules to students, however, she needed to understand all of the whys and wherefores.

In 1988, after being unable to find an English text that she considered suitable for her students, Fran decided to write a handbook for them. She had been pulling worksheets from various sources, but she realized that many students needed to review information that had been presented earlier—and other students needed to access information that the class wouldn't even cover during the year.

The 88-page handbook—with no illustrations, little white space, and her typewriter’s only font—was run off on the school ditto machine, and each student was given a copy that he or she was responsible for keeping at least until graduation from the elementary school. Fran saw some of her former students when they were in college—and they reported that they still used their handbooks occasionally.

Hands-On English



Hands-On English
ISBN: 0966486757
Pub. Date: August
2004
Available on this
website from Barnes
& Noble.
See our homepage
link!

When Fran left the classroom in 1997, she knew that she wanted to write. She decided to start with the handbook since she thought it was virtually ready to publish. When she sought feedback from a couple of professional writers, however, each independently asked, “Where are the illustrations?” Fran did not like cutesy illustrations (common in many of the textbooks she had rejected), so she decided that if she had to include illustrations, she would make them functional.

Fran enlisted one of her sons, Michael, as illustrator. Together Fran and Michael devised ten symbols for parts of speech so that grammar was made visual. The symbols relate to how the parts of speech work. For example, a cube represents a noun, a spring represents an action verb, and glue represents a coordinating conjunction. Furthermore, the symbols can be combined to show various kinds of sentences.

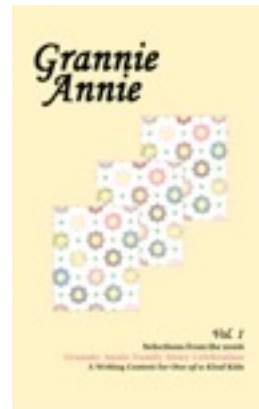
Rather than submit her handbook to an established publisher, Fran decided to create a publishing company, Portico Books, so that she could retain control of the project. *Hands-On English* was published in 1998.

In addition, Portico Books has published companion products to *Hands-On English*: an *Activity Book* (practice pages to help students master the concepts presented in the handbook), *Hands-On Sentences* (a card game that gives practice with parts of speech and sentence structure), and *Hands-On Icons* (visual aids). The second edition of *Hands-On English* was published in 2004.

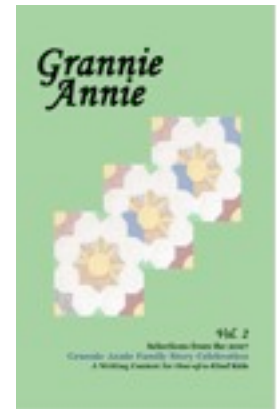
Just as Fran has taught students of all ages, *Hands-On English* is appropriate for people from fourth graders through adults who are working to master the basics of English. The *Hands-On English* curriculum has been approved by the California Department of Education as a supplementary program to teach English, even as a second language.

The Grannie Annie Family Story Celebration

In 2005 Fran partnered with Connie McIntyre, another St. Louis Writers Guild member, to create *The Grannie Annie Family Story Celebration*. *The Grannie Annie* invites students in grades 4 through 8 to interview their family storykeepers and write about something they learn from their family history. From the stories submitted to *The Grannie Annie*, Fran and Connie select about two dozen each year to publish in a paperback book. The stories bring history to life and connect readers with other places and other times. In working on *The Grannie Annie*, Fran has discovered the joy of collaboration.



Grannie Annie, Vol. 1
ISBN: 0-9677685-9-4
Pub. Date: Sept. 2006
Available on this website from Barnes & Noble.
See our homepage link!



Grannie Annie, Vol. 2
ISBN: 978-0-9793296-1-6
Pub. Date: Sept. 2007
Available on this website from Barnes & Noble.
See our homepage link!

Electronic Publication

Fran writes and publishes two free e-mail newsletters: *LinguaPhile* (for people who teach and/or enjoy English) and *Acu-Write* (for anyone whose writing is read by others). (See <http://grammarandmore.com/edu/news.htm>.) She also has a free online writing class—seven lessons that guide people through the writing process. (See <http://grammarandmore.com/temp/course.htm>.)

Fran posts her book reviews for *LinguaPhile* on Amazon.com and posts some of the reviews and other articles on IdeaMarketers.com, where they are sometimes picked up for inclusion in other newsletters. Two of her most popular articles are "For School Success, Don't Coddle Your Kids" and "Vision: 20/20 Is Not Enough!"

(<http://grammarandmore.com/tips/school.htm> and <http://grammarandmore.com/edu/archive/issue12.htm> - facts)

Other Writing

Fran served as an Opinion Shaper for the *Suburban Journals* in 1996, and she wrote newsletters for the 1904 World's Fair Society from 1989 to 1996, during her term as the Society's Director of Exploitation. In 2004 Fran wrote the segment about the Observation Wheel for the award-winning documentary *The World's Greatest Fair*.

Today Fran feels that she writes more than ever before, even though much of her writing—promotional materials and business communication—may not carry a byline or be published in the traditional sense. Occasionally she writes poems, and she has several ideas for children’s books.

Other Activities

In addition to writing and publishing, Fran does some tutoring, including volunteer work for the OASIS program. She also gives presentations to students, teachers, parents, writers, and publishers. She served on the Board of the St. Louis Publishers Association from 1999–2001, holding the offices of treasurer, president, and vice-president. Fran enjoys traveling and has visited Europe, Africa, and South America as well as many places in the United States. If time travel were possible, she would visit the 1904 World’s Fair.

Considering the difficulty that writing posed for Fran during the first twenty years of her life, she’s a little surprised that she kept putting herself in situations where she had to endure that agony. She discovered early, however—and has been reminded often enough—that the agony can be followed by ecstasy: a moment captured, an idea communicated, a student enlightened and excited about English. Fran encourages young writers to read, observe, savor experiences, and *write!* She has found that writing *does* get easier with practice.

Contact Fran Hamilton at: Fran@GrammarAndMore.com