

The Writers Network News, January 2015

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The Writers Network News

No Rules; Just Write!

Editor: Bobbie Christmas

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Follow my Write In Style creative-writing blog at <http://bobbiechristmas.blogspot.com/>

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Meet Fellow Writers

Do you live in or visit metro Atlanta? Sign up for local meeting notices today! Send your name and e-mail address to [Bobbie@zebraeditor.com](mailto:Bobbie@zebraeditor.com).

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Note: I have shortened some links in this newsletter with the help of www.tinyurl.com, a free service that takes long web addresses and converts them to short ones.

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Writer's Quote of the Month

"Literature, like magic, has always been about the handling of secrets, about the pain, the destruction and the marvelous liberation that can result when they are revealed." --Michael Chabon.

Chabon got a six-figure book deal for his first novel, *The Mysteries of Pittsburgh* (1988). The success of the book made him a literary star while he was still in his mid-twenties. His second novel, *Wonder Boys* (1995), was made into a hit movie starring Michael Douglas and Tobey Maguire, and his third novel was the Pulitzer-Prize-winning bestseller *Kavalier & Clay*.

The Virginia Quarterly Review called Michael Chabon "one of the most celebrated writers of his generation."

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One: From the editor's desk: Celebrating Twenty-Three Years in Business

Twenty-three years ago I leapt from the corporate ladder and started at dirt level again, because I wanted to start my own company. In the corporate world I had reached the managerial level and had a steady income, a retirement account and a 401(k) account, an expense account, paid travel opportunities, camaraderie, and stability. Why would I leave that world and plunge into the cold, lonely, unpredictable, and chaotic waters of self-employment?

My reasons were multifold. My personal mission was to help people, but the Fortune 500 construction and engineering firm where I worked was in business to make money for management and stockholders. Although for years I loved being in corporate communications, by the time I reached management level, I spent most of my time in meetings that had little to do with my department. I also had to assign all the great travel and article opportunities to my staff, while I dealt with budgets, planning, and reports. To top matters off, my father turned eighty and begged me to move closer to him. When I found myself in an adversarial position with the new management, I knew the time to leap had come, and I was ready. I had been saving money in preparation for the moment. I had gained the skills and knowledge I needed to go into business for myself. I was tired of living so far from all my family members. It was time to move to metro Atlanta and start anew.

When I look back at my decision, I'm amazed at myself. I sold a house that had almost doubled in value, and I thought I could use the money to buy a home in Atlanta. I was not prepared for the vast price differences I faced. I could barely afford a garage anywhere close to my father, but I found a house thirty minutes away, in Woodstock, in a county with lower prices and lower taxes. It had room for a big office and a price tag that was palatable, although it was still almost twice what I thought I would have to pay. I therefore dropped my life in South

Carolina, moved to metro Atlanta, bought a house that put me deeply in debt, and began a new life, all without any knowledge of what my income would be.

I also knew that most new businesses fail within five years and many of them fail within the first two years. What would I do if I fell on my face? I did not know, but I did know I had at that time about twenty years of experience writing and editing all sorts of news and magazine articles, reports, and business materials and a couple years of experience editing novels and nonfiction books. I thought I could combine my skills to eke out a living.

Twenty-three years later I live in a house I paid off in sixteen years. I have lived a good number of years debt-free, and best of all, I have made my living helping others achieve their goals and see their dreams of being published come true. I am living my personal mission by helping others, while I am able to do, buy, travel, or pay for almost anything I want and everything I need. Although many folks have retired by my age, I am doing what I would have done in my retirement, so why quit now? I love every day of my life, reading manuscripts and making them the best they can be. Here's to twenty-three years of success and happiness!

Happy New Year, one and all.

Yours in writing,
Bobbie Christmas (Bobbie@zebraeditor.com or bzebra@aol.com)
Author of Write In Style, owner of Zebra Communications, director of The Writers Network, and coordinator of the Florida Writers Association Editors Helping Writers service.

If someone forwarded this newsletter to you, please sign up to get your own copy. Simply go to www.zebraeditor.com, click on Free Newsletter, and follow the prompts. I never share your address or send out spam.

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Two: Ask the Book Doctor about Productivity and Self-Editing

By Bobbie Christmas

Q: I do not feel very productive in the way I write. How do you keep writing the rough draft without getting bogged down in revision or self-editing?

A: Productivity lags when we get bogged down with revisions before we even finish our first draft. Productivity takes discipline. If we stop writing to revise, we are not moving forward, and to get the first draft finished, we must move forward. Move Forward. You might want to print those words on a big piece of paper and put it where you can see it from your computer. Whenever you feel drawn to stop, go back, and revise, tell yourself, "Move forward." You'll have plenty of time to revise later. Getting the first draft down from beginning to end is vital; otherwise, the things you took so much time revising might be unnecessary when you finish the draft and discover the book took off in an unexpected direction.

Most of us you know how tough it is to go against a long-established habit. Perhaps when you sit down and write without revising for twenty minutes or a half hour, you can stop and reward yourself. Get a stick of gum or play with the dog or simply pat yourself on the back for a job well done before you sit again and write for another twenty minutes without stopping and revising. Sure, a little revising will be necessary as you write, but don't go back to prior paragraphs or chapters. Move forward. Always move forward.

Q: I plan to self-edit my manuscript as much as possible, on the chance that I can save some money. What materials will I need, to edit my book myself?

A: Although you need only a small amount of the information in The Chicago Manual of Style 16th Edition, it is the book almost all professional book editors use to standardize such things as punctuation, capitalization, and when to spell out things or use abbreviations. You can buy the book at any bookstore or subscribe to the information online at <http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org>. I use a combination of the book and the website, because finding items in the book can be time-consuming and frustrating. I go to the website and undertake a search on the subject I'm trying to find, and the site tells me where to find the information in the book. There's no subscription charge if all you do is use the search function, and sometimes your answer will come up on the site at no charge.

The next book you need is a dictionary, but not just any dictionary. If you write books, The Chicago Manual of Style recommends Merriam-Webster. I use the free online version at <http://www.merriam-webster.com/>. The most common mistake I catch in manuscripts is whether something is one word, two words, or hyphenated. Sometimes the answer depends upon how the word is used, plus dictionaries and spell-check programs differ where spelling is concerned, so the only way to resolve the issue with any consistency is to follow the guidelines in Merriam-Webster.

I hesitate to recommend my own book, but here goes: I wrote an editor's desk reference book called Purge Your Prose of Problems. I use it to train my staff of editors, and I reluctantly decided to make it available to the public. I was reluctant to sell it to the public for several reasons. First, it took me twenty years to compile all the information, and second, it is exceptional in helping people self-edit. You see, I'm an editor, and I'd rather people paid me thousands of dollars to edit their manuscripts than pay me only \$29.95 for my book. Nevertheless, Purge Your Prose covers the major points of The Chicago Manual of Style, explains grammar and punctuation rules, answers hundreds of issues that confuse writers, and even gives creative writing tips to make writing stronger, tighter, and more compelling. To order it, go to http://zebraeditor.com/book_purge_your_prose_of_problems.shtml.

You will need a spell check program, but Microsoft Word has that function built in, and Word is the standard, preferred software for manuscripts. Spell checkers aren't perfect, because sometimes they don't pick up on the use of variants, when there is a preferred spelling that differs. They do, however, catch some spelling errors, typos, and extra spaces between words, so always run a spell check after making any changes to the full document.

You would do well to find a capable critique circle or critique partner, as well, because other people will find things you overlooked or did not know that you didn't know.

Because you will find many issues by reading your manuscript aloud, you might want a reading program that reads your manuscript aloud to you. One free program is available at <http://naturalreaders.com/>.

Other things you need but cannot buy include patience, objectivity, and an eagle eye. I cannot help you gain patience or an eagle eye, but

you can gain a little more objectivity by letting the manuscript rest for a few weeks before you begin your edit. If you have not been working on or reading your manuscript for a few weeks, you will see it with fresher eyes when you pick it up again.

Bobbie Christmas, book editor and owner of Zebra Communications, will answer your questions, too. Send them to Bobbie@zebraeditor.com. Read more "Ask the Book Doctor" questions and answers at www.zebraeditor.com.

The Small Publishers and Writers Network (SPAWN) website graciously hosts many past "Ask the Book Doctor" columns. To read them, go to <http://www.spawn.org/editing/index.htm#bookdoctor> and scroll down to Ask the Book Doctor Articles.

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Three: This Month's Easy Editing Tip from Bobbie Christmas: Know Your Lengths!

Are you writing a novel, a novella, a short story, or flash fiction? Do you know the general guidelines for the lengths of those items and what those items cover? Sadly I have had several writers come to me with novels of 300,000 words or more. Most know their books are "a little" long, but they think they can simply make two or three books out of their novels. While such may be the case in some instances, each novel has to have all the elements of a novel; that is, if a long manuscript is cut into several novels, all the novels still must have a plot that begins near the opening, sustains the story throughout, and gets resolved at the end. Subplots may continue to a future novel, but not the main plot of the prior novel. If all this information is confusing, let me simply lay everything out in the following list:

Novels
Contemporary novels should be between 50,000 and 100,000 words. Yes, there is a little leeway on both ends, but these general guidelines help ensure a manuscript fits into the realm of acceptable lengths for publishers and for readers. Longer novels cost more to produce, which can be off-putting to traditional publishers and expensive for self-publishers. Writers of fantasy, however, can push the word count to 110,000 without worrying as much. While epics and sequels can go longer, first the writer must have a big fan base before counting on being able to sell an epic or a sequel.

Every novel, whether standalone or part of a series, must have a clear beginning, middle, and end; that is, one plot that carries through the entire novel. Subplots can start and end within the novel or be continued to the next one in a series. Most novels do well to have one or more subplots, yet not too many main characters. Four or fewer is a wise guideline.

Nonfiction books
Like novels, nonfiction manuscripts should also be between 50,000 to 110,000 words. Nonfiction does not have the same elements as fiction, but it does need a sense of organization. The most marketable nonfiction books tend to promise to solve a problem for readers.

Novellas
Although some people may think a novella is simply a short novel, such is not the case. A novella is simpler than a novel. It does not have subplots. It rarely has more than three main characters. It can be between 20,000 and 50,000 words. Many e-books today are actually novellas.

Short Stories
The short stories usually found in periodicals or anthology collections are between 1,000 and 7,500 words, but short-story competitions may set a minimum and maximum that differs from this guideline, so always read submission guidelines.

Novelette
Because novelettes often run between 7,500 and 20,000 words, most are considered too long for magazines and too short for book publishers. Some authors skirt the length issue by piecing together three or four novelettes into a compilation.

For more editing and creative writing tips, order *Purge Your Prose of Problems* here:
<http://tinyurl.com/4ptjnr>.

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Four: Subjects of interest to writers

Member Robert Gilbert had a story titled "Too Much of a Kid" accepted for *Frontier Tales*, a website for selected western stories. How cool! Read his story and vote for it at <http://tinyurl.com/m3srb47>. He is also the author of *Megan's Love*, available on Amazon.

~~~~~ Gifts for Writers

A button that says "Ask Me About My Book. An apron that says "I'd rather be writing." Find these and other gifts for yourself and your writer friends at <http://tinyurl.com/nvh7dyu>.

~~~~~ The Writers Network Member offers Creative Writing Class

Arlene Appelrouth is offering a creative writing class through Olli at Emory in Atlanta.

Arlene, a longtime member of The Writers Network, is a freelance writer and a regular "According to Arlene" columnist for the Atlanta Jewish Times. She is also someone I consider a personal friend.

Here is a little information about the upcoming course she will offer:

Creative Writing: Fun and Personal

You don't have to aspire to write a blockbuster to enjoy putting your stories on paper. Each class will consist of timed writing exercises and the opportunity to share what you've written. Your writing will not be judged. Writing is good for you, body and soul, emotionally, and physically.

For complete information see <http://ece.emory.edu/documents/OLLI15.pdf>

~~~~~ Ten Secrets to Persuasive Writing: Only One Copy Left!

If you write nonfiction books or reports, proposals, essays, brochures, newsletters, or advertisements, you'll treasure this seminar on CD. My

supply has almost sold out, but I have ONE copy left. To discover two words that change everything, a few words to avoid, and other persuasive tips, send me an e-mail. If you are the first person to respond, I'll let you know. You can then send \$14.95 + \$4.00 shipping (total \$18.95), and I'll mail you this powerful seminar on CD. Listen as many times as you want, share it with friends, or give it as a gift. If interested, send me a note at Bobbie@zebraeditor.com. Hurry! Only the first person to respond will get the single remaining copy of this seminar on CD.

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The Horror of the Blank Page, Blank Mind (and how to avoid it). <http://tinyurl.com/ne2j4lj>

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If you like this newsletter, so will your friends. Tell them to subscribe to The Writers Network News by going to www.zebraeditor.com and clicking on the yellow box at the top. To view back issues of this newsletter, go to <http://tinyurl.com/psnmp6p>.

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Terminology Writers Should Know: First Reader

Publishing houses can receive hundreds of manuscripts a month, yet when writers send their manuscripts to publishers, we think our submissions will be read by an acquisitions editor who will consider whether to buy it or not. Not so. Most publishers have a slush pile of unsolicited, unagented manuscripts, and the first to read any of those manuscripts is often a junior editor or editorial assistant. That person may read a few pages or the whole book and then, if it is worthy, write a report that assesses its potential market and suitability for the publisher. Sometimes the first reader has the authority to reject inappropriate manuscripts outright, but books that are recommended for consideration will move on to a more senior editor or the editor in chief.

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Computers do not last forever. Often they fizzle and die without giving any warning. If your computer died this afternoon, would your data, novels, and business information be lost? Not if you have Carbonite to back up your computer regularly, without any effort from you. I swear by Carbonite, or I wouldn't promote it. It saved me twice, so far, with files that corrupted or simply disappeared, but they were easily accessible again on the Carbonite website. If you follow this link and sign up for Carbonite, you and I both get a \$20 gift card, but if you don't, please, be sure your computer is always backed up to a safe place separate from your computer.

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Stephen King's tips on writing: <http://tinyurl.com/p3bdmhf>

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Purge Your Prose of Problems
A Book Doctor's Desk Reference, Fifth Edition

This book was a top seller at the recent FWA writers conference. Grab your copy today! Save thousands of dollars and edit your own book! Order my proprietary book-doctor desk reference book online at <http://tinyurl.com/4ptjnr>.

In alphabetical order and in easy-to-understand language, Purge Your Prose of Problems covers all you need to know to revise and edit fiction and nonfiction books, including grammar, punctuation, word choices, creative writing, plot, pace, characterization, point of view, dialogue, Chicago style, format, and much more. The spiral binder lets the book lie flat in front of your computer, for easy use. Available printed or as a PDF e-book that allows you to keep all this vital information on your computer for ready reference.

The e-book is the best deal, because you get it immediately and pay no shipping, and it then resides on your computer for the speediest reference, whenever you need it.

To save thousands of dollars by editing your own book, order Purge Your Prose of Problems today at <http://tinyurl.com/4ptjnr>.

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Young Girl Gets Abdo Publishing to Change Name of a Series

Parker Dains, with the help from her father, wrote to Abdo Publishing to express her concern about the line on the back of a cover.

"It said 'Biggest Baddest Books for Boys,' and it made me very unhappy." Parker said.

A few weeks later, the publishing house, which specializes in educational books, wrote Parker saying they loved her idea.

The San Jose Mercury News reports that Abdo Publishing wrote: "You brought up a very good point: there should certainly be a 'Biggest Baddest Books for Boys' for everyone. After all, girls can like 'boy' things too!"

Parker, who hopes to be either a writer or a circus owner when she grows up, has already received a new set of books from Abdo Publishing titled simply "Biggest Baddest Books." They will be available for purchase in 2015.

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Free Tools for Writers from Bobbie Christmas and Zebra Communications

What are the pros and cons of self-publishing? How can you tell when you're telling? Order PDF reports on these writing-related subjects and many more. Go to http://zebraeditor.com/free_reports.shtml.

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Ask the Book Doctor: How to Beat the Competition and Sell Your Writing answers many of the questions you wish you could ask an editing expert. Whether you write books, short stories, articles, reports, or anything else, learn more about how to write, edit, and sell your work. Paperback: \$14.95 plus \$4.99 S & H (total: \$19.94 US) E-book: \$8.95, no S & H, with almost instant delivery. You will save almost \$10 by buying the e-book. To order either, go to <http://tinyurl.com/lexp7n>.

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Become my friend on Facebook and follow my adventures, opinions, and observations: <http://www.facebook.com/bobbie.christmas>. I have a separate Facebook page specifically for writers. Like and follow my Zebra Communications for writers here: <http://tinyurl.com/7vcxaxu>.
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Five: Contests, Agents, and Markets

Alondra Press  
4119 Wildacres Drive  
Houston TX 77072  
[lark@alondrapress.com](mailto:lark@alondrapress.com)  
[www.alondrapress.com](http://www.alondrapress.com)

We do not have any specific guidelines in regard to the type of literature we are looking for. Our principal criterion is that the work be well

written and targeted for thoughtful and reflective readers. We will give an extra careful look at submissions that show that the author would be actively involved in the publicity and marketing of his or her work, and that he/she has read our guidelines.

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Frontier Tales Accepts Western Short Stories

<http://www.frontiertales.com/submissions.php>

We know it's getting harder and harder to find someone who will publish your western or historical stories. Well, if you're looking for an opportunity to get your work shown, you've come to the right place. You give us a story, the right to publish your work online, maintain it in our archives, and include it in a print reproduction, such as in an anthology. We'll put it out there for the world to enjoy.

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The Eric Hoffer Book Award Competition for Small Presses, Academic Presses, Micro Presses, and Self-Publishers

\$2,000 grand prize  
Entrance Fee \$55  
All books accepted

The Eric Hoffer Book Award recognizes excellence in independent publishing.

A single registration qualifies you for the following:  
\$2,000 grand prize (the Eric Hoffer Award for Books)  
Winner of the Montaigne Medal for most thought-provoking books  
Winner of the da Vinci Eye for best covers  
Winner of the First Horizon Award for debut authors  
Winner and First Runner-Up in your selected category  
Honorable Mentions for your selected category  
Individual Awards for Micro, Small, and Academic Presses, as well as Self-Published Books  
Legacy categories for any book older than two years (fiction and nonfiction)  
Award coverage in the US Review of Books and on the Hoffer Award website  
Gold Seal Certificates  
Worldwide Exposure

Categories include Art, Poetry, General Fiction, Commercial Fiction, Children, Young Adult, Culture, Memoir, Business, Reference, Home, Health, Self-Help/Spiritual, Legacy Fiction, Legacy Nonfiction, E-book Fiction, and E-book Nonfiction. (There is a category for every book.)

Submission guidelines (deadline January 21, 2015) at [www.HofferAward.com](http://www.HofferAward.com).

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Six: Got Muse? The Key to Happiness--and Good Fiction

Writer Joseph Addison (1672-1719) said, "Three grand essentials to happiness in this life are something to do, something to love, and something to hope for." I've heard the saying skewed a little and said, "To be happy, people need only three things in life: something to do, someone to love, and something to look forward to." Either way, the adage is true that those things bring people happiness. Good novels are also written on the premise that someone hopes for something and looks forward to acquiring, completing, or accomplishing it, but something or someone keeps getting in the way. If nothing got in the way, the story would not make readers keep reading.

For this exercise, think of something wildly difficult to accomplish or acquire. Think about the obstacles a character would have to face and overcome, to reach that goal. Write a story that shows a character's desire and the challenges the character overcomes to achieve or even miss a goal.

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Do YOU have news for The Writers Network News? Please send it in the body copy, not an attachment, to [Bobbie@zebraeditor.com](mailto:Bobbie@zebraeditor.com).

Deadline: The 15th of each month.

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Send a copy of this newsletter to all your writing friends. Tell them to join The Writers Network F-R-E-E by visiting [www.zebraeditor.com](http://www.zebraeditor.com) and clicking on Free Newsletter.

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With the exception of Zebra Communications, information in this newsletter is not to be construed as an endorsement. Be sure to research all information and study every stipulation before you accept assignments, spend money, or sell your work.

The Writers Network News: a newsletter for writers everywhere. No fees. No officers. No Rules; Just Write!

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