

The Writers Network News, September 2015

In This Issue

One: From the editor's desk: On Entering Competitions

Two: Ask the Book Doctor about Query Letters for Agents, Book Publishers, and Magazines

Three: This Month's Easy Editing Tip from Bobbie Christmas: Startup and Upstart

Four: Subjects of Interest to Writers

Five: Contests, Agents, and Markets

Six: Got Muse? What the . . .

The Writers Network News
No Rules; Just Write!
Editor: Bobbie Christmas

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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

Short-story writer Isaak Babel said, "There is no iron that can enter the human heart with such stupefying effect as a period placed at just the right moment."

Jewish-Ukrainian Isaak Babel's tales of the Russian army and ghetto life made him a famous author in the 1920s.

In 1931, Babel published *Odessa Tales*, a cycle of short stories set in a ghetto of Odessa. Once again, he was praised for his realism, simple writing style, and skillful portrayals of characters from the fringes of society—in this case, a band of Jewish gangsters and their leader, Benya Krik. Later in the 1930s, he wrote a play titled *Maria* (1935) and four novellas, including *The Trial* and *The Kiss*.

As the decade progressed, Babel's activities and written works were monitored closely by critics and censors for any hints of disloyalty to the Soviet government. Soviet authorities discredited him and put him to death in 1940. After Stalin's death in 1953, Babel's name was cleared and his writing rehabilitated. His work was gradually published again in the Soviet Union and even in foreign countries. He continues to influence short-story writers around the world.

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One: From the editor's desk: On Entering Competitions

Dear Fellow Writers:

In this newsletter I often list competitions for writers. I warn writers to check out competitions to be sure they are legitimate, but I encourage writers to enter legitimate competitions. To be frank, after many years of winning many awards and competitions, I no longer enter many competitions myself. With the recent release of the second edition of *Write In Style*, though, it was time to enter some competitions again. Yesterday I went through all the research; vetting; reading many pages of information, rules, and guidelines; filling out forms; and writing entry-fee checks to several competitions.

Why would I go to the trouble? Few awards offer cash prizes, so I'll never see my money again from those entry fees. I don't enter competitions for the money. Instead, awards legitimize a book. If the second edition wins as many or more awards as the first edition won,

potential buyers will know that the information in the book is sound, useful, easy, and well written. Because the second edition is an update and expansion of the first edition, I feel confident that the book will win awards, but who knows? Perhaps the competition this year will be stiffer than it was in 2004, when I won three awards for the first edition of Write In Style. Perhaps the judges will have had a bad day and won't even bother to read the entries. Who knows if I've sent my books and my checks out into oblivion, never to be heard from again? In other words, I am going through the same fears, concerns, and trepidation that my fellow writers experience every time they finish a book, essay, or article and every time they submit something to an agent, editor, publisher or competition. I'm human.

I'm a writer.

I will cross my fingers and wait. Wait many months. Most of the competitions do not report results until late in 2016.

Meanwhile, know that your editor is just like you, fellow writers. I know your pain. I have lived it many times. For that reason, when I help fellow writers, I try to be kind while also being honest with my edits and reports. I know all that you feel. I've felt it, yet we keep writing, don't we?

Yours in writing,
Bobbie Christmas (Bobbie@zebraeditor.com or bzebra@aol.com)
Author of two editions 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 Query Letters for Agents, Book Publishers, and Magazines

By Bobbie Christmas

Q: Is there a secret to writing a good query letter to an agent or a book publisher?

A: I would not call it a secret, but a formula. The letter must have specific elements in it and not be more than one page long. For an excellent example of a query letter, see <http://www.writersdigest.com/online-editor/how-to-write-the-perfect-query-letter>.

Q: I'm fifteen and really into writing. Right now I use an online site to post my stories, but I would really like to get a book out. Do you have any ideas on what I can do about this?

A: Yes, but you cannot learn in one e-mail all that you must know to get a book published. Join writers groups. Write. Take classes in creative writing. Write. Join a critique circle. Write. Read books on writing. Write. Subscribe to Writer's Digest. Write. Volunteer for your school newspaper or yearbook. Write. Read Strunk & White's Elements of Style. Read Write In Style (my book). Read William Zinsser's book, On Writing Well. Write. Learn to use standard manuscript format. After all that, edit, edit, edit, revise, revise, and revise, and eventually you may have a polished manuscript. If so, read books on how to submit a manuscript. Learn how to write a professional query letter. Write an irresistible synopsis. After doing all those things, you may be ready to submit a manuscript to a publisher or agent.

You will find other answers and information in the free reports on my website at www.zebraeditor.com under Tools for Writers. Open all the reports you need and study them carefully.

Most of all, never give up. Keep writing. I wish you much success.

Q: I've published in trade magazines, but I want to break into the consumer magazine market. I need feedback on query letters. Having sent only one to Family Circle and been duly rejected, I'm skittish about firing off the next one without some advice from an insider.

A: One rejection from such a topnotch magazine could possibly mean only that you shot too high too soon. Until you have clips from lesser consumer magazines, you may not get assignments from the top-level periodicals. You're right to look for an insider, and I hope you find one who is willing to mentor you. To find one, attend local meetings for writers and ask around. Lacking direct feedback from a fellow writer, search the Internet. Here's a link to a Writer's Life blog entry that gives a prime example of a query letter to a magazine:
<http://theadventurouswriter.com/blogwriting/how-to-write-query-letters-for-magazine-articles/>.

Q: I wrote a short profile during a feature-writing class that I believe would be a good fit for magazines geared to young adult females, but I want someone to advise me before submitting a query. Since I've already written the profile, can I just submit it as is, indicating that I can lengthen or slant it as desired?

A: The quick answer would be never to write an article without an assignment, because it's often a waste of time. Conventional wisdom aside, many articles have been sold through submissions without assignments, so ignore what the naysayers say. You may submit the article as is, as you said, indicating that you can adjust it in any way the magazine wishes. It's worth a try. It won't burn any bridges if a magazine rejects it. Before you send it anywhere, though, study the magazine and see what subjects it covers and what slants it takes. Get the editorial calendar, so you can be sure to submit the article for a specific edition in which that article fits. In addition, read the periodical's submission guidelines, to ensure the magazine accepts articles and queries from outside contributors.

News of note: Publishers all say they are looking for a fresh voice. What on earth is a fresh voice, though? Write In Style, my book on how to use any computer to help you uncover your fresh voice, won three awards in 2004 but has been out of print for years. By popular demand, the updated, upgraded, expanded, and improved second edition is finally available. Order your copy today at <http://tinyurl.com/o4trud2> or <http://tinyurl.com/pnq5y5s>, or order a signed copy at http://zebraeditor.com/book_write_in_style.shtml.

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

For even more questions, answers, and comments, order the book, Ask the Book Doctor: How to Beat the Competition and Sell Your Writing. Go to http://zebraeditor.com/book_ask_the_book_doctor.shtml.

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Three: This Month's Easy Editing Tip from Bobbie Christmas: Startup and Upstart

Startup and upstart are not interchangeable words.

Startup: (noun) the process of starting a business or other activity or a small business that is just being started. She has been the CEO since the startup of the company. We lost the contract to a small startup company.

Upstart: (noun) new person behaving like important or senior person. The upstart new hire asked the boss for a raise after working there only one month.

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

Good news from member Jill Jennings. She won second place, \$50, and publication in the Alabama State Poetry Society Contest for her poem titled "That Thing With Feathers." She won a sixth honorable mention for her poem "Kama ole One Beach Park" in the San Antonio Poets Association contest. Additionally her poem "Warning Signs" has been published in the most recent issue of Calamaro Magazine. The Oberon Poetry Magazine is also publishing one of her poems in its upcoming issue. Rock on, Jill! She encourages all poets to keep submitting their work.

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Self-Publishing? About How Many Books Do You Have to Sell to Break Even?

The companies listed below in Angela Hoy's article are the best known, but many other companies exist that may charge lower fees. No doubt self-publishing is an investment that rarely pays well financially, but most of us self-publish for more reasons than the money.

Recoup Your Investment?

By Angela Hoy - BookLocker.com, WritersWeekly.com, Abuzz Press and PubPreppers.com

- BookLocker - 121 COPIES (setup fees: \$675)
- CreateSpace - 200 COPIES (setup fees: \$1,151)
- Lulu - 233 COPIES (setup fees: \$1,089)
- Infinity Publishing - 250 COPIES (setup fees: \$1047)
- Xulon Press - 250 COPIES (setup fees \$2,396)
- Dog Ear Publishing - 252 COPIES (setup fees \$1,998)
- Llumina Publishing - 280 COPIES (setup fees: \$1,338)
- Xlibris - 304 COPIES (setup fees: \$1,673)
- iUniverse - 316 COPIES (setup fees: \$1,449)
- Trafford - 342 COPIES (setup fees: \$1,424)
- AuthorHouse - 361 COPIES (setup fees: \$1,799)
- BookBaby - 543 COPIES (setup fees: \$1,406)
- Outskirts Press - 790 COPIES (setup fees: \$1,595)

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To capitalize wines or not? William Safire gives a definitive answer. See <http://www.nytimes.com/1985/08/25/magazine/on-language-wines-without-caps.html>.

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Terminology Writers Should Know: Backstory

Backstory refers to the background of fictional characters, the biographical information related to them. Backstory works well to flesh out major characters and create a strong foundation for their motivations, goals, and influences. Given backstory, readers better understand characters and feel a connection with them.

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Writing teachers and writers begged me to re-release Write In Style, my triple-award-winning book on how to use a computer to improve your writing. The second edition, upgraded and expanded from the award-winning first edition, is at last available. Buy it through Amazon or get a signed copy by ordering directly, here: http://zebraeditor.com/book_write_in_style.shtml.

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Most of the conferences I mention take place on the East Coast, but this one looks good for writers on the West Coast. See <http://www.805writersconference.com/>.

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Free Tools for Writers from Bobbie Christmas and Zebra Communications

Order PDF reports on writing-related subjects, including correct manuscript format, how to form and run a critique circle, how to identify weak writing and repair it, self-publishing versus traditional publishing, and much more. Go to http://zebraeditor.com/free_reports.shtml. Newest report: Genre: A Slippery Subject Essential to Fiction: Learn about genre fiction categories and the benefits of complying with genre specifications.

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Are you planning a website or revamping one? Here is some vital and current information on how to build the best home page possible: <https://ww.deluxe.com/blog/how-to-get-the-ultimate-website-curb-appeal-and-generate-leads/>.

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Purge Your Prose of Problems

A Book Doctor's Desk Reference, Fifth Edition

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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Stephen King's advice on how to boost your online writing income. See <http://writersweekly.com/this-weeks-article/eight-strategies-to-boost-your-online-writing-income-by-steven-king#comment-18>

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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>  
Like Zebra Communications on Facebook: <http://tinyurl.com/7vcxaxu>.  
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Five: Contests, Agents, and Markets

Mother Lode of Agent Information

Learn who is accepting queries and who isn't, and always be sure the agents you approach handle your type of book. See <http://www.agentquery.com> and/or <http://www.aaroline.org>.

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NATIONAL WRITERS ASSOCIATION NONFICTION CONTEST

The National Writers Association
10940 S. Parker Rd.
#508
Parker CO 80134
303-841-0246
natlwritersassn@hotmail.com
www.nationalwriters.com

Gives first- through fifth-place awards. Other winners will be notified by March 31. 1st Prize: \$200 and Clearinghouse representation if winner is book proposal, 2nd Prize: \$100, 3rd Prize: \$50, 4th-10th places will receive a book. Honorable Mentions receive a certificate.

Costs: \$18

Deadline: December 31.

Only unpublished works may be submitted. Judging of entries will not begin until the contest ends. Nonfiction in the following areas will be accepted:

articles—submission should include query letter, first page of manuscript, separate sheet citing five possible markets
essay—the complete essay and five possible markets on separate sheet
nonfiction book proposal including query letter, chapter-by-chapter outline, first chapter, bio and market analysis.

Those unsure of proper manuscript format should request Research Report #35.

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THE LAMAR YORK PRIZES FOR FICTION AND NONFICTION  
<http://thechattahoocheereview.gpc.edu/prizes.htm>

Two prizes of \$1,000.00 each and publication in *The Chattahoochee Review* are awarded to a winning story and essay in the annual Lamar York Prizes for Fiction and Nonfiction, which honor the founder and former editor of *The Chattahoochee Review*.

- Send stories and essays of up to 5,000 words, double-spaced.
- Entries must be submitted via Submittable (under the appropriate contest category) between October 1 and January 31. We no longer accept paper submissions. All entries will be considered for publication. Early submissions are encouraged!
- Submissions are judged anonymously. Please include a cover letter in the appropriate Submittable entry field with the entry's title and entrant's name, address, and phone number. Remove identifying information from the file attachment. We would appreciate a note letting us know how you heard about the contest in the cover letter.
- Simultaneous submissions are discouraged but permissible, though we ask to be notified immediately upon acceptance elsewhere ([gpcr@gpc.edu](mailto:gpcr@gpc.edu)).
- An entry fee of \$15 (nonrefundable) includes a one-year subscription to *The Chattahoochee Review* beginning with the Spring issue. Each additional entry requires a separate fee but may include a gift subscription; please make a note with payment.
- No theoretical, scholarly, or critical essays will be considered, but all other approaches and topics are welcome. Only unpublished essays and stories will be considered. While manuscripts will not be returned, authors may include a stamped, self-addressed postcard for notification of receipt of manuscript.
- Winners will be announced on TCR's website in the winter and published in the Spring issue.
- The editors support the Council of Literary Magazines and Presses Contest Code of Ethics. Editors will select ten finalists in each category, and judges will select one winner each. Students, former students, close associates and friends of the judges must refrain from entering. Faculty of GPC, former students of the editors, and close friends or associates of the editors must also refrain from submitting.

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"Be sure to read our guidelines before sending a submission. We will not respond to authors who do not observe our simple guidelines. Send

your submissions in an e-mail attachment only."

We recommend to the authors who decide to submit their works to Alondra Press that they make sure they are submitting their manuscripts in the best form they are capable of - that they not handicap themselves by submitting a work riddled with grammatical and typographical errors. On our part, in order to assist those writers as far as we are able, we invite them to send their work by email, in a Microsoft document. In this age of modern technology, there is no longer any need to waste paper, ink, and postage, or to wait several months for an acceptance or rejection. Send a very short synopsis - not more than 300 words - and a few pages of your novel or book. If your book is accepted, you will be asked to sign a standard publisher's contract. At present we are not offering an advance, but we do offer a generous 20% of royalties on net proceeds. A book of not more than 75,000 words will have a better chance of acceptance by us. See the submissions guidelines here: <http://www.alondrapress.com/Submissions.html>

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Six: Got Muse? What the . . .

- What the hell?
- To hell and back
- Chance of a snowball in hell
- Shot to hell
- Not a hope in hell
- Hounds of hell
- Hell-bent for leather
- Hell to pay
- The road to hell is paved with good intentions
- Hell has no fury like a woman scorned
- Going to hell in a handbasket
- Come hell or high water
- Like a bat out of hell
- Hot as hell
- Payback is hell
- When hell freezes over
- Hell-bent and heaven bound

Guess what today's high temperatures brought to mind. Above are a few of the hellish platitudes we Americans use when we speak, but as writers, we are told to avoid clichés. Instead of using these idioms themselves, examine them and let them bring images, situations, and stories to mind. Write a story that involves one of the above expressions without using the phrasing itself, except, perhaps, in the title.

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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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