

The Writers Network News, January 2016

In This Issue

One: From the editor's desk: Disconnected and Disappointed

Two: Ask the Book Doctor about Author Opinions, Synopses, Hyphenation, and Agents

Three: This Month's Easy Editing Tip from Bobbie Christmas: Baby Sit, Baby-sit, or Babysit?

Four: Subjects of Interest to Writers

Five: Contests, Agents, and Markets

Six: Got Muse? Listen, My Children

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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](http://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

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, author and man of letters, said, "One ought, every day at least, to hear a little song, read a good poem, see a fine picture, and if it were possible, to speak a few reasonable words."

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Goethe, a German poet, playwright, novelist, scientist, statesman, theater director, critic, and amateur artist, is considered the greatest German literary figure of the modern era. One of his best-known works is Faust, a tragic play in two parts.

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One: From the editor's desk: Disconnected and Disappointed

Dear Fellow Writers:

With Christmas staring me in the face, a friend dropped by and said, "Let's go on a cruise." I naturally thought of taking a cruise in two or three months, but no, he had selected one that sailed in two weeks. In a whirlwind, we booked the cruise, bought plane tickets, packed, and took off for Florida and Mexico.

Cruise ships offer Wi-Fi for a small fee per day, but I chose to disconnect for the days we were at sea. I had no access to my phone, e-mail, voice mail, Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram. What's a person to do? While the younger folks took to the bars, pools, and hot tubs, I sat in the warm sun and read on my iPad. In truth, I read only when I could take my eyes off the display of bodies, boobs, booties, and bubbas bouncing to the music that abounded in the public areas. The balcony of my room provided the most quiet, relaxing spot on the ship, and I put it to full use.

When I'm at work, I read for a living. Every day I read manuscripts and edit them, so reading for fun is a rare and delicious treat for me. Months earlier, I had downloaded a dozen or so e-book samples. At last I had time to read those samples and decide which books I had no further interest in and which ones I wanted to buy, when I had access to the Internet. I found it most interesting that the books I liked were all nonfiction. The selections of fiction that I read were all slow, narrative-filled, or disjointed. One book that had just won a big award and was featured on National Public Radio drove me to distraction, and I was glad to get to the end of the sample and stop having to interpret what the heck the writer was trying to say. Where was the dialogue? Where was the action? Where was the story? The first pages—twenty-five or more—were all backstory. Boring!

In the process, I learned that today's novelists have grown slack, in my opinion. Whatever happened to conventional wisdom? Contemporary

writers—or at least the ones I sampled on my cruise, all forgot or chose to ignore the tenets of good writing: Start when things go wrong. Hook the reader. Show more than tell. Use action verbs. Avoid passive voice. Always be clear.

No wonder the books I edit tend to do well in the market, though. I implore writers to follow the guidelines of strong creative writing, and when writers do, their books sell. Their books might not be featured on National Public Radio, but they reflect well on the authors and often win awards.

For now I'll stick to the nonfiction books I chose, but if someone has a well-written novel to suggest that I read, I'm open to suggestions. Meanwhile, write on, my friends, but please follow the tenets of good creative writing.

I know you will enjoy my zany, odd, and sometimes creepy blog about my encounters with the opposite sex. See [www.NeuroticaStories.blogspot.com](http://www.NeuroticaStories.blogspot.com), and sign up to follow it.

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](http://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 Author Opinions, Synopses, Hyphenation, and Agents

By Bobbie Christmas

Q: Is it ever appropriate for an author to express an opinion in a novel in an effort to influence readers? I've heard it's called author intrusion, and we should avoid it.

A: My answer is that while author intrusion is rarely appropriate, authors still can slant a story or a character in a way that influences readers. One of my clients who is opposed to killing sharks wrote a gripping and successful novel about people who try to stop the slaughter of sharks for their fins. By the end of the story, trust me, most readers will be against slaughtering sharks as well. Never did the author intrude with a personal opinion; instead the opinions were those of the main characters. Through their research, dialogue, and actions, readers learn why slaughtering sharks is detrimental to the ecosystem.

In my nonfiction book titled Write In Style, I speak at length about author intrusion, ego, and voicing a personal opinion in writing. Although my book is about creative writing, I use as examples a character who is opposed to the use of shock collars in dog training. By the end of the chapter, my readers certainly have gathered the fact that I must be opposed to shock collars, yet I never actually voiced my opinion.

Q: What makes a good synopsis?

A: This question is broad, and whole books have been written on the subject of synopses. I'll give a short answer, though.

A synopsis must have certain elements in it, to be considered good. In one page, single-spaced, it must reveal the following information:

- the title of the novel
- the genre of the novel
- the word count
- the main characters
- the arc—that is, the problem or plot
- the ending of the story—the resolution

A synopsis is not intended to be a piece of creative writing, but it should be written in present tense and use active verbs. It is not a promotional piece or a teaser, so it should not end with a question or cliffhanger such as this: Will Dorothy ever find her way back home to Kansas? A synopsis is intended to tell the gist of the story, so agents and publishers can decide if it is a book they want to acquire.

Q: In the following, should there be a hyphen after "food?" A food and drink-laden coffee table separates them.

A: Because the table is laden with both food and drink, the sentence can be written two ways. It can be either a food- and drink-laden coffee table, with a space after food, or it can be written this way: A food-and-drink-laden coffee table separates them.

Q: Can the name Carolyn be hyphenated at the end of a line in a book (the word didn't fit on the line) as in "Car-" on one line, and on next line, "olyn"?

A: Names should rarely be hyphenated, but sometimes breaking a longer name is necessary, to keep a line of justified type from being too stretched out or too compressed.

If the name must be hyphenated, I would not hyphenate it with Car- on the first line, because readers will naturally think of an automobile and mentally pronounce the first paragraph incorrectly. They would then have to back up to correct it mentally, once they see that "Car" is pronounced as a name. We never want readers to back up or have to reread something to understand it correctly; it jars them out of the story. For that reason, it is wise never to hyphenate a word except in places where readers would make a correct guess about the remainder of the word. In other words, not re-remainder, but remain-der would be acceptable. If necessary, then, Caro-lyn would be an acceptable hyphenation of the name, if it absolutely must be hyphenated.

Q: My finances are limited, and I am fearful that finances might be a problem, as everything I read suggests I sign up for some publication that will answer all my many questions concerning finding an agent, etc. I could spend a small fortune on books and spend all my time reading them, instead of working on my book. From what I gather, they all say pretty much the same thing. My greatest challenge is to find an agent who will feel as passionate about my manuscript as I do. Do you feel comfortable recommending an agent or agents to me?

A: I may sound cruel, but in a word, no. I do not recommend specific agents and do not tell prospects that I might be able to help them find

an agent if they pay me to edit their books. As an editor, such a promise or implied promise would be unethical and a conflict of interest.

As a fellow writer, though, I feel your pain when it comes to having to obtain information and spend time reading and following advice, but every job has parts that are not as much fun as other parts. Being a successful writer calls for spending time (and money, if necessary) learning how to find an agent or publisher and then spending time researching potential agents and publishers and submitting manuscripts for consideration. No magic formula can circumvent that portion of the writer's job, and no golden path leads to securing an agent easily, quickly, or without spending time doing it.

If it were simple to land an agent, every writer would have one. Instead, successful writers are those who have found potential agents, sometimes online or at conferences, and then researched each potential agent and selected those most likely to be interested in their type of book. In addition, successful writers have learned how to pitch their work, writing and submitting whatever documents potential agents want. Some want proposals, while others want only query letters. Some ask for sample chapters, while others want the full manuscript. The writers who land agents are those who met all the specific requirements of that agent, in addition to submitting a gripping and well-edited book. Writers who gain representation are the ones who dig in, do the work, slough off rejections, and stick to their mission until they find an agent or publisher.

Note: Write In Style, Bobbie Christmas's book on how to use a computer to improve your writing, is available at <http://tinyurl.com/pnq5y5s>.

Send your questions to [Bobbie@zebraeditor.com](mailto:Bobbie@zebraeditor.com). Bobbie Christmas, book doctor and owner of Zebra Communications, will answer your questions quickly. Read more "Ask the Book Doctor" questions and answers at [www.zebraeditor.com](http://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://tinyurl.com/lxp7n>.

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Three: This Month's Easy Editing Tip from Bobbie Christmas: Baby Sit, Baby-sit, or Babysit?

In all likelihood, you have seen all three versions of the same term, baby sit, baby-sit, and babysit. Which one is correct? Your spell checker accepts them all. How is a writer to know what to choose? The answer can be found in a dictionary, but if you write books, you should be using the dictionary recommended by The Chicago Manual of Style, which is the Merriam-Webster Dictionary. If you don't have a copy handy, do not despair. I use the online version, and it's free and fast to check anything. Go to <http://www.merriam-webster.com>, type in the word you want to check, and it will tell you in split seconds. According to Merriam-Webster, the correct form of the verb is one word, with no hyphen: babysit.

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

After reading last month's newsletter that discussed prologues, member Steve Moore wrote the following:

Two comments about prologues: (1) Once I had my hand slapped by a critic who went after me for using the spellings prologue, epilogue, and dialogue over prolog, epilog, and dialog. I checked it out. While one version is more British, that's not a hard-and-fast rule, so I wrote and told him my take was that an author writing in English can use either one, as long as s/he was consistent. Never heard from him again. Your take? (2) I recently reviewed a book, and its only flaw was a prologue describing a scene that was later included verbatim as a chapter. This is common in dramas on TV; I really object to it in writing. I had a reviewer criticize a true prologue in one of my early books (Soldiers of God) in that it described events that took place years before the rest of the novel. "Just call it chapter one," he said. While I'll admit that the closer the events are to the beginning of the novel, the more they should be in chapter one, a wide gap in time seems to necessitate a prologue. Any idea how long that duration should be? I've never heard anyone talk about that. I'm always willing to learn more about writing!

Here's my response.

I agree that scenes should not be repeated verbatim. I also agree that a prologue is intended to tell a scene that takes place before the opening in chapter one. As for the time between the prologue and chapter one, I have seen prologues that took place as much as a century before the story opens in chapter one. Creative writing rarely has hard-and-fast rules.

Spelling is a different matter. Spelling does have rules. Chicago style, used by most American book publishers, avoids variant spellings and recommends Merriam-Webster as a source for consistency. I looked up prolog, epilog, and dialog in Merriam-Webster, and it considers those words to be variants, not preferred spellings.

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So a friend called me and asked, "Have you noticed that in the past few months more people are starting sentences with 'so?'"

So I said, "I delete those when I'm editing a manuscript, but I've noticed it most often when I'm watching Shark Tank on TV. A shark will ask a question, and the entrepreneur in the tank will answer, 'So when I....'" I told my friend I considered it was a filler word, a word like "um," that gives the speaker a moment to think while still holding the conversation open.

So National Public Radio has a different opinion, it turns out. NPR has posted a commentary on the subject, and I found it fascinating. NPR called it a "backstory so."

So to read all about it, see <http://tinyurl.com/onnszsb>.

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Find Your Fresh Voice when you Write In Style

Writing teachers, critique circle leaders, 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 from me here: [http://zebraeditor.com/book\\_write\\_in\\_style.shtml](http://zebraeditor.com/book_write_in_style.shtml).

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I discovered a website that is being built that says you will be able to use the website to sell all or part of your book without paying any commissions to the site. I don't know how or if it will work, but it may be worth checking out. See <http://bookbypart.com/coming-soon/index.html>. It says the following:

No more starving artists!

Artists keep 100% of the profit, no contracts, and the money comes straight to you. BookByPart takes no commission!

At BookByPart we want no more starving artists!

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Free Reports 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](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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Writers are expected to get their facts right, even when writing fiction. I found an interesting article that outlines the symptoms that indicate when a terminally ill person's death is imminent. If your novel involves someone who is dying from a terminal illness, you may want to see this article: <http://tinyurl.com/o4wj2so>.

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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, Purge Your Prose of Problems covers all you need to know to revise and edit fiction and nonfiction. Get information on grammar, punctuation, word choices, creative writing, plot, pace, characterization, point of view, dialogue, Chicago style, format, and much more. The spiral binder of the printed version lies flat on your desk for easy use. Purge Your Prose of Problems is also available in PDF form, which allows you to keep all this vital information on your computer for ready reference.

Save thousands of dollars by editing your own book or make thousands by editing other people's books. Order Purge Your Prose of Problems today at <http://tinyurl.com/4ptjnr>.

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BookBaby offers three free PDF e-books to help you write, self-publish, and sell your books. See <https://www.bookbaby.com/free-guide/three-guide-bundle-thanks.aspx>

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What's Happening in the Publishing industry? Read <http://tinyurl.com/qb2yc98>,

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TheWorldsGreatestBook.com has more information than you'll ever need on how to choose a font for your book, but remember to stick to the basics: Use a serif type for the body copy for most books; save the sans serif fonts for headlines, subheads, and photo captions. See <http://theworldsgreatestbook.com/choosing-book-font/>.

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Ask the Book Doctor: How to Beat the Competition and Sell Your Writing answers many questions you wish you could ask an editing expert. Paperback: \$14.95 plus \$4.99 S & H (total: \$19.94 US) E-book: \$8.95. You will save almost \$10 by buying the e-book! To order, go to <http://tinyurl.com/lexp7n>.

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Good information on how to revise your manuscript after finishing the first draft. Especially the last item: be sure all the dialogue sounds natural and moves the story forward. See <http://tinyurl.com/q7vfn7o>.

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Write In Style is Now Also an E-book

Find Your Fresh Voice at a Lower Price

To order the Kindle version, click here: <http://tinyurl.com/orjp9v2>.

For a B&N Nook version, click here: <http://tinyurl.com/qfo55xu>

For Kobo click here: <http://tinyurl.com/ouoeejc>.

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The eight most controversial books in 2015. See what Bustle has to say. <http://tinyurl.com/nh2fh8j>.

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Want to Write a Nonfiction Book? Read How to Write a Blockbuster for ten tips that help you get organized, write, and market your book.

Here's tip # 9, which I love, because it describes me as well as the work I do perfectly:

Find a Ruthless Editor

Most people are too damn nice.

They don't want to hurt your feelings. They tell you your writing is brilliant when it's a pile of garbage.

They do this because they like you. Nobody, save sociopaths, enjoys hurting someone's feelings.

But there's a time for relationships and a time for business. (Tip: Your friends and family are fired as editors.)

Writing a book is serious business.

Your editor will help polish rough and rambling words into a sparkling, cohesive piece of prose that leaps off the page and sucks readers in.

A great editor will bring tough love in spades. More importantly, you'll love them for it.

The editor you hire will ideally:

Have a portfolio of edited books.

Have a clear idea of what your book is trying to achieve.

Give dispassionate feedback.

Improve the grammar, flow, clarity, and cohesion of your ideas.

Not be afraid to call you out when your work isn't up to par.

So go on and pony up the cash to hire an editor who won't sugarcoat the truth.

For the whole article, see <http://writetodone.com/how-to-publish-a-book/>.

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Blogging to Promote Your Book?

The Collective Mill offers ten easy and effective ways to grow your blog. See <http://tinyurl.com/hqmhgap>.

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WritersWeekly.com gives details of the worst query letters and book proposals it has received in 2015. See <http://tinyurl.com/jybnvnp>.

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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

Ooligan Press

<http://ooligan.pdx.edu/>

Ooligan is a not-for-profit general trade press that publishes books honoring the cultural and natural diversity of the Pacific Northwest. We seek to publish regionally significant works of literary, historical, and social value. We define the Pacific Northwest as Northern California, Oregon, Idaho, Washington, British Columbia, and Alaska.

We recognize the importance of diversity, particularly within the publishing industry, and are committed to building a literary community that includes traditionally underrepresented voices; therefore, we are interested in works originating from, or focusing on, marginalized communities of the Pacific Northwest.

We invite you to submit the following:

Literary fiction

Nonfiction

Poetry

Young adult fiction

Books about the craft and teaching of writing, publishing, and book production

Books on sustainable practices

Important: Read guidelines on how to submit. See <http://ooligan.pdx.edu/submissions/>.

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Possibility Press

A World Leader in Personal, Professional, and Business Growth

"Our focus is on co-authoring and publishing short (15,000-40,000 words) bestsellers. We're looking for kind and compassionate authors who are passionate about making a difference in the world, and will champion their mission to do so, especially by public speaking. Our dream author writes well, knows how to promote, will champion their mission, speaks for a living, has a following and a platform, is cooperative and understanding, humbly handles critique and direction, is grateful, intelligent, and has a good sense of humor."

Nonfiction: psychology and pop psychology

Fiction: parables that teach lessons about life and success.

At Possibility Press we do our best to respect the author's stylistic preferences as much as possible, but some standardization of manuscript form is necessary: it simplifies evaluation and speeds up editing. Read the detailed requirements for manuscripts before submitting. See <http://www.possibilitypress.com/about/authors/default.html>.

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Website: [www.finneyco.com](http://www.finneyco.com)

<http://www.finneyco.com/about.html>

Finney Company is a growing independent publisher, distributor, and manufacturer of educational materials.

Our mission is to help improve the quality of lifelong learning worldwide.

We hope to strengthen and develop our organization by working with existing and new authors while continuing to make strategic acquisitions of additional products lines to distribute.

Our publishing imprints include

Astragal Press

Chester Book Co.

Ecopress

Finney Career Development Department

Great Outdoors Publishing Company

Hobar Publications

Live Oak Publications

Lone Oak Press

The New Careers Center

Pogo Press

Skipjack Press

Windward Publishing

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AGHA SHAHID ALI PRIZE IN POETRY

University of Utah Press, J. Willard Marriott Lib.

Ste. 5400, 295 S. 1500 East

Salt Lake City UT 84112

Phone: (801)581-6771

Fax: (801)581-3365

Website: [www.uofupress.com/ali-poetry-prize.php](http://www.uofupress.com/ali-poetry-prize.php)

Prize: \$1,000

The University of Utah Press and the University of Utah Department of English offer an annual award of \$1,000, publication of a book-length poetry manuscript, and a reading in the Guest Writers Series. Poems must be unpublished as a collection, but individual poems may have

been previously published elsewhere. Considers simultaneous submissions, "however, entrants must notify the Press immediately if the collection submitted is accepted for publication elsewhere during the competition." Submit 48-64 typed pages of poetry, with no names or other identifying information appearing on title page or within manuscript. Include cover sheet with complete contact information (name, address, telephone, e-mail address). Submissions must be in English. Manuscripts will not be returned. Guidelines available on website. Entry fee: \$25/book submission.

Competition receives over 300 manuscripts/year. Winner announced on press website in November, series editor contacts winning poet. Copies of winning books are available for \$14.95 from University of Utah Press (800-621-2736 for order fulfillment) or through website.

Important: Send entries after February 1 and before March 31.

Manuscripts must be in English and should be between 48 and 100 typed pages. The competition is open to poets who have previously published book-length poetry collections, as well as unpublished poets. Simultaneous submissions are permitted.

See website for full details and submission guidelines.

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Secret Agent Man  
P.O. Box 1078  
Lake Forest CA 92609-1078  
(949) 698-6987  
No unsolicited calls, please.  
(Don't call us; we'll call you.)  
Scott Mortenson  
scott@secretagentman.net  
<http://www.secretagentman.net/>

Secret Agent Man is a small, personal literary agency handling mainly mystery, suspense, and thriller fiction. SAM does not charge reading fees, and while we may offer critiques on submissions, it's not a habit. Critiques take a long time, but if the writer and the work are onto something special, a few comments and suggestions might be offered to help things along. Query only by email to [query@secretagentman.net](mailto:query@secretagentman.net) with sample chapters sent as an attachment or pasted into the body of the email. (Attachments work better.) Make sure the word "Query" is somewhere in the subject line. If it isn't, it may (and probably will) go into the spam folder, and it will disappear forever.

Include sample chapters and synopsis and/or outline.

To be honest, it's nearly impossible to judge your work based a query letter or synopsis alone. We'd prefer see the "real thing" rather than a description of it. Oh, and send the first 3-to-5 chapters, not non-sequential chapters (like 6, 17 and 34).

Don't expect a quick reply. You may hear something in a day or six weeks. Please be patient, though you're welcome to send a little "reminder," if you wish.

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#### Six: Got Muse? Listen, My Children

As I walked my dog through an autumn afternoon, very few birds were singing, a fact that made me think the afternoon was soundless. When I took stock of reality, though, the neighborhood was anything but silent. Music wafted from a neighbor's open carport door. Perhaps he left it open while he worked on his car. Traffic whooshed down a road nearby, such a constant sound that I rarely notice it. Where was everyone going? A few cars passed me on my street, and their tires whined while their engines hummed. Were these folks almost home, just leaving home, or on their way to visit someone in the neighborhood? My dog's paws clicked on the asphalt and his tags tinkled on his collar. What images, sounds, and smells interested him at the moment? Overhead I heard the high whine of an airplane. Where was it headed? Who was onboard? In the distance leaves rustled, and a chipmunk scurried amid the fallen leaves and acorns. I assumed he had work to do, stocking up for the winter. A hawk squawked above me; perhaps he had caused the other birds to fall silent. Would he spot the chipmunk I had spotted?

Once I took the time to pay attention of every sound around me, I realized I was walking in anything but soundlessness. A variety of performances played all around me, reflecting endless events and experiences.

For this creative exercise, visit some location, whether noisy or quiet, and spend time listening to the sounds, identifying them, considering what caused them or even what caused the absence of other sounds. Take notes and then write a story that involves some of the sounds or the silence that you observed.

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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.

Note: If your address changes, you must sign up again with your new address; we cannot change your address for you, because of our double-opt-in, no-spam policy.

To access past issues of The Writers Network News, click here: [http://live.ezine.com/feeds/ezine/886\\_2](http://live.ezine.com/feeds/ezine/886_2).

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