

The Writers Network News, June 2016

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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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WRITER'S QUOTE OF THE MONTH

"The main effort of arranging your life should be to progressively reduce the amount of time required to decently maintain yourself so that you can have all the time you want for reading." --Norman Rush, author of the short-story collection WHITES, which became a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize, and the novel MATING, which won the National Book Award.

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ONE: FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK: SHARPENING THE SAW

Dear Fellow Writers:

This month I took classes on the basics of the iPhone and an iPad. Yes, I've used iPhones for many years, and I bought my iPad more than six months ago, and while I knew the basics, I didn't know what I didn't know. First, both devices seemed to do all the same stuff, with the exception that it's much easier for me to read e-books on my iPad than on my iPhone. As a result I use the iPad mostly as a Kindle device. I wondered what else it might be good for.

I've known about the classes at the Apple store, only two towns away from me, but I resisted taking the classes. I had many excuses, including the driving time involved. While I learned new tips and tricks, I felt silly for waiting so long to sign up. Even though the class was basic, I learned interesting shortcuts and new ways to use my electronic devices.

The weekend before my Apple classes, I flew to Fort Meyers, Florida, to speak to a vibrant and large group of members of the Gulf Coast Writers Association. Still suffering from the aftereffects of a cold, I snorted, coughed, and wheezed my way through my talk, doing my best to impart valuable information to the group. I focused on how to improve a manuscript after the first draft, what to look for and revise or delete to make the writing stronger and unique. Very few people in the audience were under the age of forty, and I felt pleased that they were still willing to learn something new and continue to improve their writing.

We've all heard the term "sharpen the saw" in reference to sharpening the tools in our lives that make us better at what we do, whether it's becoming a better salesperson, a better parent, or a better writer. Even though I give seminars that sharpen writers' saws—give them

stronger tools to write even better—I must never forget to sharpen my own saw, and that’s why I’m glad I took those classes at the Apple store.

Here’s to continuing to sharpen our saws!

Yours in writing,

Bobbie Christmas [Bobbie@zebraeditor.com](mailto:Bobbie@zebraeditor.com) or [bzebra@aol.com](mailto: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

Have you been following my zany, odd, and sometimes creepy blog about my encounters with the opposite sex? See [www.NeutricaStories.blogspot.com](http://www.NeutricaStories.blogspot.com), and sign up to follow it.

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 COMMAS

By Bobbie Christmas

Q: Commas drive me crazy. I see them one way in one publication and another way in other publications. What are the rules? How am I to know where to put a comma?

A: You are not alone in your confusion. The problem is that the use of commas is a style issue, rather than a strict rule. Each publication has a specific style. Newspapers often use Associated Press style, for example, which does not use the Oxford, or serial, comma. AP style would handle commas this way, in a list: The American flag is red, white and blue.

Chicago style, however, which most book publishers follow, does call for a comma before the conjunction in a series. Chicago would write the same sentence this way: The American flag is red, white, and blue. See the added comma? No wonder writers are confused.

Chicago style, set forth in *The Chicago Manual of Style*, has a long list of when to use commas, and I won’t go into the list here. My best advice is to use an editor familiar with the style of the publication for which you write. If you are writing fiction or nonfiction books, be sure to hire an editor who follows Chicago style.

Q: Do I include or omit the commas in the following? “A big, iron, black pot was used to cook the crabs.” I couldn’t decide based on the description of coordinate adjectives in *The Chicago Manual of Style*, which states the following:

“A coordinate adjective is one that appears in a sequence with one or more related adjectives to modify the same noun. Coordinate adjectives should be separated by commas or by ‘and’ {skilled, experienced chess player} {nurturing and loving parent}. But if one adjective modifies the noun and another adjective modifies the idea expressed by the combination of the first adjective and the noun, the adjectives are not considered coordinate and should not be separated by a comma.

“As a general rule, when a noun is preceded by two or more adjectives that could, without affecting the meaning, be joined by ‘and,’ the adjectives are normally separated by commas. Such adjectives, which are called coordinate adjectives, can also usually be reversed in order and still make sense. If, on the other hand, the adjectives are not coordinate—that is, if one or more of the adjectives is essential to (i.e., forms a unit with) the noun being modified—no commas are used.”

A: The CMOS definition makes my head swirl. I’d much rather talk in terms of creative writing. I’ll give you an answer, although it may not be the one you expect. Quite often when we have questions about commas, we really are dealing with creative issues. For example, although commas are okay in the instance of “A big, iron, black pot was used to cook the crabs,” the sentence relies on a string of adjectives: big, iron, and black. While one adjective can be effective, each added adjective in a string weakens the writing. The sentence is also passive. In reality the color of the pot is not essential, so consider revamping the entire sentence, perhaps this way: “We used a big iron pot to cook the crabs.” Doesn’t that sentence sound more direct?

Q: I might be thinking too deeply and getting confused, but am I correct to place commas as I did in the following sentence:

You can’t go back, and if you think too much about the future, you miss the moment.

OR should it be: You can’t go back and if you think too much about the future, you miss the moment.

I’m confused because when I add all the commas, as in the first example, then “and if you think too much about the future” looks like a nonrestrictive clause, which it isn’t. Yipes!

A: Sometimes we do overthink grammar issues. The first sentence is correct:

You can’t go back, and if you think too much about the future, you miss the moment.

Here’s why the punctuation is correct. Two independent clauses joined by a conjunction should be separated by a comma. “You can’t go back” and “If you think too much about the future, you miss the moment” are independent clauses. “And” is the conjunction.

Q: I’m talking about when my hair came back years ago after chemo. In the sentence below, do I need a comma before ‘and?’ “So was I” does not seem like a full sentence. I also tried the sentence different ways. Which one, if any, do you like?

My new hair was full of vigor and so was I.

My new hair was full of life and vigor and so was I.

A: “So was I” has a subject and a verb, so it can be a standalone sentence, even though the conjunction “so” should rarely begin a sentence. Nevertheless, in both cases, because the sentences are compound, a comma should be placed before “and.”

My new hair was full of vigor, and so was I.

My new hair was full of life and vigor, and so was I.

As for the two sentences, both will be correct, once a comma precedes "and." Only you can decide which sentence gives the message you want to set forth.

Q: Is a comma okay after "inside?"

Inquisitively, I tore it open; inside, was a gold coin.

I'd like to keep it as one sentence, as shown above, instead of two distinct sentences.

A: The semicolon is fine, but the comma after "inside" is not appropriate. Correct: Inquisitively, I tore it open; inside was a gold coin.

For much more information on commas and hundreds of other subjects of vital importance to writers, order Purge Your Prose of Problems, a Book Doctor's Desk Reference Book at <http://tinyurl.com/4ptjnr>.

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).

Bobbie Christmas's second edition of Write In Style: How to Use Your Computer to Improve Your Writing is available at <http://tinyurl.com/pnq5y5s>.

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/lexp7n>.

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### THREE: THIS MONTH'S EASY EDITING TIP FROM BOBBIE CHRISTMAS: I THINK, I FEEL, I BELIEVE, I REMEMBER

Wordy phrases creep into our first drafts, but don't despair. First drafts are supposed to be more like talking than writing. Our job as writers, however, is to be sure that in the second and future drafts we take out words we don't need, so our strong voice and clear message come through. When we speak we say things such as "I feel like," "I feel as though," "I believe," "I think that," "I remember," and even "I'll always remember." Such phrases add nothing but words, and they weaken the writing. If we didn't think, feel, believe, or remember, we wouldn't be writing about the subject.

When we write, we must remove unnecessary wording. Consider the following examples:

Original: I feel that the president should be elected by popular vote.

Stronger: The president should be elected by popular vote.

Original: I believe writers should also be avid readers.

Stronger: Writers should also be avid readers.

Original: I'll never forget the accident on my graduation night.

Stronger: On my graduation night, my car tire blew and my car careened off the road.

Use my Find and Refine Method to power up your prose. Simply use the Find function (Ctrl + F) and type in the word or phrase you seek. If you think you may have used "I remember" where it would best be deleted, type "I remember" in the Find function and keep searching and editing each use of the word throughout the manuscript. You'll be amazed at the easy yet potent results.

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 WINS HONORS

Yowza! Look what I heard from member Lynn Hesse: "I won the 2015 Oak Tree Press Contest Cop Tales publishing contest. I will be selling my debut novel, WELL OF RAGE, at the Decatur [Georgia] Book Festival September 2 - 4, 2016." Good for her! Her radio interview will air in Atlanta on 1690 AM Radio, May 8 & 11 at 7 p.m. Check out her blog entry about the experience at <https://lynnhesse.wordpress.com/2016/04/27/lynn-hesse-interviewed-on-1690-am-radio/>, which says in part, "I've wrestled two-hundred pound drunks on morning watch while on duty as a cop, but I admit an on-the-air radio studio with a sound board and multiple gigantic microphones is a bit intimidating."

In her note to me, she added, "When I read your publication, I always learn something helpful. Thank you."

Oh, thank you, Lynn, and congratulations.

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MORE INFORMATION REGARDING BAD BOOK REVIEWS

What an honor it was to hear from Chris Roerden, author of DON'T MURDER YOUR MYSTERY (Agatha Award for Nonfiction; Anthony & Macavity Finalist; Writer's Digest Book Club Alternate Selection) and it's all-genre clone: DON'T SABOTAGE YOUR SUBMISSION (Benjamin Franklin Award for Literary Criticism; Royal Palm Award for Instructional/Education Book & Book of the Year). She said the following:

Bobbie, I read this note [in the last issue of The Writers Network News] with interest: "one of our members told me about trying to fight a Kirkus review of a book, even though he paid for Kirkus to review the book. He, too, met with complete resistance, despite pointing out several inaccuracies and bad assumptions in the review," because even though I have no idea at all what a paid review entails in the way of a written offer, I'd think that an author might be warned to read whatever fine print is offered and to at least inquire about redress in case of inaccuracies, if not actually attempt to insert some statement protecting herself or himself against such. The Internet is loaded with

complaints of errors in unpaid reviews, so your advice to counter with good reviews is right on. Still, it's likely that any review will have at least one inaccuracy. If a paid supplier of reviews is unwilling to cooperate on that point at least, I'd want other authors warned away from paying for anything without reading the fine print, especially since new authors are ripe for picking.

She added an opinion: Besides, Kirkus is one of the snarkest review pubs out there.

Chris is well-known in our industry and a highly successful editor and author. Writers would do well to heed her advice.

I also heard from Tricia Pimental, author of *A MOVEABLE MARRIAGE*, who wrote, "I had an awkward situation with a Goodreads review. It wasn't negative, just not well written. I understand why, now, as I read the reviewer's own book. I'm in a quandary how to handle writing one for her. Isn't the writing life grand?"

It sure is, Tricia. We sometimes have to walk a careful line when we critique someone's work. We want our feedback to be helpful, not hurtful, but we also want to be honest. It can challenge our own writing skills to find exactly the right words.

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PLANNING TO SELF-PUBLISH?

How much does it cost to self-publish a book?

See <http://blog.reedsy.com/cost-to-self-publish-a-book> for some interesting statistics.

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VOTE FOR WRITE IN STYLE FOR READER'S CHOICE—PLEASE!

WRITE IN STYLE was chosen as an INDIEFAB finalist because it represents the best indie books published in 2015 by the Foreword Review panel of judges who include librarians, booksellers, and its editorial staff. There's one other group that also deserves a voice in the INDIEFAB voting, and that's the readers. This is why we're introducing the new "Reader's Choice" category for this year's INDIEFAB Awards.

The INDIEFAB Reader's Choice Winner will be awarded to the INDIEFAB finalist that gets the most votes from fans: Please go to the Write In Style Indie Finalist page at <https://indiefab.forewordreviews.com/books/write-in-style/> and leave a comment that Write In Style is your #INDIEFABFAVE (note: commenters must login through Facebook or with a Foreword Reviews account).

The book with the most reader endorsements will be named the INDIEFAB Reader's Choice Winner. Please help me by endorsing Write In Style.

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EDIT YOURSELF OR EDIT OTHERS

PURGE YOUR PROSE OF PROBLEMS, A BOOK DOCTOR'S DESK REFERENCE, will save you thousands of dollars, when you use it to edit your own book. Order my proprietary book-doctor desk reference book at <http://tinyurl.com/4ptjnr>. Available printed and spiral bound, so it stays open easily next to your computer, or buy the PDF version to store on your computer, ready to search electronically, whenever you need it.

Purge Your Prose of Problems covers all you need 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.

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SAVE ALMOST \$10 FOR MY MOST POPULAR BOOKS

WRITE IN STYLE, my book that gives you copious tips on how to improve your writing, has won four awards and is still in the running for more. It's selling quickly, and the reviews are all positive. Creative writing teachers use the book to teach students how to write stronger, clearer prose, and writers everywhere use it to help themselves find their fresh voice. The book is easy and fun to read. WRITE IN STYLE usually sells for \$14.95 plus as much as \$4.99 shipping.

PURGE YOUR PROSE OF PROBLEMS: A BOOK DOCTOR'S DESK REFERENCE, is quite possibly the world's most complete reference for writers. It's great for resolving disputes among writers and critique circle members. It covers grammar, punctuation, Chicago style, creative issues, word-choice issues, and much more. Spiral bound, the pages stay open for easy reference, even while you are at your computer. PURGE YOUR PROSE OF PROBLEMS usually sells for \$29.95 plus much as \$4.99 for shipping.

If you buy these books individually, your total cost with shipping could be almost \$55.00, but for a short time, I am offering a crazy deal. Buy both books directly from me (not through Amazon or other sources), and you'll pay only \$45. I will pay for the shipping. Yes, FREE shipping! I'll even flat sign (just my name and date) both books. You'll save almost \$10 and get the best two books on writing that you will ever order.

To take advantage of this one-time offer, send me \$45 through PayPal.com (Bobbie@zebraeditor.com) or mail a check to Bobbie Christmas, 230 Deerchase Dr., Woodstock, GA 30188. Be sure to give me your shipping address.

This offer will not last long, so take advantage of it today.

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NEW FREE REPORTS

I've added two new free reports for writers from Bobbie Christmas and Zebra Communications

Report #119 - How to Format a Book-Length Manuscript in Word 2010: This report clearly tells you how to format a manuscript to make it acceptable to submit to an agent or publisher. If you plan to self-publish, the format of your manuscript is not as vital, but following this format simplifies the layout process of the finished book.

Report #120 - Can You Make a Living as a Writer? I can't answer the question for everyone; I can only tell you what worked for me. I have had a long, prosperous, and fun-filled life working with words. This report may spur you to follow your dreams and find ways to make a living as a writer too.

For these and more free reports, go to [http://zebraeditor.com/free\\_reports.shtml](http://zebraeditor.com/free_reports.shtml).

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HOW TO DISTINGUISH AN EM DASH OR EN DASH FROM A HYPHEN

The Chicago Manual of Style new question and answers gives clear instructions, along with some other great questions and answers for writers. See <http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/qanda/latest.html>

ASK THE BOOK DOCTOR, THE BOOK

ASK THE BOOK DOCTOR: HOW TO BEAT THE COMPETITION AND SELL YOUR WRITING answers 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>.

START WITH THE END IN MIND

Almost every time I speak to writers as a group, I tell them what Aristotle said, "Start with the end in mind." Before you start writing your book, you need to know a few things, so your efforts won't be wasted, and I'm not talking about simply knowing the storyline. I found a post that says everything I want writers to consider before they type the first word in a book. See <http://tinyurl.com/zuep5x7>.

FOUR-TIME-AWARD-WINNING BOOK ON CREATIVE WRITING

Updated, upgraded, expanded, and indexed, the second edition of Write In Style goes even further than the award-winning first edition to show writers how to produce compelling prose. This book reveals how to uncover your fresh voice, the type of voice publishers and readers demand. This book is not a book on grammar; it's an easy-to-read yet instructional book that improves any type of writing.

For an autographed copy, write to me here: bzebra@aol.com.
For an unsigned copy, click here: <http://tinyurl.com/h5qstpy>
For the Kindle version, click here: <http://tinyurl.com/orjp9v2>
For a Nook version, click here: <http://tinyurl.com/qfo55xu>
For Kobo click here: <http://tinyurl.com/ouoeejc>

WHO TO FOLLOW ON TWITTER?

Weak on Grammar?

I could give you many suggestions on who to follow on Twitter, and I may make more, but today I have one suggestion for those who would like to bone up on grammar. Yes, I find grammar to be a dull subject, even though I must comply with it for editing purposes. I'd rather speak about how to make writing stronger and more marketable through strong writing, so I always try to simplify issues if I must speak about grammar. I found this Twitter feed by Grammar God, though, which also keeps things simple. If you feel weak in grammar and want to learn a little bit one piece at a time, you would do well to follow Grammar God at <https://twitter.com/grammargods101>.

BECOME MY FRIEND ON FACEBOOK

Follow my adventures, opinions, and observations: <http://www.facebook.com/bobbie.christmas>

FOLLOW ZEBRA COMMUNICATIONS ON FACEBOOK

News, information, immediate updates, and other things writers can put to use.

Like Zebra Communications at <http://tinyurl.com/7vcxaxu>.
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FIVE: CONTESTS, AGENTS, AND MARKETS

UNION LITERARY OPEN TO SUBMISSIONS

Union Literary
30 Vandam Street
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New York, NY 10013

Union Literary is a full-service boutique agency specializing in literary fiction, popular fiction, narrative non-fiction, memoir, social history, business and general big idea books, popular science, cookbooks and food writing. We excel at project development, hands-on editing and placing our projects with domestic and foreign publishers, film and television companies. Please be sure to read and consider the agent bios at <http://unionliterary.com/bio/>, when submitting to the agency, and only submit to the agent you think will best respond to the work. If we think it's a better fit for someone else within the agency, we will happily refer it to them.

We prefer to receive submissions by e-mail with sample pages attached in .doc or .docx format. Please do not send .pdf files.

Nonfiction submissions should include a query letter, a proposal, and a sample chapter.
Fiction submissions should include a query letter, a synopsis, and either sample pages or a full manuscript.

The agency does not represent romance or science fiction.

SEEKING POC SUBMISSIONS FOR ANTHOLOGY

Sanguine Press is open for submissions to our first anthology, Transitions & Awakenings.
Deadline: June 30, 2016
Theme: I Regret Nothing

Too many characters spend their time brooding about the past, whether it's missed opportunities or mistakes that led to misfortune down the line. For our first anthology, we want your stories with at least one character who has no regrets, either for a specific moment or in general. Your story must feature a predominantly POC (people of color) cast to be considered.

Genres: Sci-fi, Fantasy, or Horror (no poetry, please)

Story Length: We're looking for original short fiction up to 10,000 words. While we'll read a piece that's slightly longer, we will not consider any story over 12,000 words. Your story must be complete within the stated word count-no serials or other multi-part pieces.

Pay: We pay .10/word for the first 1,000 words, .05/word for the next 5,000 words and .03/word after that.

Contract Overview: Our contract covers the right to publish your story within our digital and print anthology, as well as online at Sanguine Press for paying members. We ask for exclusive rights for one year and non-exclusive after that. A full contract will be provided upon acceptance into the anthology.

No multiple submissions: Please only send us one story at a time, and wait for a response before sending another. We're excited to get to read your work, but as a two-person team we have to do all we can to give as many authors as possible a fair chance to be read.

No simultaneous submissions: If you decide to submit to another publisher, please send us a note and withdraw your submission here, first. We ask this only because of time constraints, and this policy may change in the future when our staff expands.

No previously published works: We're thrilled to have published authors submit their work for consideration, but please, no work that has already been published elsewhere.

We solemnly swear we will respond to you whether your work is accepted or not, but please give us at least two months to read and get back to you. If you haven't heard from us by then, by all means, send us a note to see what's up. We know that's a long time to wait, and we thank you for being so patient with us.

Click here to submit your story: <http://www.sanguine.press/submission-requirements/>

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POCKETS ANNUAL FICTION CONTEST

<http://pockets.upperroom.org/write-for-us/annual-fiction-contest/>

Entries must be postmarked no later than August 15.

- Please indicate FICTION CONTEST on both the outside envelope and the cover sheet.
- There is no set theme and no entry fee.
- Stories should be 750-1,000 words. (Stories shorter than 750 words or longer than 1,000 words will be disqualified.)
- Stories must be previously unpublished.
- Please include an accurate word count on your cover sheet.
- Multiple submissions are permitted, but please submit only your best work.
- Past winners are ineligible.
- The winner will be announced November 1 at [pockets.upperroom.org](http://pockets.upperroom.org).
- Award: \$500 and publication in the magazine.
- Entries with a SASE will be returned.
- If you have questions, visit our website at [www.pockets.upperroom.org](http://www.pockets.upperroom.org) or write to us.

SEND ALL MANUSCRIPTS WITH SASE TO:

Lynn W. Gilliam, Editor  
P. O. Box 340004  
Nashville, TN 37203-0004

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SIX: GOT MUSE? INTERNAL CONFLICT

"Conscience is a dog that does not stop us from passing but that we cannot prevent from barking." --Nicolas de Chamfort (1741-1794)

Sébastien-Roch Nicolas, also known as Chamfort, was a French writer best known for his witty epigrams and aphorisms. He was also active politically and one of the first to enter the Bastille when it was stormed.

Our conscience often conflicts with what we want or need to do, and conflict drives good stories. In fiction, a main character's conflict often involves another person, place, or thing, but sometimes the conflict comes from within. What happens when a priest falls in love with a parishioner, for example; what will he do? What if a staunch vegetarian found herself stranded in a group somewhere where no vegetation was edible, but several hunters offered her meat from animals they killed? Does she starve to death or cave in and eat meat, to survive?

What goes on in the head of people who face internal conflict? Thoughts and internal conflict can be the most difficult subjects to write about. Sometimes it is wiser for a writer to have the character voicing his or her feelings and opinions to another person, rather than having all the conflict go on in the character's head.

How would you write a story that involved conscience and internal conflict? Start with an outline, and then flesh it out into a scene, story, or

novel.

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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.

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 enter a competition, pitch or accept an assignment, spend money, or sell your work.

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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