

The Writers Network News, September 2016

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 THE WRITERS NETWORK NEWS
 No Rules; Just Write!
 Editor: Bobbie Christmas

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WRITER'S QUOTE OF THE MONTH

Anne Tyler was born in Minneapolis, Minnesota (1941), and is the author of *The Accidental Tourist* (1985), *Back When We Were Grownups* (2001), and *Digging to America* (2006). Early in her career, she decided she did not want to be a public person, so she stopped giving readings and gives only occasional interviews in writing. She said, "Any time I talk in public about writing, I end up not able to do any writing. It's as if some capricious Writing Elf goes into a little sulk whenever I expose him." Ann Tyler also said, "I want to live other lives. I've never quite believed that one chance is all I get. Writing is my way of making other chances. It's lucky I do it on paper. Probably I would be schizophrenic--and six times divorced--if I weren't writing."

ONE: FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK: A BOOK THAT CHANGED MY LIFE AND DEATH

Dear Fellow Writers:

You may find today's subject morbid, but I find it fascinating, comforting, and realistic, so I'd like to share some of the ways I have been enlightened.

I recently read *Stiff: The Curious Life of Human Cadavers* by Mary Roach, and it changed the way I think. I found the subject captivating, and the book held my attention from start to finish.

We all have to leave this earth sooner or later, but what happens to our bodies? The book answered many questions for me and delved into subjects I found entrancing. Best of all it changed how I plan for my body to be handled after my death.

Many years ago I decided I did not want to be buried, because I did not want the people I love to visit my grave and mourn me. After my twenty-two-year-old sister died in an accident in 1964, I spent years visiting her gravesite and weeping. As a result I decided I never wanted to be in a place where people came and grieved over me. I am a happy person, and I want others to be happy. Instead of my loved ones going to a place that made them sad, I wanted them to feel I was everywhere, all around them, loving them and smiling with them, wherever they went. I decided that cremation would be the answer. I had originally planned for my son to scatter my cremains on a garden, where I might do some good. His wife, my adorable daughter-in-law, is an accomplished horticulturist, and their lawns have won quite a few awards.

I had thought how nice it would be to have my body feed her glorious gardens.

Alas, in reading *Stiff*, I learned that cremains have no organic value; they won't feed plants or flowers, as I had hoped. What to do, then, with my cremains?

From reading *Stiff* I also learned of the need for bodies to be donated to science and the respect and dignity with which researchers and medical students treat those bodies. Yes, sometimes limbs or even a head is cut off the body to be used elsewhere for science, yet each body part is treated with the same respect, dignity, and thankfulness, and each body and body part helps medical education and research move forward in ways that help the living. The companies that run body donation programs pick up the body from the place of death, use it as needed, and cremate the remains. Eventually the company will, if requested, return some of the cremains to a family member. The company eventually scatters the remaining ashes in the ocean.

Yes, the subject is macabre, but as I face yet another birthday in September, I know my days here are more limited in number than they used to be. It's time to make decisions regarding my future. After a quick Internet search I found LifeQuest Anatomical, the company that administers the body-donation program in Georgia and many other states, and the company mailed me all the forms necessary for donating my body to science. Thanks to *Stiff*, I will donate my body to science, and my family members will not have to pay for a funeral and especially not an expensive plot in some graveyard. I've chosen for all my remains to go into the ocean, so my son won't even have to deal with any of my cremains, and he has agreed to honor my wishes.

Knowing my eventual demise will not be a burden to my family and will give medical students and researchers a chance to advance their knowledge, I can forget about death and get on with my wonderful life. A friend of mine heard of my plans and asked me to give him copies of the consent form, so he too can donate his body. I feel the good vibes spreading.

Isn't it wonderful how reading a book can change your life? *Stiff* even changed my death, and I'm pleased to move forward with life knowing the details of my death are a little more in order.

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.

TWO: ASK THE BOOK DOCTOR ABOUT WORD COUNTS, DIALECT, AND OVERUSING CONJUNCTIONS

By Bobbie Christmas

Q: How many words are in a young adult novel?

A: Young adult books for ages twelve and up should come in at 40,000 to 50,000 words. Yes, I know that the Harry Potter series pushes that envelope until it pops, but J. K. Rowling's first book in the series was not disproportionately long. The success of the first book allowed her more freedom with the lengths of the remaining books in the series.

Q: My novel has both Anglo and Black characters. In the Black characters' dialogue, is it okay to dispense with all of the apostrophes indicating dropped g's, softened r's, etc., and write the words phonetically? Members of my writers' group say doing this will be considered racist and advise against it.

A: First let me note that while Anglo, which means a non-Hispanic white person, is capitalized, "black," when it refers to a person of color, should not be capitalized, unless it appears at the beginning of a sentence.

Next let me address the issue of writing dialect. Can you honestly say that you know a single person who pronounces a g at the end of a word? None of us do, and for that reason alone, using an apostrophe for a dropped g or leaving off the g with no apostrophe is not indicative of thoughtful writing. If we all speak that way, why pick one character to point out that he or she speaks that way?

Dialect is a sticky issue, as editors will tell you, not only for the fact that it can mark a writer as a racist, but also because it is hard to read and harder to write well. Instead of relying on typographical tricks to indicate that someone speaks a little differently, it's smarter to use vernacular—word choices and word order. For example, when the more grammatical dialogue might be "Where are you living?" in black vernacular it might be this: "Where you staying?" Some white southerners, on the other hand, might say, "Where're you living at?"

Another way to show dialect without relying on it heavily is to reveal to readers how one or two words were pronounced. For example, we might write dialogue this way on a rare occasion:

"You don't know nothing," she said. She pronounced the last word "nuttin."

Q: You are a national treasure, and your book, *Write in Style*, is a treasure trove for writers and editors. I've changed the way I write forever since purchasing it. Here's my question: Now that I've removed so many "buts" and other connectives, I find myself using "and" more often. Is it possible to have too many "ands" in my manuscript?

A: It's always best to avoid repetition. "And" is not a word that stands out much, but (and you can also use "but," "of course") it can also mean that the manuscript has too many compound sentences or sentences with too many words. Twelve is an ideal number of words in a sentence, but not all sentences should be the same length, either. Keep in mind, however, that twenty or more words could result in a confusing sentence.

My objection isn't so much to the overuse of "and" or "but," but the overuse of such conjunctions at the beginning of sentences. To avoid the pattern, often two sentences can be linked into one compound sentence.

For example, instead of the following:

I always loved fishing. But as I grew older, I could no longer tolerate the sun.

The stronger writer might write this:

I always loved fishing, but as I grew older, I could no longer tolerate the sun.

The strongest writer who wanted to avoid overusing “but” might write the same passage this way:

I always loved fishing. As I grew older, though, I could no longer tolerate the sun.

Only you can decide if you've used "and" too often. To find out how many times you've used it, in Word 2010, you can press Ctrl + F, and a Navigation box pops up. Put your cursor in the box and hit the spacebar once, type the word "and," and then hit the spacebar again. This method avoids counting words with a-n-d in the middle and counts only the uses of the actual word "and." If the manuscript is 50,000 words long and has 3,000 uses of the same word, the word “and” is obviously overused. I cannot conjure up the ideal ratio, though. Some things must be left up to the author.

For much more information on these subjects and hundreds of others 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. 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.

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

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THREE: THIS MONTH'S EASY EDITING TIP FROM BOBBIE CHRISTMAS: STATES

When and how should you abbreviate a state name? Book-length manuscripts follow Chicago style. In Chicago style, the names of states are always spelled out in running copy. The only exceptions are when the manuscript quotes a real or fictitious newspaper or magazine article written in Associated Press (AP) or United Press International (UPI) style or when a nonfiction book lists references. If writing or imagining a newspaper or magazine article, you may use AP style, but be sure you are familiar with how it handles state abbreviations. I am no longer an expert in AP style, but when I wrote for newspapers and magazines more than thirty years ago, the state of Florida, for example, was abbreviated Fla., not FL, the way the post office abbreviates. Rather than learn a new style, novelists cannot go wrong by continuing to use Chicago style, even when quoting fictitious magazine and newspaper articles.

This lesson teaches you how to use the Find and Replace function to catch opportunities to write stronger, more stylistically correct prose.

Use my Find and Refine Method to power up your prose. In this case you will want to search your manuscript for the use of any state abbreviations. To do so in Microsoft Word, use the Find function (Ctrl + F on a PC and Command + F on a Mac) and search for any state abbreviations you think you may have used. Examine each instance and be sure the state name is not abbreviated in running copy unless it appears in a magazine or newspaper article within the novel or in an index or other reference source.

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

HOW DO SOME PUBLISHERS STACK UP?

Although the article is slanted toward BookLocker, which owns the blog, the information in this investigative article about companies that help people self-publish is quite revealing. See <http://writersweekly.com/angela-desk/booklockers-investigative-reporter-goes-undercover-to-investigate-pod-publishers-by-brian-whiddon-a-k-a-secret-squirrel>.

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). Although the page offers to sell the book, you don’t have to buy it through this page. Simply scroll down and leave your comment.

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

WEBSITES FOR WRITERS

PHRASE ORIGINS

Yes, strong writers avoid idioms and clichés, except in dialogue, but did you ever wonder about the origin or meanings of some of our idioms? Visit this British site (and I warn you; it uses British spelling, even for American idioms) to learn the origins of some of our idioms. <http://www.phrases.org.uk/meanings/a.html>

HOW TO CORRECT SOMEONE’S GRAMMAR

Thank you, Mark Diamond of Mark Diamond’s Writing to Command Attention, for sending me a link to a site that has a great article on when and how to correct someone’s grammar without losing a friend. See <https://www.proofreadnow.com/blog/should-you-correct-others->

grammar?utm_source=hs_email&utm_medium=email&utm_content=33097056&_hsenc=p2ANqtz-8STrZt0C6hy6u_xOTPgqcbEI7f953V46nQGt9LbxWsfBkVryT5svRj6gCCoHqelwgGhP8_sGpgr8k1PDVZ6QF95V4CEQ&_hsmi=33097056

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SAVE THOUSANDS ON EDITING

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. It's the resource editors use to edit book-length manuscripts.

Order the book-doctor desk reference book at <http://tinyurl.com/4ptjnr>. Available spiral bound, so it stays open easily next to your computer, or as a PDF to store on your computer, ready to search electronically.

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 hundreds of other subjects.

Order Purge Your Prose of Problems today at <http://tinyurl.com/4ptjnr>.

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SALES UP IN BOOKSTORES

At last some good news for writers! The US Census Bureau reported that for the first half of 2016, bookstore sales were a little more than six percent ahead of the same period in 2015.

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MEMBER INTERVIEWED ON SENIOR LIVING

Ben Oswald reports, "I was a guest on Senior Living hosted by Doug Theaker on WMFD TV, Mansfield, Ohio. The program was also published on the Internet at the following address: <http://www.wmfd.com/watch-WMFD-TV-Shows/senior-living/index.asp>

"Doug and I discussed my latest book, Johnny DeSilver: Reflections of a Candy Cop, and some of the things I do to try to keep aging at bay. The program is available on Google, Safari, and Firefox."

Way to go, Ben! It's hard to get publicity for our books. This interview is a terrific achievement.

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FREE REPORT: FORMAT A MANUSCRIPT

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.

For this and more free reports, go to http://zebraeditor.com/free_reports.shtml.

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TEXT MUST MAKE SENSE ON ITS OWN

I often edit nonfiction books that give a chapter title, heading, or subhead that assumes readers read the title, heading, or subhead. I'm a stickler for making the wording stand alone, no matter what the title, heading, or subhead may say. This month's Q&A from The Chicago Manual of Style backs me up. It says that the text should make sense even if all the headings and subheadings are removed. To read more Q&A from The Chicago Manual of Style Online, go to <http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/qanda/latest.html>.

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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>.

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TERMINOLOGY WRITERS NEED TO KNOW: STANDARD MANUSCRIPT FORMAT

Standard Manuscript Format, or SMF, has specific requirements related to how a manuscript should look when submitted to an agency or publisher. The following are the guidelines for SMF:

A 12-point font (preferably Courier or Times New Roman), double spaced, with each new paragraph indented five spaces. Do not add space (or allow the computer to do so automatically) between paragraphs except to show a scene change. Allow at least a one-inch margin on all sides. New chapters begin one-third of the way down a new page. Chapter titles are in all caps, centered. Page numbers, manuscript title, and author name should appear in a header at the top of each page. Page numbers should be consecutive and should not begin at page one again for each new chapter.

When writers had to submit their works printed and sent through the mail, we always had to follow standard manuscript format. With electronic submissions, however, the format may depend upon the publisher's wishes. Before submitting a manuscript, always check each publisher's website or query publishers to learn of their format requirements. If they request standard manuscript format, be sure to follow the guidelines above.

Oh, and one added tip. Do not use the spacebar or the tab key to indent new paragraphs. Set the indent arrow on the ruler at the top of the screen. If you aren't sure how to set indents or stop a computer from adding an extra space after each paragraph, click on the Help button at the top right corner of the Word screen. It's a question mark in a blue circle.

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FOUR-TIME-AWARD-WINNING BOOK ON CREATIVE WRITING

Updated, upgraded, expanded, and indexed, the second edition of Write In Style: How to Use Your Computer to Improve Your Writing 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>
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BOOK PROMOTERS RECOMMEND USING GOODREADS

Social media experts and book promoters say that authors with books to promote should have an active presence on Goodreads.com. Sign up for a free account, post your book, get reviews, and review books by others. <https://www.goodreads.com/>

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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

CHATTAHOOCHEE VALLEY WRITERS SHORT STORY CONTEST AND POETRY CONTEST

Detailed information at <http://www.chattwriters.org/contestsguidelines.html>

Both contests offer the following:

- First Place: \$50
- Second Place: \$25
- Third Place: \$15
- Honorable mention: Certificate.

Submit so that manuscript is received no later than 1 Sep 2016, along with your check for \$10, to Chattahoochee Valley Writers, Inc. Do NOT use registered or certified mail.

For questions and/or concerns regarding contests, please see the website or e-mail chattwriter@gmail.com. Include in the subject line "Contests."

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BEAR DELUXE MAGAZINE

810 SE Belmont  
Studio 5  
Portland, OR 97214  
[beardeluxe@orlo.org](mailto:beardeluxe@orlo.org)  
Full submission guidelines here: <https://orlo.org/participate/>

Accepting fiction and nonfiction.

Orlo is an organization dedicated to exploring place-based and environmental issues. Orlo is also far-reaching community of people—writers, artists, designers, scientists, entrepreneurs, readers, observers, experimenters—who are curious, critical and engaged with the people and places around them. Through "Bear Deluxe" magazine, readings, art shows, lectures and other events, Orlo supports a dynamic and diverse dialogue about how we relate to our environment. Orlo and "Bear Deluxe" magazine operate with a dedicated crew of volunteers and supporters.

Unsolicited nonfiction manuscripts are considered, but it is less common that they find a home in "Bear Deluxe." More often, nonfiction writers approach editors with a story idea or are asked to write on ideas generated internally by the magazine.

When it comes to fiction, we are most excited by high-quality writing that furthers the magazine's goal of engaging new and divergent readers. We appreciate strong aspects of storytelling and are open to new formats, though we wouldn't call ourselves publishers of "experimental fiction." We generally do not publish traditional sci-fi, horror, romance, or crime/action stories. Word limit: 4,000.

E-mail submissions are accepted but not generally encouraged. The Editorial Group still prefers printed submissions and query letters mailed to the address above. We can respond only to e-mail submissions chosen for publication. We prefer that you submit writing under each category as its own submission.

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FINEPRINT LITERARY MANAGEMENT

FinePrint Literary Management is a strategic agency offering representation and management for new and established writers. Our expertise covers book publishing (traditional and e-books) and subsidiary rights (foreign translation, audio, TV, and film).

Accepts commercial, crime, fantasy, historical, middle grade, mystery, romance, science fiction, suspense, thriller, women's, and young adult.

For more information on queries and submissions, see <http://www.fineprintlit.com/submissions.html>

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SIX: GOT MUSE? FACEBOOK FANTASIES

Most of us are involved in some sort of social media, whether it be Facebook, Twitter, or any of the other sites where people report their activities, life events, and feelings. For this exercise go to any social media site, read a few entries, ponder what people have said they are

thinking or doing, and extrapolate that information into a short story with a beginning, middle, and end, including action, dialogue, and scene setting. Your story does not have to play out exactly as told on the social media site; simply let other people's postings inspire you to turn a comment into a short story.

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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 and clicking on Free Newsletter.

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To access past issues of The Writers Network News, click here: 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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