

The Writers Network News, January 2017

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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

"I feel that when you look out into the world, the world is funny. And people are funny. And that people always try to make each other laugh. I've never been to a dinner party where nobody said anything funny. If you're going to ignore that [fact as a fiction writer], what are you doing?" ~short story author Lorrie Moore

Lorrie Moore is an American fiction writer known mainly for her humorous and poignant short stories.  
Born: January 13, 1957 (age 59), Glens Falls, NY  
Awards: PEN/Malamud Award, Rea Award for the Short Story, and more  
Nominations: PEN/Faulkner Award for Fiction

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ONE: FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK: WHAT WILL I TACKLE IN 2017?

Dear Fellow Writers:

The holidays are behind us and a new year is ahead of us. This week I took a moment to think about what I want to produce in the coming year.

In 2016 several people contacted me in hopes of becoming a book doctor. I've been self-supporting with my successful book-doctoring business for almost twenty-five years, whereas most businesses fail within the first five years. I have a huge amount of information to impart to beginning editors on how to avoid pitfalls and setbacks and how to start and run a successful editing business. Years ago I began writing a book about how to become a book doctor, but I barely got past creating an outline. The outline lives on one of my many old computers, dying a digital death. Will this be the year I tackle that project for real? Maybe. Maybe not. I'm not convinced the market is large enough for a book of that type. I'm willing to listen to feedback on the subject, though, if you have an opinion.

Even if I tackle a book about how to become a book doctor, I still have my book of relationship memoirs to finish and shop around in hopes of finding a publisher. I started a blog where I post shorter stories of encounters and experiences with the opposite sex and have gotten encouraging feedback on those stories, so I'm feel certain my longer stories will make a good book and have a strong market. I had more

than enough stories to fill a book, so the blog features shorter stories, most of which are not in the book. Yes, I have that many stories, having been single most of my life. If you enjoy true stories about sometimes funny, sometimes sad, sometimes odd, and sometimes scary encounters with the opposite sex, you'll enjoy my blog at <https://neuroticastories.blogspot.com>, and will perhaps one day you'll also get to read my book, NEUROTICA, if it ever gets published.

Okay, that's two possible books, yet I also have a novel that I wrote many years ago. My critique partners loved the novel, but the truth is that I have since learned so much more about novel writing that I'm afraid to go back and look at what I've written, because I'm sure I made many of the same mistakes or oversights that I now find in the novels I edit for other writers. Maybe I'll dig up that book and polish it. It's a thought.

No matter what project I tackle in 2017, I will write. Writers write. We cannot help it. Even if I did nothing else, I'd still be writing these letters to my readers and writing editing tips and blogs and reports and other information to help fellow. It's a happy burden I gladly carry, because I love to help writers be the best they can be.

If you read my newsletter last month, you know I faced some medical challenges in 2016, but all the pain and all those challenges are behind me, and I'm ready for a brand new, happy, health-filled, productive year. I hope the same for you.

Bring it on, 2017!

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

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TWO: ASK THE BOOK DOCTOR about When Your Publisher Drops You and Determining the Viability of a Book Idea

By Bobbie Christmas

Q: My publisher closed the imprint under which my book was published. What should I do now?

A: You have several options, but first and foremost, you must have the publisher return your rights to you. After you receive a letter that officially reverts the rights to you, you can then look for another publisher or choose to self-publish.

Cardoza Publishing, which bought and published my book on creative writing, Write In Style, did exactly what you describe, a few years after releasing my book in 2004. It shut down the Union Square Publishing imprint that specialized in books for writers and moved the company from New York to Las Vegas, where it concentrated on books about gambling.

I halfheartedly queried one or two publishers about rereleasing the book, but no one snapped it up. Frustrated, I let the book languish. Years passed, and the information in the book grew dated.

One day I was talking to the owner of a local book printing company, and he asked whatever happened to Write In Style. He knew it had sold well but was out of print. When I said I was remiss in updating it, he suggested I self-publish and release it at a conference he had planned in a few months. With his encouragement, I had a plan and a deadline, if I wanted to launch the second edition at his conference.

My decision was a great one. With a deadline looming, I revamped, updated, and expanded the book, had a new cover designed and the book printed in time for the conference. The printer brought the first fifty copies to the conference, and I sold all but one of those copies, the first day the book was released. The book continues to sell copies through Amazon and other outlets. I make much more per book than I did with the traditional publisher, and I had complete control over the cover, the layout, and the title.

Speaking of the title, I needed to keep the same title for continuity, but I updated and simplified the subtitle and ditched the long, convoluted subtitle the previous publisher had insisted upon. I even added an index, which the prior publisher would not do. Because I had more control over the self-published edition of Write In Style, writers get more information from it than before, the printer makes money every time a copy is sold, and I make more money per book. Everybody wins.

Self-publishing is not for everyone, but it met my needs.

Q: I am a musician and a big music fan. Years ago, a musician friend of mine pointed out that in his view, a specific year was an especially strong one in music, and that many music artists released their best work that year. I agree with him; while searching through the discographies of artists from that era I have found it to hold true. It got me thinking about that year in particular. Was there a certain energy to that year?

Believing that music reflects the times within which it is created, I started to look at other events outside of music that occurred then. It does seem to be a pivotal year, with organizations, iconic buildings, concepts, and technology entering our society and culture that are still with us today. [The year and the events have been deleted, for proprietary purposes.]

I haven't come up with a unifying theory that ties it all together, and I'm struggling to weave together a narrative that explains it. I'd love to hear your critique. Is this topic too broad? I haven't been able to find a similar book out there about the zeitgeist of a particular year. Any suggestions and whether you think this idea is a viable one for a book would be appreciated.

A: I've thought long and hard about this set of questions before I sat down to respond.

First, the unifying element (not theory) that ties all those things together is simply that in one year, important, interesting, and life-changing events took place. What a year it was! I agree with you that the year hosted many vital events, all of which I find fascinating, with the possible exception of [subject deleted], but that's just me. If you uncover an interesting and untold story behind that subject too, though, then it might also be of interest to the general public and to me as well.

The topic is not too broad, if, as you say, it has a unifying element, and it does.

The next issue, though, is whether I think it is a viable idea for a book. Oh, if only we could predict what the American public would buy! No one can predict such a thing; however, one way to avoid spending years writing the book only to find there's no market for it would be to write a strong book proposal and shop it to agents and publishers. The details of how to write a book proposal are set out quite simply in several books, including Michael Larsen's book, *How to Write a Book Proposal*. I followed his formula and sold my book, *Write In Style*, to a New York publisher in 2004. A proper book proposal includes sample chapters, so only after I sold the book based on the proposal did I then have to write the remaining chapters.

If no agent or publisher shows an interest after receiving a well-written and thoroughly edited proposal, you may then have your answer, that it's not a viable book idea. On the other hand, you may also decide to avoid the proposal/agent/publisher issue altogether and self-publish the book and market it yourself.

In general I'd say that whenever a subject fascinates one person willing to research and write about it, others will find the subject fascinating, too, provided the book is written well and carefully edited.

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](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 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: WELL

As writers we must make dialogue sound authentic without duplicating all the things people add into their speech. When people speak they add words and sounds that, if duplicated in written dialogue, create repetition and bog down dialogue. One of the most overused fillers I see in dialogue is the word well.

Examples:

"Well, how have you been, John?"  
"Yeah, well, I know. I've been busy."

Better:

"How have you been, John?"  
"I know. I've been busy."

Conversation-filler words and sounds can be used to our advantage as writers, if those fillers have not been overused to the point of having no meaning to readers. Note the emphasis a writer can put on specific points when we use those little fillers intentionally. The hesitation shown with fillers gives readers a good idea of what's going on in the speaker's mind.

Examples:

"Well, now, where did you get that dress, Emily?"  
"I've been meaning to, well, ask you if I could borrow it."

If you suspect you or your characters have used the word "well" too often, you can easily repair the flaw. Use my Find and Refine Method and hunt through your manuscript. In this case you will search your manuscript for the word "Well." To Find and Refine "Well" in Microsoft Word, use the Find and Replace function (Ctrl + H on a PC and Command + H on a Mac) and check the Match Case feature. In the Find What box, type Well. Capitalize the word, because when overused, "Well" often appears as an opening expletive in dialogue. Leave the Replace With box empty. Click on Find Next, and read each use of the word "Well" that the computer finds, to determine if you want to delete the word.

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

Based on last month's editing tip regarding when to use "bad" and when to use "badly," Mary Ellen Gavin wrote the following:

You are such a bright light for those who often tuck certain issues in a dark corner to save face in their speech and writing. One of my tucked-away expressions is BAD. I came from Chicago, where BAD was a popular expression. While probably overused, when the word BAD was in a sentence, everyone understood how truly BAD whatever was being mentioned was. When I moved to the East Coast, my usage of the word BAD was always corrected to BADLY with an understanding wink that I no doubt used the word improperly because of my Chicago style of speech. I have avoided both BAD and BADLY, as if I could catch the plague from writing or speaking the words. When I spot either one in a manuscript, I prompt the writer to find better descriptive words; therefore, I loved your explanation of the differences. Thank you.

I responded:

I also felt bad when I saw Cyndi Lauper on *Celebrity Apprentice* tell Donald Trump that she felt bad about something. Trump incorrectly said, "Badly. You felt badly." Lauper apologized, yet in actuality, she was right and sorry, but the Donald was bad wrong.

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WHAT TYPE OF WRITER ARE YOU?

Take the quiz on Reedsy.com to decide whether self-publishing or traditional publishing is the right path for you. See <http://tinyurl.com/j54cppd>.

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HOW TO PERFORM MARKET RESEARCH FOR YOUR BOOK

How can you estimate the market for your book? What key elements will help you craft a potential bestseller? What tips will help you market your book? See <http://blog.bookbaby.com/2016/11/how-to-do-market-research-for-your-book/>

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CMOS ONLINE Q & A

This month's Chicago Manual of Style Online answers the following question:

Should there be a comma after Perhaps in the following sentence? "Perhaps I would never have had the opportunity for an education."

Read the answer to this question and many more questions and answers at <http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/qanda/latest.html>

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WRITE IN STYLE

WRITE IN STYLE: How to Use Your Computer to Improve Your Writing: The second edition, has won four awards; the first edition won three awards. The book has won seven awards in total, and readers are praising it on Amazon. Copies are selling fast on Amazon, but to be truthful, I make a little more per book if you order it through my publisher, rather than through Amazon. To order go to <http://tinyurl.com/zeq6z5g>.

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FIVE: CONTESTS, AGENTS, AND MARKETS

Call for Entries: 2017 Next Generation Indie Book Awards

The Next Generation Indie Book Awards is the largest not-for-profit book awards program open to independent publishers and authors worldwide who have a book written in English that was released in 2015, 2016, or 2017 or with a 2015, 2016, or 2017 copyright date. Enter online at: [www.IndieBookAwards.com](http://www.IndieBookAwards.com)

Entry Guidelines available at: <http://www.indiebookawards.com/enter/guidelines>

Entry Deadline for the 2017 awards program - February 17, 2017.

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Blue River Press released its first book in the spring of 2004. Today we have more than one hundred books and eBooks in print on the subjects of sports, health, fitness, education, games, popular culture, travel, and more. Our books have been recognized with awards and national and regional review attention. Our distributor, Cardinal Publishers Group, has placed our books in chain and independent book retailers, libraries of all sorts, mass-merchant retailers, gift shops, and many specialty retail and wholesale channels.

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The mission of our press is to publish work that disturbs and enraptures. While we've been very fortunate in our successes in LGBTIQ publishing, we are an inclusive publishing house and welcome all authors, artists, and readers regardless of sexual orientation or identity. We publish work we love. Merit trumps category.

Our open submission period for full-length poetry manuscripts, chapbooks, and pretty much anything you want to throw at us runs each year from March 1 - June 1. Manuscripts to be published are announced by December. Added bonus: As the Library of Congress has acquired all SRP books, the selected title(s) will reside among history's greatest writers—in perpetuity—in the Rare Book and Special Collections vault in the world's biggest library.

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### SIX: GOT MUSE? I Have a Feeling

Novelists and creative nonfiction writers often hear the adage "Show, rather than tell," yet when writers describe characters' emotions, opinions, and thoughts, they often slip into narrative that tells, rather than shows. Dialogue and action show, while narrative often tells, but action scenes include narrative. How, then, can writers know when they are telling, rather than showing?

Verb choice often reveals narrative that tells, rather than shows. Every time any form of the verb "to be" appears, chances are the narrative tells, rather than shows. For example, the following sentence tells: Harry was nervous. To show, rather than tell readers that Harry was nervous, a strong writer would recast the sentence into a visual scene. Consider this simple recast: Harry's hands shook when he reached for the doorknob. The rewrite shows readers that Harry was nervous, rather than telling them. It gives readers something visual to imagine.

Often characters' feelings represent the most difficult things to show, rather than tell, but strong writers find ways to show feelings through characters' actions and dialogue.

For this exercise I list emotions that characters might exhibit. Choose one or more to write into a scene or a sentence that shows, rather than tells what a character is feeling.

- Lonesome
- Sad
- Elated
- Jealous
- Depressed (also note the difference between sadness, which comes and goes, and clinical depression, which does not lift)
- Serious
- Playful
- Furious

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Deadline: The 15th of each month.

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