

The Writers Network News, February 2017

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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 notices of local (but sporadic) meetings today! Send your name and e-mail address to [Bobbie@zebraeditor.com](mailto:Bobbie@zebraeditor.com).

Urgent! I'm in the throes of planning a meeting for February or March, so be sure to sign up for notices today.

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CHANGING YOUR E-MAIL ADDRESS? HOW TO REMAIN A SUBSCRIBER

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. Go to www.zebraeditor.com, click on the yellow box, and sign up with your new address.

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Some links in this newsletter are shortened with help from [www.tinyurl.com](http://www.tinyurl.com), a free service that converts long links to short ones.

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Writer's Quote of the Month

"As I sit at my computer ... I think of myself as sitting around the campfire after a day on the trail, telling stories that I hope will have the members of the audience, or the readers, leaning forward just a bit, wanting to know what happens next." ~Stephen E. Ambrose

Stephen Edward Ambrose (January 10, 1936 – October 13, 2002) was an American historian and biographer of presidents Dwight D. Eisenhower and Richard Nixon. He was a longtime professor of history at the University of New Orleans and the author of many best-selling volumes of American popular history.

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One: From the editor's desk: MY CUSTOMER-SERVICE RANT

Dear Fellow Writers:

I am infuriated with AT&T, and not because my cell phone service is bad. I simply wanted to know the end date of my contract. I hoped to change to a cheaper service, but first I needed to know where I stood with my contract.

First I dialed 611, as my bill said I could do, to manage my account. Next thing I knew I got a text message congratulating me and saying I am eligible for an upgrade and to press some button to get an upgrade. I wanted to downgrade, not upgrade. I rarely use much data, for which providers scare people into thinking is going to cost a fortune if they go over their maximum.

After I dialed 611 and received the worthless text, I got stuck in a "if you want this, press that" scenario, where I was pressing buttons galore and getting nowhere, until finally I was given the option to speak to an operator. I punched the zero while feeling my anger rise, and Antonio answered.

Antonio spoke so quickly I could barely understand him, even though he spoke without an accent. He had apparently memorized all his required dialogue and blurted seven- or eight-word sentences in a way that blended into two or three words. I could not comprehend his gobbledygook, so I asked him to slow down. Finally he blurted at Mach speed, "Isent youa text. Read itta me." I had to ask him to repeat himself at least twice before I understood the sentence, but I then found his text message and read a bunch of numbers to him.

Next he said, "Now you have to set a blixrt. What'dya wannit to be?"

"A blixrt? What did you say?"

"You have to set a blixrt before I can access your account."

"A blixrt?"

"Right, a blixrt. What'dya wannit to be?"

"I don't know what you are asking."

To shorten a long story, I learned that he wanted me to set a passcode so he could access my account. I told him I did not want to set a passcode; I already have too many passcodes. I simply wanted to know the end date of my contract.

He demanded that he could not look at my account unless I set a passcode. I told him to give me someone who could, and he insisted he could do it quicker, if I would give him a passcode. Like broken records, he and I repeated our messages back and forth three or four times. He would not relent. My voice rose, adrenaline surging into my system. I rarely get angry, and even rarer do I raise my voice unless I am at the end of my patience, and I was. I commanded, "Give me a supervisor!"

He said to hold on.

I sat on hold so long that I did what he probably wanted. I hung up. I did not give up, though. I called a different number, a landline number for AT&T also listed on my bill. Again I went through a series of button pushing and then was put on hold until Savannah answered. Thank heavens she spoke at conversational speed. I took a deep breath and explained what I wanted and that I did not want to set a passcode. Without a passcode or even a blixrt, she accessed my account, gave me the information I needed, and even changed my account so that I will save about \$15 a month and still get all the service I need.

When I hung up I was still shaking. To get something so simple done, why did it take me two calls, a half an hour of my time, an overdose of adrenaline, and being left feeling irritable? Was our exchange what is called customer service?

I could go on with my other bad customer-service experiences with other businesses from the past few months, but I'll refrain. You can probably add several of your own. When will businesses catch on and provide customer service that actually serves customers?

Thank you for letting me vent. Like you, I am a writer. I can write to vent, let go of my irritability, and move on with important things, such as sending out this newsletter to my faithful followers.

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

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.

Two: Ask the Book Doctor about Being the Expert and Abbreviating Cousin

By Bobbie Christmas

Q: A friend read my nonfiction manuscript and said it lacks conviction, as if I'm not an expert on my subject matter. I have advanced degrees that prove I'm an expert on the subject of my book. What might she mean?

A: First let me say that one opinion should not shatter your dream. We editors know the old adage, "Ten editors, ten opinions." Nevertheless, if you think the comment has merit, I have some suggestions that will help. Note that my recommendations do not apply to textbooks and academic books, which have restrictions, but to how-to books and other less formal nonfiction.

How can authors set themselves up as the expert on a particular subject? Here are some tips.

Be the authority. Instead of adding quotes from other sources, write the information as your own. I don't mean to plagiarize, but instead make the information something you know for a fact.

Instead of writing something like this: A 2015 Harvard Business School study proved that . . .  
Write this: Studies show that . . .

Avoid words such as "somewhat" or "rather," which weaken the author's position on a subject and choose strong verbs that strengthen your position.

Instead of writing this: The results were somewhat interesting.  
Write this: The results amazed researchers.

Write tight and spurn meek phrases such as "I think," "I believe," or "I feel." Instead state things as fact. Be strong in your conviction.

Instead of this: I believe the best way to write well is to use a good editor.  
Write this: Strong writers employ good editors.

Pay attention to chapter titles. Make them exciting, playful, powerful, or intriguing. As a result, the table of contents will lure readers in. For example, in my book, *Write In Style*, I could have used the label *Infinitives* for the chapter that covers infinitives and other formations that weaken sentences. Instead I playfully titled the chapter *To Infinitives and Beyond*.

Avoid adding footnotes and endnotes. Readers can grow lazy or tired from jumping back and forth to read the information in footnotes and endnotes. Instead of footnotes and endnotes, find ways to consolidate vital information into the body of the book. Save endnotes for a bibliography in the back, if desired or required.

These tips are just the beginning, but they give you a few good ways to add conviction and authority to a book.

Q: I've seen the word "cousin" abbreviated as "coz," "cuz," and "cos." What's the right abbreviation?

A: The problem is that common use can make words, and even abbreviations, acceptable to the masses. In addition, not all dictionaries agree on or even list all abbreviations. Instead of arguing the point, I prefer to refer to one dictionary, Merriam-Webster, the one recommended by the University of Chicago Press, producer of The Chicago Manual of Style. Merriam-Webster lists "coz" as the accepted abbreviation for "cousin." It lists "cos" as an acceptable abbreviation for "companies," "consul," "consulship," "cosine," and "counties." You can see why The Chicago Manual of Style recommends avoiding abbreviations whenever possible. FYI, the Scrabble dictionary accepts "cuz" as an abbreviation for "cousin." No wonder we're all confused. I've probably been guilty of using "cuz" in e-mails and on Facebook, myself, but I will use "coz" from now on. I wonder how many people will know what I'm talking about, though, when we're so accustomed to seeing "cuz."

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: That/Who

"That" refers to an object or time. What kind of soup is that? After that, he became a recluse. Do not use "that" to refer to a person.

"Who" refers to a person. She was the doctor who treated me.

In addition to using "that" and "who" correctly, be careful not to overuse "that." The word can become repetitious and often can be eliminated for tighter writing. Loose writing: I told her that I'd meet her at noon. Tighter: I told her I'd meet her at noon. Loose: The reason that I didn't go was that I was sick. Tighter: I didn't go because I was sick.

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 use of "that," to see if it refers to a person or a thing and to determine if the word is even necessary. To find "that" in your file using Microsoft Word or Pages, use the Find function (Ctrl + F on a PC or Command + F on a Mac) and search for each use of "that" in your manuscript. In this way you will be able to determine whether you used the correct word choice or can eliminate some uses of "that."

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

WHAT'S THAT WORD?

Don't you hate it when you are seeking a specific word and know the definition, but can't think of the word? Sometimes using a thesaurus helps, but there's also a reverse dictionary available online. You can use the definition to look up a word at <http://onelook.com/reverse-dictionary.shtml>.

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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.

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Order PURGE YOUR PROSE OF PROBLEMS today at <http://tinyurl.com/4ptjnr>.

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HOW TO WRITE A GREAT AUTHOR BIO

The information may surprise you, but it could mean the difference between a good sales tool and a weak one. Read here: <http://tinyurl.com/hacw6bv>.

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NPR LISTS BEST BOOKS IN 2016

I trust National Public Radio, and NPR.org has revealed its picks for the best books published in 2016. To read about them, click here: <http://apps.npr.org/best-books-2016/>.

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SALE PRICED! 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. E-book: \$8.95. Paperback is usually \$14.95 plus \$4.99 S & H (total: \$19.94 US), but read on. To pay the full price or to order the e-book, go to <http://tinyurl.com/lexp7n>.

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IS IT OKAY TO QUOTE A LINE OF SONG LYRICS?

I have edited books that used a line or two of lyrics from a popular song. Perhaps writers think it is okay to quote only a few words, but if a song is not in public domain (written before the 1920s), the copyright owner can sue. Yes, a few words from a song can set a mood or create motivation. For example, a couple could dance to a song that becomes their song, or a character could be inspired by some lyrics. I warn clients that quoting lyrics can be costly, though. You may have to pay the copyright owner or risk get sued by the copyright owner if you don't pay. This blog says more about staying within the law. <http://tinyurl.com/hw7gjq>.

If you want to quote lyrics in a song and need to know who owns the copyright, a good place to start looking is here: <http://www.copyright.com/>.

On the bright side, titles of songs cannot be copyrighted, so it's okay to name the title of a song and let readers remember the lyrics on their own.

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Become my friend on Facebook

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

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News, information, immediate updates, and other things writers can put to use. Like Zebra Communications at <http://tinyurl.com/7vcxaxu>.

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CMOS ONLINE Q & A

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

Can CMOS weigh in on the pluralization of trademarked materials? We have an internal debate over "iPhone 7s" versus "iPhones 7."

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

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WRITE IN STYLE: How to Use Your Computer to Improve Your Writing

WRITE IN STYLE has won seven big awards for helping writers. Copies are selling fast on Amazon, but I make a little more per book if you order it through my publisher, so please order it here: <http://tinyurl.com/zeq6z5g>.

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Five: Contests, Agents, and Markets

ROYAL PALM LITERARY AWARDS

The Florida Writers Association will start accepting entries to its prestigious Royal Palm Literary Awards beginning February 15. The competition is open only to members of FWA, but membership is inexpensive and includes many benefits. For more information and to enter the Royal Palm Literary Awards, see <http://tinyurl.com/gtt5ues>.

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INDIES BOOK OF THE YEAR AWARDS

The Foreword INDIES Book of the Year Awards recognize the best independently published books. Along with two cash prizes, the Foreword INDIES are a way for us to highlight deserving books in over 60 categories to our audience of librarians, booksellers, industry professionals, and book lovers. For more information and to enter your independently published book, see <http://tinyurl.com/hbhk2um>.

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In 1215, the Magna Carta was signed underneath the ancient Ankerwycke Yew tree, starting the process that led to rule by constitutional law - in effect, giving rights and the law to the people. Today, the ABA's Ankerwycke line of books continues to bring the law to the people. With legal fiction, true crime books, popular legal histories, public policy handbooks, and prescriptive guides to current legal and business issues, Ankerwycke is a contemporary and innovative line of books for everyone from a trusted and vested authority.

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NEXT GENERATION INDIE BOOK AWARDS

Calling all indie book authors and publishers, including small presses, mid-size independent publishers, university presses, e-book publishers, and self-published authors who have a book written in English released in 2015, 2016, or 2017 with a 2015, 2016, or 2017 copyright date to enter the most rewarding book awards program. For more information and to enter, see <http://www.indiebookawards.com/>.

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Before submitting, read entire guidelines at <http://www.crestonbooks.co/submissions>.

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"If your text has misspellings and grammatical errors, it shows a lack of professionalism and carefulness. An editor will stop reading at the first mistake, as will any reviewer, teacher, or librarian."

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Six: Got Muse? No Bullying!

"Though boys throw stones at frogs in sport, the frogs die not in sport, but in earnest." ~Bion of Borysthenes, philosopher (c. 325 - 250 BCE)

A big theme running through schools and social media these days is bullying and shaming. Many of us experienced bullying in some form when we were young, although if you're reading this exercise, you managed to survive it. Such is not always the case with young people, though. Today we hear of many a young person committing suicide, thinking death is the only solution to the problem. What a shame!

For this exercise write a scene, short story, or essay that incorporates bullying in some form. Show what the bullies do and perhaps show their motivations. In a separate scene, show what the victims think, feel, and do in response to the bullying. This subject is a sensitive one. Ideally bullies should suffer some consequences of their acts, which unfortunately may not always be the case in real life.

Conflict creates strong fiction, and bullying creates a great deal of conflict, both physically and emotionally. If you write fiction or nonfiction, scenes that reveal bullying may be strong enough to result in the basis for a short story, young adult novel, biography, or autobiography.

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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 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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