

The Writers Network News, April 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). Our meeting in March was very interesting, with in-depth writing issues addressed and discussed.

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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

"I love writing. I love the swirl and swing of words as they tangle with human emotions."
--James Michener

James Albert Michener, who passed away in 1997, wrote more than forty books, mostly fiction. His novels usually covered generations of family sagas in specific geographic locations and included well-researched history. His book *Tales of the South Pacific* won the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in 1948, but my favorite of his books was *HAWAII*, which gave me deep insight into Hawaiian history and culture.

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One: From the editor's desk: Organizing and Clearing Out

Dear Fellow Writers:

Today I finally got frustrated that things kept sliding off my credenza because of a large pile of paper there. I went through the pile and found many interesting things. I found a few copies of e-mails from 2014, one from a magazine hoping I would send it (free) articles. I went online to see if the magazine still existed. It didn't. Another old e-mail had copious suggestions from a company that wanted to redesign my website. Instead I had my own webmaster update my website, so I don't know why I still had that e-mail. In other words, I found pages and pages of notes that covered items and issues I no longer have any interest in. In addition, though, I found an outline for a book idea I've never gotten much further with. In general I could recycle almost the entire pile, with the exception of the proposed book, yet that paper pile had been sitting, yellowing in a corner for more than two years. What a relief to clear out all that old stuff!

Years ago I read an article that revealed that people have many ways of organizing (or not), but if you can find what you're looking for within five minutes, your method of organizing works. I always hated filing. When I was twenty, I worked in an office where one of my jobs was to file copies of the correspondence. Instead of filing it immediately, I stacked the copies in a box in my desk drawer. When someone wanted a copy of a letter, I went into the box and quickly found it chronologically. No one else knew the copy had not been in a file, but in a box in my drawer. Unfortunately when I left, that box still held months of filing that I should have done.

After reading that article about how people organize differently, though, I realized that I organize in piles, and it works for me. I have four piles on my work desk, in addition to the now-missing pile that had been on my credenza. On the far right corner of my desk a pile contains

blank notepads, a book I plan to read, and a book from a tour company. That's my "casual" pile, things I don't have to do much with. After a while, that pile may be transferred to my credenza, which is probably how that old pile got there. In front of the pile on my far right, I pile my medical bills and health-insurance reports until those issues are straightened out, because they often take months to resolve. I recently moved the 2016 pile into a real file in a real file cabinet, and I'm starting my 2017 health pile now that I have a new insurance company.

The pile of papers on my left, closest to me, is my "immediate" pile. There I stack the bills I need to pay, items I might want to add to this newsletter, appointment information, projects in progress, and, if I dig through, my application to renew my passport, which I have to do this year.

My final pile is a haphazard sort of junk pile of pictures I've scanned, a cable for my iPhone in case I want to download something to my computer from my iPhone, and a visor I wear when the early morning sun comes directly in my window and makes it hard for me to see my computer monitor. I also have a telephone message pad, which I hardly ever use, a few bulldog clips, an old magazine, and other unimportant items. I need to tackle that pile next.

As I write this, spring is just beginning. Maybe I am spring cleaning without realizing it, but I'm happy that according to the experts, I am organized, even in my chaos. My desk looks like a mess to neat freaks, but it works for me. Even so, clearing out feels good when I reduce the chaos now and then.

How do you organize?

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.

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Two: Ask the Book Doctor about Starting Out, Crediting Sources, and Spelling Coworker

By Bobbie Christmas

Q: I have considered starting a book for a long time and I have come up with ideas on the plot, the development of characters, and so on, but when I get down to writing it down on a the page, it ends up uninteresting. I can't get the suspense or the dialogue right. I can't get the story to come to life. Can you help me get my story to come to life yourself, or can you send me some links that will help me in this area?

A: Congratulations on creating a good plot and planning the character development! Idea creation is one area where many beginning writers fail, and you're past that point. Way to go!

First let's discuss the plot, to ensure it is a strong one. Does it involve a character strongly wanting something and then striving to get it? What obstacles or people make it harder for the character to obtain whatever it is that he or she wants? Most good plots have this struggle as the general basis. For example, in *The Wizard of Oz*, Dorothy wanted a better, more colorful life than what she was living, but after attaining what she thought she wanted, she realized she had everything she wanted back home, and then she had to overcome many obstacles to get back home.

As for how to write ideas so the book is interesting, how to write natural dialogue, and how to make a story come to life (how to show it, rather than tell it), all those things take practice. You must simply start, write, and practice, with feedback from knowledgeable people.

I recommend taking a course in creative writing, and be sure to sign up for a course that gives you feedback each time you turn in an assignment. As you practice, practice, practice and get feedback, feedback, feedback, your skills will improve.

Look for courses at art centers or centers for continuing education. Don't simply take a one-day seminar. Take a six-week or eight-week course that gives assignments and gives you feedback on areas that could use improvement. When that course is over, take another and another, even taking the same course again, if necessary, until your skills are at the highest level possible.

While you take courses, join a critique circle of accomplished writers specializing in the genre of your book. You'll get free, valuable feedback from members of your critique circle, and you'll learn even more when you critique the work of others, as well.

Writers don't simply sit down and write a blockbuster novel on their first attempt. They take years to hone their skills. Skiers, skaters, hockey players, basketball players, even competitive dancers did not start out being great at what they do. They practiced long and hard first. I am pleased that you are willing to do the same with writing, which is why you asked what you can do to improve your skills. You're already on the right track by asking.

Go for it! Practice, practice, practice, and enjoy the journey.

Q: I'm writing a novel, but it is set in a real era and a real city. I am using a real quote from a newspaper during that era. Do I have to footnote it to attribute it to the right source?

A: Although you should give credit to the source, footnotes do not have a place in fiction. Instead, name the periodical and note the date of the article in the text. Here's an imaginary example:

John opened the October 16, 2006, *Pickle Times* and read, "Heinz, known for its many varieties of pickles and other food products, plans to release its newest product, an avocado pickle, in December."

Q: I am checking the proofs of my latest book and need a definitive answer on the spelling of a word. My sources give me conflicting answers. Coworker or co-worker? Which spelling is correct?

A: Dictionaries differ in their answers, but most book publishers use Merriam-Webster as their final source. According to M-W, the proper spelling is coworker, with no hyphen.

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: Repetition

I just finished editing a book of short stories that were clever, but the writing itself grew tedious and boring. Why? Because countless sentences had a similar structure, and some words were repeated far too many times. With some changes to protect the client's anonymity, here are the types of sentences I kept seeing:

As an autumn breeze meandered across the campus, she walked forward as her blond hair floated across her face. (In the 38,000-word manuscript, the word "as" appeared 965 times.)

Shifting her weight from one foot to the other, she glanced across campus, watching him sauntering along. Standing just inside the doorway, letting her eyes adjust to the limited light inside, she caught sight of something near the corner of the building. (1,660 words in the 38,000-word manuscript ended with "ing")

In my editing, I see those two duplications ("as" and "ing" words) most of all. Sometimes only another person can catch such repetition in our work, but you can use my Find and Refine Method to check for these common repetitions yourself. In this case you will search your manuscript for "as" in the Find function of your computer. If you hit the spacebar after typing the word, you won't have to deal with words that have "as" in the middle. After you've checked to see how many times you've used the word, you can go through and find ways to reduce the usage and recast sentences to avoid using "as." No, you cannot eliminate every usage, but you don't want a high percentage of words to be the same.

Next you can type in "ing" and a space and recast many of those sentences, as well. Often beginning a sentence with an "ing" word results in a dangling modifier, as well, and I've covered that subject before. For now pay particular attention when starting a sentence with an "ing" word.

This lesson teaches you how to use the Find and Replace function to catch opportunities to write stronger, more stylish 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

#### NEWS FROM MEMBERS

Member Robert Gilbert has been busy. Here's his latest report: "Keeping you updated with my western short-story writings, 'Run with the Outlaws' was published in the December 2016 online issue of Frontier Tales. Also, in the February 2017 online issue of Frontier Tales was my next western, 'Squire Canyon.' These are my fourth and fifth westerns published by Frontier Tales."

Member Rachel Fischer has been published in Poets & Writers. She wrote, "I edited an earlier version of this blog. Though not perfect, it is so much better than it was the first time I read it. It's not every day that something I touch gets published by a mainstream magazine!" See the article at [https://www.pw.org/content/bittersweet\\_the\\_immigrant\\_stories](https://www.pw.org/content/bittersweet_the_immigrant_stories)

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FREE PODCAST WITH BOBBIE CHRISTMAS

I'll be participating in a podcast for Grandma's Genes and WikiTree, and you're invited to attend. You'll get tips on writing family history and much more. It's certainly worth the price! (Free!)

April 1, 2017 - 3:00 P.M. EDT: WATCH LIVE - The Profile Improvement Project with Bob Kenniston and Book Doctor Bobbie Christmas. We will chat about the project and some of the nuts and bolts of profile improvement on WikiTree, and then we will throw in a bit of professional writing help from the Book Doctor herself, award-winning writer and editor Bobbie Christmas. See <http://tinyurl.com/kodenqn>

If you miss the live podcast, you can watch it later at a time that works for you.

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#### MEMOIR MISTAKES

Here's an excellent article on mistakes some writers of memoirs make. See <http://tinyurl.com/kqg6ana>

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NOW ACCEPTING PAGES FILES FROM MAC COMPUTERS

For many years I accepted printed manuscripts for hard-copy editing but only Word files for electronic-file or hybrid editing. I am now able to accept files in the Mac program called Pages. As always, clients have three choices: electronic-file editing (line editing of the file using Track Changes), hybrid editing (line editing of the file using Track Changes plus a detailed report on all suggested changes, creative writing tips, and more), or hard-copy editing (line editing of the printed manuscript plus a detailed report on all suggested changes, creative writing tips, and more).

I'm in the process of changing my website to indicate that I can accept files in Pages, too, but if you see a message that says I accept only Word files, ignore it, and let's get your Mac-based or PC-based manuscript edited and ready for publication together. (www.zebraeditor.com)

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#### NEW YORK TIMES ARTICLE: MISSING COMMA COSTS MILLIONS

Note that Chicago style, preferred by book publishers, advocates using the serial (or Oxford) comma to avoid confusion. As an update to the following article the appeals court ruled in favor of the five delivery drivers, citing the "remedial purpose" of the state's overtime laws as reason to interpret them liberally. See Lack of Oxford Comma Could Cost Maine Company Millions in Overtime Dispute at <http://tinyurl.com/k4fcsjd>

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AMERICAN BOOK REVIEW LISTS BEST 100 FIRST LINES

What makes a good opening line to a novel? See the first lines from some of the best-known novels here: <http://americanbookreview.org/100bestlines.asp>.

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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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FREE Publishing Children's Books Workshop
Saturday, April 22, 2017
2:30 - 3:30
East Roswell Branch Library
2301 Holcomb Bridge Road
Roswell, GA 30076

This workshop covers the basics of publishing a children's book. We'll walk you through the obstacles of publishing a children's book. We will also discuss finding an illustrator and the illustration process. Presented by BookLogix. Registration is required.
E-mail: comments@co.fulton.ga.us
Phone: 404-613-4050

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BOBBIE'S BLOGS

Neurotica: Stories of Love, Lust, and Letting Go—If you like relationship stories, I've got a ton of them. Some are funny, some a little sexy, and all true. I reveal some of my stories at <http://neuroticastories.blogspot.com/>.

In my Write In Style blog, you'll find more tips on creative writing and other subjects. For my latest blog on people who inspired me to become a writer, see <http://bobbiechristmas.blogspot.com/>

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PRINT BOOK SALES ON UPSWING

This month Nielsen released 2016 figures that indicate that print book sales are up in Ireland, the UK, and the US, but down in Australia, Italy, South Africa, and Spain. See <http://tinyurl.com/kr6gxoz> for the full article.

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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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CMOS ONLINE Q & A

THE CHICAGO MANUAL OF STYLE standardizes the style that book publishers use. It dictates such things and where commas go, when and what to capitalize, when and how to abbreviate words, when to spell out numbers and when to use numerals, and much more. If you write books, you will want to know more about Chicago style or be sure to use an editor intimately familiar with Chicago style. This month's Chicago Manual of Style Online answers the following question: Is there a correct way to write a range of only two numbers in a complete sentence?

Read the 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 please order it here, directly from the publisher: <http://tinyurl.com/zeq6z5g>.

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Five: Contests, Agents, and Markets

50 BLOGS THAT PAY WRITERS

Freedom with Writing lists many paid writing opportunities, including fifty blogs that pay writers. See <http://tinyurl.com/llfnuzf>

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WRITER'S DIGEST SELF-PUBLISHED BOOK AWARDS

Writer's Digest Self-Published Book Awards  
10151 Carver Road  
Suite 200  
Blue Ash, Ohio 45252

Open to all English-language self-published books for which the authors have paid the full cost of publication, or the cost of printing has been paid for by a grant or as a part of a prize. Must submit a printed and bound book. Entry fees include an early bird deadline of April 3 with a judging fee of \$99 for the first entry. After April 3 the fee goes to \$110. Entrants get an evaluation of the book along with recommendations. Must be postmarked by May 1. Grand prize \$8,000, a feature article in Writer's Digest, and more. Eight first-place winners get \$1,000 and promotion in Writer's Digest. For other prizes and full details see <http://tinyurl.com/ojr7a4j>.

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FLASH ESSAY COMPETITION

Sweet is thrilled to announce its first annual Flash Essay Contest. Broadly speaking, we appreciate a close attention to language and a quirky sense of humor, and you can always read published essays in previous Sweet issues on our website. We look forward to reading your work! Submissions open until June 25, 2017 See <https://sweetlit.wordpress.com/> for details.

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SEEKING PERSONAL EXPERIENCE ESSAYS

Cosmopolitan.com is building a network of talented and eager contributors. We want you to participate!

Send us an essay of no more than 800 words about a memorable, crazy, hilarious, or touching college experience. Stories about friends, class, dating, partying, studying, working, interning—anything that happened to you or around you in college is fair game. (Or: Tell us why you didn't go to college, why college is bullsh\*t, what you're doing instead...)

If we publish your essay on Cosmopolitan.com, we'll pay you \$100 and hit you up for future assignments. <http://tinyurl.com/lbqz9z8>  
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Six: Got Muse? Create a Naïve Character

"Those who are incapable of committing great crimes do not readily suspect them in others." ~Francois de La Rochefoucauld

Most of us know people who don't trust others, but do you know a naïve person who gets scammed, abused, or used by flimflam operators, the opposite sex, scammers, or even friends? For this exercise, create an innocent character, one who trusts anyone because he or she is trusting and trustworthy. Create a circumstance or story that involves the character while showing, rather than telling, the character's attributes and vulnerabilities.

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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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