

The Writers Network News, January 2019

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

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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

"Substitute 'damn' every time you're inclined to write 'very'; your editor will delete it, and the writing will be as it should be." —Mark Twain

Samuel Langhorne Clemens (November 30, 1835 – April 21, 1910), better known by his pen name Mark Twain, was an American writer, humorist, entrepreneur, publisher, and lecturer.

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ONE: FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK: THE SPIRIT OF CHRISTMAS

Dear Fellow Writers:

As I write this, Christmas is only hours away. I've almost exhausted myself preparing for my annual family gathering. It seems only right to celebrate Christmas Day at the Christmas house.

The drawback is that I live alone, which means I am the one who does the inviting, shopping, decorating, and setting up. I alone have to move the furniture around to create a buffet table and then bring in all the chairs to accommodate a roomful of guests. I have to clean off the driveway and porch, and believe me, the task is no easy one, with the heavy fall of leaves and pine needles, the rain having made everything stick, and a driveway that is long, steep, and slippery. I'm the one who cooks most of the food, although my guests do bring one dish per family too, I am thankful to say.

Before the party begins I often feel depleted, but as soon as my family members and friends start filling my living room, all the preparation is forgotten and my heart warms with joy. That, my friends, is the Christmas spirit, and it's the thing I love most about the holidays.

My sister recently posted a cartoon on Facebook that showed a theater full of seats. In the hundreds of available seats sat only two people. The banner above read "Adult Children of Normal Parents Annual Convention." I laughed, but the truth is that my siblings and I would not have attended that convention. We had a fabulous father with only a few flaws, but we cannot say the same for our mother. Without going into detail, I can say that the five of the six siblings still living are close-knit, loving, and successful, despite our challenging childhood.

Christmas is a time to celebrate the things we've overcome in life and enjoy the abundance of love and provisions that flow into our lives. I agree with all who believe that Christmas should be a spiritual experience. What could be more spiritual than the gathering of family and friends and the sharing of love and food?

I hope you all had a wonderful holiday season. I look forward to hearing of all your accomplishments in 2019. Happy New Year!

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

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## TWO: ASK THE BOOK DOCTOR

### FROM FARSI TO ENGLISH and PASSIVE VOICE

By Book Doctor Bobbie Christmas

Q: I have recently written a novel in Farsi and I have translated the first seventeen pages of it to English. Even though the story line has been of interest to some publishers and agents in US and UK, I could not get them to commit. I am willing to rewrite it, and I would like to know what I should address to interest publishers in America.

A: It's been my experience that people translating from Farsi use quite a few gerunds (words ending in -ing), but contemporary American publishers prefer authors to avoid them, because they not only get repetitious and wordy, but they also rely on passive verbs (forms of "to be") instead of active verbs. For example, instead of "She was planning a trip to Florida," publishers might prefer "She planned a trip to Florida." Instead of "They were dancing in the street," strong writers would choose "They danced in the street."

Also, those who learn Farsi first sometimes then learn British English, which is more elevated than American English. American publishers often expect the writing to be on about a sixth- or seventh-grade reading level, rather than higher, as British English tends to be. I would avoid using British terms, too, such as amidst, amongst, whilst, and towards, when in America we use amid, among, while, and toward. These things are minor in comparison to the story, though, and American publishers want a compelling story peopled with interesting characters. Americans want plenty of plot-related action and dialogue and a satisfying ending, even though it doesn't have to be a happy one. Contemporary publishers rarely purchase literary writing—which tends to have long, flowery descriptions and such—and prefer tight, active, writing.

Q: I spent time reviewing one of your books on writing. One place said that a writer reported that an agent read only his first page at a conference, gave it back, and said it was too passive (telling, not showing). The writer said the action started later, but the agent didn't get that far.

My novel starts with two passive sentences before the story becomes active. These two sentences contain the verbs could, were, and had. I loved my opening until I read your article, and now I question it. It's written below. The suggested change uses active verbs dropped and jaunted. Is the easy tempo of the original text strong enough to use as an opening sentence, or should I lean toward the turmoil of the second version?

The text at the end of paragraph two is passive exposition but is engulfed in a sea of action. It's there because I can't find a better way to express this thought. Let me know what you think.

[Author Paul BuBose granted permission to use the actual text below.]

Original Opening Sentence:

Tammy Martin could not resist the temptation to run down to the beach after school, even for a short escape. San Juan and the Academy were miles from her thoughts; pent up energy had to be released.

Revised Opening Sentence:

Filled with pent-up frustrations after six and a half hours of tolerating the stupid sisters at the Academy of Holy Names in San Juan, Tammy Martin dropped her books on the front porch and jaunted toward the ocean two blocks away.

Passive Exposition:

The irresistible beach had a tropical similarity to the Philippines, but that was too long ago to remember. She had lived in four other places around the world since then, the last in Northern France.

A: I definitely like the revised opening sentence much better.

Most of the portion labeled Passive Exposition works okay, because it is brief. It uses that to refer to a concept, however, which I advise against. It could be revised to be more active than passive, too, perhaps this way: She found the beach irresistible and similar to the Philippines, where she had lived before . . .

A short spurt of passive writing here and there that constitutes a small percentage of the manuscript will not detract from the overall pace, as a rule. We writers cannot and do not have to completely avoid using passive voice.

While we're on that section, though, the scene is in Tammy's point of view, so it should not tell what she cannot remember. With all this information in mind, then, consider revising the sentence labeled Passive Exposition this way: She found the beach irresistible and similar to the Philippines, but she had lived in four other places around the world since then, the last in Northern France.

Bobbie Christmas, book editor, author of WRITE IN STYLE: USE YOUR COMPUTER TO IMPROVE YOUR WRITING, and owner of Zebra Communications, will answer your questions, too. Send them to Bobbie@zebraeditor.com. Read more "Ask the Book Doctor" questions and answers at <https://www.zebraeditor.com/>.

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>.

Bobbie Christmas's award-winning second edition of WRITE IN STYLE: How to Use Your Computer to Improve Your Writing is available from Amazon at <https://tinyurl.com/y7ppcdkd> or buy it directly from me at <https://tinyurl.com/y7p9xkbb>.

### THREE: SUBJECTS OF INTEREST TO WRITERS

#### MEMBERS WRITE...

In response to last month's blurb about whether writers should write from the perspective of the opposite sex, Steve Moore wrote "I've always said that men who are uncomfortable with female characters should be careful, and vice versa. However, I'm a man, and, modesty aside, I have many good female characters. I think those men who have had the luck of knowing strong, intelligent, and interesting women should have no problem with female characters." He says his last two books are written from the perspective of strong women. Here's what M. J. Neary's review said about one of his main characters: "The most unique feature about this novel is the female protagonist, Esther. If you are tired of female leads who look like sexy French art students or Playboy bunnies, Esther Brookstone is delightfully refreshing. . . . she is like a female version of James Bond. "

I told Steve that the biggest mistakes male writers make when writing from a female perspective is in the sex scenes when the male author assumes that women react the same as do men. "She got excited when she saw his raging erection," for example. Nope. Women get excited when they are kissed and/or caressed, but the visual is not enough to excite most women I know."

Ellen Marks responded to last month's blurb giving the (overused) Words of the Year that various dictionary compilers chose. She says the words she's tired of hearing are transparent and transparency, "especially since the people who use it tend to be opaque."

I had a most interesting email correspondence with fellow editor (and prolific author and wearer of many other hats) Cyn McGregor, who said she found the following manuslip (as I call them) in a manuscript she was editing for a publisher:

The man with the weapon's face showed his impatience.

I responded with the following:

That one is a mystery to me. Was the author trying to say the man with the weapon in his face? Did the man perhaps have a nose that looked like a gun? Sometimes it is hard to translate manuslips.

She responded that she edited it to read: The face of the man with the weapon showed his impatience.

You can see that even editors differ in their opinions. How would you have interpreted the original writing, "The man with the weapon's face showed his impatience?"

Mark Diamond, better known as Mr. D. to all the children to whom he has taught creative writing, sent a link to an interesting article in The New York Times. It begins as follows:

"This year has been, much to everyone's surprise, a blockbuster for the publishing industry. Despite the relentless news cycle, readers have bought books in droves. Hardcover sales are up, and unit sales at independent bookstores have risen 5 percent. Multiple titles — Bob Woodward's FEAR, Bill Clinton and James Patterson's THE PRESIDENT IS MISSING and Michelle Obama's BECOMING — have passed the million-copy mark, while there is also a surprisingly strong appetite for literary fiction.

"But what should be good news for publishers, agents and authors has created headaches during the crucial holiday sales season, as printing presses struggle to keep up with a surge in demand, creating a backlog that has led to stock shortages of popular titles." Read the entire article here: <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/12/23/books/paper-printers-holiday-sales-books-publishers.html>

#### MORE MANUSLIPS

In my Manuslips file I keep a list of errors I find that either tickle my fancy or prove a point about clear writing. I use quite a few manuslips in WRITE IN STYLE too.

Here's one from a manuscript I edited:

They spread a bunch of horrible tales about her, most of which were nothing but lies, pigments of their distorted imaginations. [I suppose the tales were quite colorful.]

#### TERMS WRITERS SHOULD KNOW

##### AUTHOR INTRUSION

Strong writing shuns author intrusion, which can happen when a portion of a novel is not written in the viewpoint of a character in the book.

Minor author intrusion can be a word choice that implies personal feelings, rather than using a true description.

Example: The weather was beautiful. (Beautiful is a personal opinion.)

Better: The weather was perfect for kite flying. A slight, steady breeze blew through the treetops. The sun peeked through thin clouds, imparting a warm glow to the vast green slopes of Rocky Top Park.

Sometimes a one-word intrusion occurs when an author chooses adverbs that reflect a personal opinion. Examples of minor author intrusion: Luckily, the car was unlocked. Hopefully, she would heal quickly. Better: He found the car unlocked and breathed a sigh of relief. She hoped she would heal quickly.

We also sometimes see the two-word intrusion, of course. Of course the door was locked. Delete it in narrative. The door was locked.

Sometimes thoughts not attributed to a character can sound like the author's opinion, and therefore constitute author intrusion.

Example: (author intrusion) He had better hurry; someone might catch him breaking in.

Better: (action) His hands shook, even as he tried to hurry. (thoughts) I'd better hurry, he thought. What will I do if someone catches me breaking in?

Example: (author intrusion) She shouldn't have yelled at him. Now he would be angry.

Better: (dialogue) "I'm sorry. I know I shouldn't have yelled at you. Please don't be angry." (thoughts) Why did I yell at him, she wondered. Now he's going to be angry with me.

Major author intrusion stops the action and dialogue and goes into an explanation.

Example: Junior Sol wept into his hands. He felt bad because even though he was a doctor, he couldn't do anything to save his mother.

Better: Intern Junior Sol wept into his hands. A nurse patted his back. He turned to her, almost shouting. "What good were all those years of medical school and all this training? I still feel like a little boy." He pointed to the body in the hospital bed. "I can't even help my own mother."

[The above excerpt comes from PURGE YOUR PROSE OF PROBLEMS.]

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SAVE \$\$\$ ON EDITING

The sixth edition of PURGE YOUR PROSE OF PROBLEMS answers vital questions that arise while you edit your manuscript. It settles disagreements that may arise in your critique circle, as well. Simply look up the subject alphabetically. Order the ebook or printed book here: <https://www.zebraeditor.com/bookstore/>.

Here are a few of the 700+ issues PURGE YOUR PROSE OF PROBLEMS puts to rest:

Where do the commas belong? Where do they not belong? (page 59)

What's the difference between "which" and "that?" (page 174)

What is a dangling modifier? How can you repair it? (page 66)

What is right, "towards" or "toward?" (page 180)

When should you write out a number? When should you use the numeral? (page 128)

Which is correct, T-shirt, tee shirt, or t-shirt? (page 171)

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EASY ACCESS TO BOBBIE'S BLOGS

Read creative writing tips as well as some of my personal experiences. Access the Write In Style blog here:

<https://www.zebraeditor.com/blog/>

On the other hand:

For my relationship-related blog, see my blog titled "Neurotica: Crazy Stories of Love, Lust, and Letting Go." If you like to read about disastrous dates and ridiculous relationships, I've got a ton of them, and they all happened to me. Some are funny, some are a little sexy, some are sad, and all true. <https://neuroticastories.blogspot.com>.

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ELLIPSES: SPACE BETWEEN OR NO SPACE?

The Chicago Manual of Style has the final answer. To see it in a cool way you will never forget, see . <https://tinyurl.com/y8fp76aq>.

P.S. If you're not familiar with proofreader marks, a carat meant "insert here" and a hash mark means "add a space."

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CMOS ONLINE Q & A

Someone wrote to The Chicago Manual of Style Online asking the following: In the sentence "Cane Ridge post office in Van Buren County, Tennessee, was opened in March 1866," the town name is Cane Ridge and it has a post office. Would you capitalize "Post Office" or leave it lowercase?

To get the answer to this question and many more based on Chicago style, go to

<http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/qanda/latest.html>.

THE CHICAGO MANUAL OF STYLE sets the standard in book publishing for issues such as punctuation, capitalization, and much more. If you write fiction or nonfiction books, you will want to know about Chicago style or be sure to use a professional book editor intimately familiar with Chicago style.

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### PUBLISHERS WEEKLY REPORTS ON LITERARY FIRM ABOUT TO GO BANKRUPT

When Darrin Webb, a bookkeeper for Donadio & Olson, pled guilty to embezzling over \$3.3 million from the literary agency late last month, it seemed like a bizarre episode in the industry was reaching a close. Webb's theft, which leaves a storied agency facing the possibility of bankruptcy and a cadre of authors with holes in their bank accounts, was, by all industry accounts, an aberration. The tale, though, may not be over, as PW reports. Read the full article here: <https://tinyurl.com/ya8kzbak>.

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### FOUR: CONTESTS, AGENTS, AND MARKETS

#### PARABOLA

Parabola is a quarterly journal devoted to the exploration of the quest for meaning as it is expressed in the world's myths, symbols, and religious traditions, with particular emphasis on the relationship between this store of wisdom and our modern life.

Each issue of Parabola is organized around a theme. Examples of themes we have explored in the past include Rites of Passage, Sacred Space, The Child, Ceremonies, Addiction, The Sense of Humor, Hospitality, The Hunter, The Stranger, and Prayer & Meditation.

Theme for summer 2019

The Wild

Editorial Submission Deadline: March 1, 2019

Theme for fall 2019

Abundance

Editorial Submission Deadline: June 1, 2019

See our submissions guidelines here.

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### ENCHANTED CONVERSATION: FAIRY TALES, FOLKTALES & MYTHS

Enchanted Conversation is looking for stories and sequential art (aka comics) that explore the different aspects of love set within the fairytale, folktale, or mythic templates. Work can either be retellings of established stories or use original characters. Be bold, traditional, lyrical, or experimental in your storytelling and enchant us with stories set in a variety of locations around the world and time periods from ancient to modern.

Submissions open until January 20, 2019 for the February "Love Issue."

Love can be magical or tragic; star-crossed or end happily ever after; an unrequited longing or two souls that always find one another.

Stories should be between 700 and 2,000 words, with our sweet spot being around 1,200 words.

The upper limit 2,000 word count is FIRM. Stories over 2,000 words will not be considered.

For full guidelines see <http://www.fairytalemagazine.com/p/submissions-guidelines.html>.

Payment flat rate: \$10.00 U.S. dollars

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Bradford Literary Agency

5694 Mission Center Rd. #347

San Diego, CA 92108

619/521-1201

The Bradford Literary Agency is a boutique agency that offers a full range of representation services to authors who are both published and pre-published. Our mission at the Bradford Literary Agency is to form true partnerships with our clients and build long-term relationships that extend from writing the first draft through the length of the author's career.

We are currently acquiring the following:

Fiction: Romance (historical, romantic suspense, paranormal, category, contemporary, erotic), urban fantasy, women's fiction, upmarket commercial fiction, literary fiction, mystery, thrillers, children's and young adult (please read agent bios for specific interests).

Nonfiction: Business, relationships, biography/memoir, self-help, parenting, narrative humor, pop culture, illustrated/graphic design, food and cooking, history and social issues

We are NOT currently acquiring: Poetry, screenplays, short stories, westerns, religion.

We do not charge reading fees for evaluating your material.

We accept email queries only. To avoid falling into spam, the subject line must begin as follows: QUERY: (The title of the manuscript and any SHORT message you would like us to see should follow). We do not open email attachments, unless specifically requested by an agent. Your entire submission must appear in the body of the email and not as an attachment.

Submission guidelines: <http://bradfordlit.com/submission-guidelines/>

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### SLIGHTLY FOXED SUBSCRIBERS' WRITING COMPETITION 2019

Slightly Foxed Competition

53 Hoxton Square

London N1 6PB

<https://foxedquarterly.com/slightly-foxed-writing-competition-2019/>

anna@foxedquarterly.com

All entries should reach us by 31 March 2019

From the start, we were keen that Slightly Foxed should feature not only contributors familiar from other book pages but also the voices of people who could write but who didn't think of themselves as writers – people outside the literary world, who had other equally interesting kinds of experience, and for whom the written word was just as important. We've come to the conclusion that this describes many of our readers; entries to the writers' competition in 2018 netted us five excellent pieces for the magazine – two joint winners, and three runners-up. So, now the dark evenings have closed in again, we think it's a good time to run another one.

The competition is open to all current Slightly Foxed subscribers. The winner will receive a prize of £250 and will have their article published in a future issue of SF  
We're looking for a piece of between 1,000 and 1,500 words on a favourite book or on a personal experience that is book-related.

Please do check our online index to make sure the subject you have in mind hasn't been covered already.

Articles should be submitted to Anna as a Word document by email or post and should include your name and contact details

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Do YOU have news for The Writers Network News? Send it in the body of an email to Bobbie@zebraeditor.com or bzebra@aol.com.  
Deadline: 18th of each month.

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<https://www.zebraeditor.com/> and signing up for The Writers Network News.

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