

The Writers Network News, February 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

"I have never produced anything good except by a long succession of slight failures."

—André Gide

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André Gide was a French author and winner of the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1947.

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ONE: FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK: WAKE-UP CALL

Dear Fellow Writers:

When I went to the gym for the first time in January, I expected to see a crowded parking lot. I did. Hundreds of people had made a resolution to work out more. I see this phenomenon every January, but by mid-February or so the parking lot and the machines inside are far less populated, as resolutions fall to the wayside.

Although I stopped making New Year's resolutions years ago, I do always think I should spend more time on my own work and less time on the work of others. I spend most of my days editing books written by people who actually made time to write, while I haven't done the same thing myself. I think I will make time to write. I tell others to schedule time to write. I mean to schedule time to write, but I don't always do it. I know that the only way to make time to write is to work it into my schedule. Instead I schedule the work of others and not my own.

Will I be better this year? Who knows? I've already filled my January and early February calendars with manuscripts I must edit. I have many stories in my head and many unfinished or as-yet-unpublished books to work on. I am a writer, yet like many writers, I put everything else first, before I sit down and write.

In the 1970s my son was an early teen when he asked me why I subscribed to a particular magazine for writers. I said, "Because I think of myself as a writer."

He looked at me with the naiveté of a young boy and asked, "Then why don't you write?"

His comment was my wake-up call. Since that day I've written several books, countless personal experience essays, an endless number of poems, hundreds of magazine articles, and more. I didn't need New Year's to make me resolve to do better. I needed the observation of an innocent boy.

Many writers don't start writing until their later years. Some begin early. What was your wake-up call? What made you finally start writing?

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: Commas, Adverbs, and Genres

By Book Doctor Bobbie Christmas

Q: I wonder if you've noticed the recent outbreak of unnecessary commas between adjectives in otherwise respectable publications (I've even seen it in The New York Times!) It's especially bad in Kindle books. I even spotted one in a George Sand Kindle book. What could be the cause? Are kids not taught comma use in English class anymore? Do publications still use copy editors? Is there some computer grammar-check app that is responsible?

I was always told that if you can put "and" between the adjectives, a comma is indicated; if not, the first adjective is modifying the phrase and should have no comma after it.

Here's an example. In a blog, author Nancy Peacock wrote: take care of a sick child or other, practical tasks...

A: In English class, if what we heard actually stuck with us, many of us were taught academic style, which sometimes differs from Chicago style, the style that book publishers follow. Anyway, Section 6.33 of the 16th edition of The Chicago Manual of Style says, "As a general rule, when a noun is preceded by two or more adjectives that could, without affecting the meaning, be joined by 'and,' the adjectives are normally separated by commas." It goes on to say that the coordinate adjectives can also usually be reversed in order and still make sense. "If, on the other hand, the adjectives are not coordinate—that is, if one or more of the adjectives is essential to (i.e. forms a unit with) the noun being modified—no comma is used."

While some of the commas you have spotted might be called for in Chicago style, the example you give does not quite. In the case of the example, then, the comma may be unnecessary, as you say. Perhaps people get confused about the difference between coordinate adjectives and those that are not coordinate.

All that terminology can be confusing. I like to simplify the process and say that if the adjectives are equal, a comma is warranted.

Because in some cases a comma is needed between adjectives and in others it is not, the issue can be quite confusing to those who are not highly skilled in Chicago style.

Q: I know I'm not supposed to use too many adverbs, and you've shown me how to find adverbs that end in "ly," but not all adverbs end in "ly." How can I identify adverbs that don't end in "ly?"

A: My advice: Don't worry too much about them. The "ly" adverbs are the ones that draw the most attention to themselves and become repetitious. Nevertheless, some of the "hidden" adverbs—adverbs that don't end in "ly"—include words such as today, yesterday, now, then, and rather. Of that list I see the last three adverbs—now, then, and rather—overused and used unnecessarily most often. Look for those three words and determine if you can delete them and make a sentence tighter without changing the meaning.

Adverbs tell how, where, or when something is done, and sometimes that information is important to a story. We cannot avoid every adverb, but when eliminating an adverb leads to stronger writing, the effort is worth it.

Q: My latest novel is about an abandoned resort hotel that has ghosts. How would you classify such a novel?

A: Marketers of books need to know the genre so they can promote the book to the right market. Bookstores need to know the genre so they can place the book on the right shelf. Writers must therefore know the genre of the books they write.

Because the book has ghosts, it's paranormal, but the rest of the description depends upon whether it is paranormal romance, paranormal mystery, paranormal thriller, or paranormal something else.

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](mailto: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>.  
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## THREE: SUBJECTS OF INTEREST TO WRITERS

MEMBERS WRITE...

Marlene Clark responded to a manuscript that Cyn McGregor encountered and wasn't sure what the author intended. The original sentence went like this: The man with the weapon's face showed his impatience.

Marlene said, "Sure was a mysterious sentence." She gave two suggestions: The man whose face looked like hardened steel showed his impatience or The face of the man who clenched the weapons in his hand showed impatience.

I told her I liked her first recommendation best: The man whose face looked like hardened steel showed his impatience. I added,

"Unfortunately it's not the job of an editor to add creative flourishes to a manuscript, only to correct what's wrong and perhaps suggest further improvement. I'm glad the manuslip wasn't in a manuscript I was editing but was in one that my colleague was editing. I dodged a bullet. (Groan. Bad pun intended.)"

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Patti Brady wrote, "Your newsletter has been coming to me for a number of years. It's past time to tell you how much I appreciate all the excellent information I receive free of charge. Of course I have your books, but the grammar reminders and writing techniques on a monthly basis are great refreshers. This month the article about author intrusion was especially pertinent to me. So double thanks to you!"

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#### 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:

He jumped on her and started kissing her neck with his scruffy four-day beard.

Can you see what's wrong with that sentence? English offers many ways of saying the same thing. How would you recast the sentence to avoid the manuslip?

As for me, I'd rather be kissed with lips than with a beard. I'd recast the sentence this way:

He jumped on her and kissed her neck despite his scruffy four-day beard.

(Did you notice that my recast not only keeps the beard from doing the kissing but also deletes "started kissing" and replaces it with the stronger verb form, "kissed?")

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#### TERMS WRITERS SHOULD KNOW

##### PORTMANTEAU

A portmanteau is a word coined by fusing two or more words. A.Word.A.Day with Anu Garg offered the following portmanteaus in its recent posts:

Rurban: (from rural and urban) Having characteristics of both rural and urban life

Squiggle: (from squirm and wiggle) An irregularly curling or looping line, string, etc., to make an irregular line, to scribble

Palimony: (from pal and alimony) Financial support or other compensation given by one member of an unmarried couple to another after separation

To learn more about English and its origins and to expand your vocabulary, subscribe to A.Word.A.Day at <https://wordsmith.org/awad/subscribe.html>.

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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)

Order a printed or PDF copy here: <https://www.zebraeditor.com/bookstore/>.

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#### HAPPY ENDINGS MAKE HAPPY READERS AND WRITERS

Harvard Medical School's Health Story Collaborative put on a recent conference. One of the interesting points made at the conference was that redemptive narratives are psychologically healthy. Yes, stories that involve situations that start out bad but end up good improve not only the health of the reader, but also the health of the writer. No wonder people like stories with satisfying endings!

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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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#### SCAMS AND WRITING METHODS

Author George Weinstein posted an interesting article based on his personal experience and methods. Every author should read it. See <http://www.georgeweinstein.com/2019/01/for-writers-pantser-or-planner/>

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### 100 BEST WEBSITES FOR WRITERS 2018

<https://thewritelife.com/100-best-websites-for-writers-2018/>

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Be my friend on Facebook

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

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Get news, writing-related cartoons, immediate updates, and other good stuff for writers.

Like and follow Zebra Communications at <https://tinyurl.com/ydyn3pcu>.

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### CMOS ONLINE Q & A

Someone wrote to The Chicago Manual of Style Online asking the following:

Sometimes I have a hard time distinguishing between a predicate adjective and a past-tense verb being used in a passive-voice construction. For example, in "this dish was leftover," is "leftover" an adjective, or should it be "was left over," with "left" being a verb and "over" being an adverb?

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

WRITE IN STYLE teaches writers how to strengthen their writing style and create a fresh voice, one that publishers and readers want to read.

Order your copy today at <https://tinyurl.com/y8fp5nym>.

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### FOUR: CONTESTS, AGENTS, AND MARKETS

#### A.T. PUBLISHING

23 Lily Lake Rd.

Highland NY 12528

(845)691-2021

Submission E-mail: [tjp2@optonline.net](mailto:tjp2@optonline.net)

Anthony Prizzia, publisher (education)

This book-publisher publishes trade paperback originals, accepts simultaneous submissions and non-agented submissions. It publishes only one to three titles a year and buys manuscripts outright for between \$500 and \$1,500. It looks for how-to books on education or recreation. Query with SASE. Submit complete ms. "Audience is people interested in a variety of topics, general. Submit typed manuscript for consideration, including a SASE for return of ms."

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A self-addressed, stamped envelope (SASE) with the correct postage must accompany all mailed manuscripts. A SASE is needed for any kind of response, even if the writer does not want the material returned.

A good photocopy of the manuscript or a computer printout, rather than the original, should be sent. Finishing Line Press is not

responsible for lost manuscripts. Please submit via submittable: <http://finishinglinepress.submittable.com/submit>

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SEEKS BLOG ENTRIES ABOUT UNEMPLOYMENT

Unemploymentville.com is a place for anyone who has felt the sting of being out of work. It is looking for reader contributions to the blog, and we're willing to pay for them.

What kind of writing do we want?

- Personal stories about being unemployed - Have you used your time away from the workplace to change careers? Walk dogs? Visit friends? Note, not all personal stories have to have happy endings. People need to know they are not alone in their struggles.
- Stories of earning a living (or trying to) by getting gigs rather than a job. Are you landing work through Uber? Fiverr? or other websites that match freelancers of any kind with people who need a task performed, then we'd like to hear how you are doing?
- Advice on dealing with the financial or emotional challenges of being out of work
- Unique job search techniques

Minimum length is 350 words

We pay: \$40 - \$75. Details in follow-up email

How to Make It Happen:

Email [admin@unemploymentville.com](mailto:admin@unemploymentville.com) with a subject: Reader Contribution - Guest Post. Tell me what you'd like to write about and any writing samples you can provide. I'll let you know if there is a current opening for your writing.

Minor editing will be done on accepted articles. You are allowed an "About the Author" section, which can contain up to two links and can be up to 10% as long as the article you wrote.

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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](mailto:Bobbie@zebraeditor.com) or [bzebra@aol.com](mailto:bzebra@aol.com).

Deadline: 18th 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

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

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