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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, 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 Paul Guillaume Gide (November 22, 1869 –February 19, 1951) was a French author and winner of the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1947.

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ONE: FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK: PICK PROFESSIONALISM OVER PRICE

Dear Fellow Writers:

Over the course of my career in editing books several people have requested that I edit their manuscript for a percentage of the profits. I refused all those requests for a number of reasons. First, how would I have any reliable information about the number of copies sold? Imagine the accounting nightmare I might have if I had to track all my clients' books and sales and my commissions on sales! Secondly, my fees are set in stone and must be prepaid. In that way I don't waste time tracking and collecting debts.

A few years ago I made one exception to my rule, when a new publisher pleaded with me to participate in its new publishing model, to see if it worked for all the participants. The company promised to report sales quarterly and promote its books intensely. The request came at a time when I had fewer projects than normal, so I agreed to edit one book under the company's new model. Under the model, each participant—author, editor, layout person, and publisher—took an equal percentage of the gross. The experiment took place eight years ago. I get quarterly reports, as promised, and in eight years, the book has sold more than 2,000 units, mostly as an ebook, which has a low price tag. So far my entire take for spending two weeks editing the book has been \$29.00. I know of no one who can live on \$29 for two weeks, much less eight years. It should be clear why I will never fall for the "percentage of the sales" ploy again.

While we are discussing payments, many new editors have asked me how to price their services. I explain that they must set their prices based on their time, expertise, and expenses. There's no easy formula, but certainly editing takes time, and therefore it's not cheap. When potential clients contact me looking for a cheap editor, I have to warn them that they will get what they pay for. A person who can charge only a couple hundred dollars to edit an entire book is someone who probably does not spend much time on the book or doesn't have the expertise to edit a book.

It's a sad situation when a person seeks a bargain when it comes to editing; nevertheless, more often than not, the first question prospects ask me is, "How much will it cost?" They do need to know the cost, of course, and they should get the answer up front. My website helps them calculate the total cost before they commit. Nevertheless, people seeking an editor should not make a final decision based on who is the cheapest. Instead they should ask questions such as these: What will I get for my money? What is your expertise? How long will it take to get my edited manuscript back? Do you evaluate the elements in the book as well as line edit? Do you adhere to Chicago style? How long have you been in the business of editing books? Can you give me the names and emails of clients who have

used you, so I can see what they have to say about your services?

Ah, yes, people seeking an editor need to know those things and more before they can decide if the cost is worth it, but they should never choose an editor simply because he or she offers a bargain price.

Oh, one more thing. If a person offers you a discount if you "order today," that person is a good salesperson trying to close the deal, but it doesn't mean that person is a good editor. Run away!

When it comes to professional editing, you get what you pay for.

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

If someone forwarded this newsletter to you, please sign up to get your own subscription. Simply go to <https://www.zebraeditor.com/> to subscribe to The Writers Network News. My promise: I never share your address or send out spam.

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TWO: ASK THE BOOK DOCTOR: Passive Voice, Who/Whom, and Journalism

By Bobbie Christmas

Q: Why is using passive voice a no-no in fiction?

A: Voice, when it refers to the verbs in a sentence, shows whether the subject acts (active voice) or is acted on (passive voice).

Let me ensure that we understand the difference between past tense and passive voice. Past tense refers to verbs that indicate the action has already happened. Most novels are written in past tense, and they should be. Examples of past tense: I tossed the newspaper onto the porch. John winked at Melissa.

Past tense, however, can also be in either active or passive voice. No wonder we're confused.

Passive voice emphasizes the object of the action, rather than the person or thing that does the action. As a result passive voice relies on weak verbs and wordy writing, neither of which leads to strong prose. Often the word by tips writers to the fact that the sentence is passive, rather than active. Here's an example of passive voice: The silence in the room was observed by the speaker. See how silence was the highlight of the sentence, rather than the speaker? Active voice would recast the sentence this way: The speaker observed the silence in the room. The revised sentence has fewer words, and tight writing is strong writing. The active voice version of that example deleted a weak verb (was) and a preposition (by). Here's another example of passive voice: The newspaper was tossed onto the porch. In this example readers are not told who did the action. Such a ploy may be necessary now and then, but in active voice the sentence might read this way: A boy on a bicycle tossed the newspaper onto the porch.

Creative writers spurn passive voice for multiple reasons. As I showed, passive voice often uses more words than necessary, sometimes fails to say who does the action, and relies on weak auxiliary verbs, such as forms of "to be." Conversely, strong creative writing uses action verbs, keeps sentences tight, and shows the person or thing that does the action.

No rule demands that fiction writers never use passive voice, but strong writers know that passive voice goes against the guidelines for powerful prose. Passive voice has a place in writing, but strong writers use it only when necessary.

Weak, passive voice: The ball was thrown into the outfield by the pitcher.

Stronger, active voice: The pitcher threw the ball into the outfield.

Weak, passive voice: Reports were circulated to all participants.

Stronger, active voice: Management circulated reports to all participants.

Q: I'm always confused about when to use "who" and when to use "whom." Is there an easy way to remember the answer?

A: Here's my explanation from *PURGE YOUR PROSE OF PROBLEMS*:

To determine whether to use "who" or "whom," determine whether the word is the subject or the object.

Subject: Who refers to the person who is doing the action. Who said that? The boy who showed up was not the boy we summoned.

Object: Whom refers to the person to whom the action is done. To whom should I send this letter? Tell me whom to call.

Oddly dialogue that uses "whom," even correctly, rarely sounds realistic. Many folks, even well-educated ones, don't know when to use "whom." For that reason, dialogue (not narrative) can misuse "who" for "whom," and it may sound more realistic.

Q: What do you see in the future for journalism? Should I change my major?

A: No! Don't give up! I majored in journalism too, although it was way back in the 1960s, when people often subscribed to one or more daily newspapers. Since then the market has changed, but the world will always need writers. Writing is everywhere! Take journalism and learn about writing, but don't limit yourself to writing for print newspapers or print magazines. Writers today still have many ways to make a living with words.

In my early years my motto became "I'll write anything for money." As a result for more than half a century I have made my living writing things as diverse as radio commercials, newspaper and magazine articles, print ads, brochure copy, web copy, advertorials, résumés, newsletters, company profiles, corporate communications, nonfiction books, and more.

Study journalism to learn how to write tight, compelling prose, but instead of defining yourself as a journalist, think of yourself as a writer, and you'll be able to work in many places writing a wide variety of materials.

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>.

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### THREE: SUBJECTS OF INTEREST TO WRITERS

#### MEMBERS WRITE...

Laura Prochaska wrote, "Thank you for your monthly newsletter. I really look forward to receiving it each month!"

Cynthia ("Cyn") MacGregor, a fellow editor and writer whose eagle eye has caught many a slipup, sent me the following manuscript this month: "Qin Shi Huang, the first emperor of China, whose artifacts and treasures include the famous buried terracotta army, died after ingesting several pills of mercury, which he believed would grant him internal life."

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OLD NEWS

I've always laughed at the oxymoron "old news," yet here's some news that should have been in last month's newsletter. Words Matter Week, now in its eleventh year, has finally been recognized as an official national week. Words Matter Week takes place during the first full week of March and coincides with National Grammar Day. The week is designated to stamp out verbal slop and drivel. I'm sorry to be reporting the information after Words Matter Week is over, because now it's officially old news.

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#### TERMS WRITERS SHOULD KNOW

##### Royalties

Royalties refer to the author's share of a book's selling price. If a book sells for \$10 and the publisher's royalty rate is six percent, the author gets sixty cents for every book sold. If this royalty seems low, it is not unusual, if the publisher paid all the costs of publishing the book.

If a publisher pays you an advance, it's important to know that it is an advance against royalties. In other words, if you get paid a \$1,000 advance, at a six percent royalty rate and a \$10 cover price for the book, the publisher has to sell more than 1,670 books before you will receive more royalties.

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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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#### THINKING OF WORKING FROM HOME?

Be sure that working in isolation is right for you. According to Sara Perry, PhD., new research has revealed that remote workers who have naturally high levels of emotional stability (people who are not overly reactive to difficult situations) do better working from home than people who are less emotionally stable. The idea is that emotionally stable folks are better at connecting with others and accomplishing work even when isolated from coworkers and resources.

I've known at least one person who tried to work from home and could not handle the isolation.

I am an even-keeled person and rarely get rattled (computer issues aside, of course!), and I've enjoyed living alone for most of my life. Working alone from home seemed like a good thing for me, and I've enjoyed working from home for more than a quarter of a century now. I see it as one of the benefits of being a writer and editor. I admit, however, that I went through a short period of adjustment. At first when I started working from home, I noticed others leaving their apartments dressed for work and carrying briefcases, and I felt envy. I felt isolated. Within a few weeks I caved and took a job in the offices of a magazine publisher, but the demands, chaos, office politics, commute, and stress quickly got to me, and I happily returned to working from home. I have been happily working from home ever since.

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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. My latest addition is a little scary, because it happened when I was only six years old. Read it here: <https://neuroticastories.blogspot.com>.

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VERY INTERESTING ARTICLE

A Washington Post columnist has written a very interesting article on the word "very," which he sees as very superfluous and very overused. I very much agree. He takes the point to some very interesting places, though. Read all about it here:

<https://wapo.st/2TDRL0i>  
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CMOS ONLINE Q & A

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

Q. On social media platforms, where italics are not an option, what do we do with book titles or other titles that would normally be italicized?

The answer gives three options. I use the third option for this newsletter.

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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THREE SAUDI WOMEN ACTIVITISTS RECEIVE PEN FREEDOM-TO-WRITE AWARDS

The PEN awards come at a time of heightened scrutiny of Saudi Arabia, since the journalist Jamal Khashoggi was murdered at the Saudi consulate in Istanbul last fall. Read the full AP article here: <https://apnews.com/b762afb02bb04c70956f855d230de178>.

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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

LOOKING FOR A LITERARY AGENT?

Writer's Digest Guide to Literary Agents blog often features agents looking for new clients. See <https://www.writersdigest.com/editor-blogs/guide-to-literary-agents>

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SELF-PUBLISHED BOOK AWARDS

The Writer's Digest Self-Published Book Awards will be open for submission until May 1. Entrants must submit a printed and bound book that was published or revised and reprinted between 2014 and 2019. Entry fees are high, in my opinion, and only one grand prize winner will take home the \$8,000 in cash, a feature article in Writer's Digest, and a paid trip to the Writer's Digest Conference in New York City. If you want to enter your self-published books, though, get all the details at [WritersDigest.com/competitions/selfpublished](http://WritersDigest.com/competitions/selfpublished).

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BACK TO COLLEGE SEEKS ARTICLES

Back to College is a news and information resource for adult re-entry students pursuing professional development or an advanced degree. We feature articles that address issues of importance to the older student: obtaining financial aid, on campus and online education, finding the right program, graduate school, or attaining academic excellence (study skills and success strategies). Career management and articles on successful transition are appreciated. We are especially looking for stories on the re-entry student experience. Articles may be anecdotal, or include examples and resources where readers can obtain more information (Web resources are desirable for an online publication.) Payment is \$55+ for original feature articles (\$27.50+ for reprints and derivatives), approximately 1,000 - 1,500+ words in length (compensation is determined by depth). See <http://back2college.com/guide.htm> for 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](mailto:Bobbie@zebraeditor.com) or [bzebra@aol.com](mailto:bzebra@aol.com).

Deadline: 18th of each month.

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

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