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The Writers Network News
No Rules; Just Write!
Editor: Bobbie Christmas

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Writer's Quote of the Month

"An author departs; he does not die."
—Dinah Maria Mulock Craik (1826 - 1887)

Dinah Maria Mulock Craik was an English Victorian who earned her living by writing and who believed in greater freedom of opportunity for women, especially those unmarried.

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One: From the Editor's Desk: THE MASKED WRITER

Dear Fellow Writers:

I've lived through times that I thought were turbulent, but those times fade in my memory in light of the current and simultaneous onslaught of political, racial, and health issues. I hope that some good will finally emerge. Meanwhile, I'll do my part to effect positive change through my vote, my attitude, and my use of a face mask during my rare public excursions.

Speaking of face masks, how did they become a political issue? I don't get it. I wear a mask because I don't want to infect others, in case I have the virus but am asymptomatic. I wear a mask for you, not for me. Why won't others wear a mask for me? I must say that I see more people wearing masks than not, but masks are not mandated in the state of Georgia, and the folks I see without masks also seem not to care if they come too close to me in public either. I have to steer clear of them, rather than vice versa.

Wearing a mask in public is an act of kindness to others. What, then, does it say about those who refuse to wear a mask in public?

What are your opinions on the subject?

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, coordinator of the Florida Writers Association Editors Helping Writers service, and senior editor of Enjoy Cherokee Magazine

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Two: ASK THE BOOK DOCTOR: Show Rather Than Tell

By Bobbie Christmas

Q: I'm trying to grasp the concept that adverbs tell rather than show. I don't quite understand what you mean. Will you explain "show rather than tell" using different words?

A: Yes. Let's look at this example: Jack rapidly walked to the closet and quickly took a jacket off a hanger. "Rapidly" tells how Jack walked. "Quickly" tells how he took the jacket off the hanger. While nothing is wrong grammatically with that sentence, it is considered weak in the creative sense. Strong writers use strong verbs that show action by themselves. Strong verbs don't need adverbs to support them and tell how the action took place. Here's a possible rewrite: Jack raced to the closet and snatched a jacket off a hanger. With the recast we have two strong verbs—raced and snatched—that show action all by themselves. The writing is tighter and stronger plus it shows, rather than tells.

There are other ways that writing tells rather than shows, such as in these examples: John was frustrated. Mary was pretty. To avoid telling show John's frustrations through his actions and dialogue. For example, one might write this: John tried the doorknob one more time; it still refused to turn. He slammed a fist into the door, kicked at the door, and yelled, "Open the damn door, Harry!" Instead of telling readers that Mary was pretty, one might show it this way: Mary's blond hair fell in ringlets around her petite shoulders. Her green eyes sparkled in the twilight.

I hope these examples and the possible rewrites show the difference between telling and showing.

Q: According to the latest edition of The Chicago Manual of Style, it is no longer allowed for a writer to italicize inner dialogue. Will you please tell us how to accomplish the new way of indicating inner dialogue?

A: The Chicago Manual of Style 17th Edition addresses the issue in 13.43, page 725. It says that thought, imagined dialogue, and other internal discourse (also called interior discourse) may be enclosed in quotation marks or not, according to a style set by the publication or contest to which you are submitting or even according to the writer's preference. If a thought begins midsentence, it normally begins with a capital letter. Here are some examples of two ways to handle inner dialogue: "I'll just eat a little of this popcorn," Marcia told herself, "but just in case I want more, I'll buy the biggest size." Alvin wondered, Why did Elaine call me at four in the morning?

I'd like to add a few more comments, though. First, readers are quite familiar with thoughts being set in italics. As long we are consistent throughout a manuscript, no one would argue that such use is terribly wrong.

Next, in real life we cannot hear other people's thoughts, so when tempted to go into a character's head, consider another, more realistic method. Read on to see what I mean.

Most importantly, thoughts tell, whereas actions and dialogue show. For that reason, the more creative approach shows characters' thoughts not through inner discourse but through the actions or dialogue. Examples: Marcia pondered her choices and shook her head a few times before telling the clerk, "I'll take the largest size of popcorn, just in case I want to eat more." Alvin glared into the phone. "Elaine, why would you call me at four in the morning?" Both these examples show what the characters were thinking without having to rely on punctuation, italics, or inner dialogue.

Q: Approximately how many gerunds and how many adverbs are acceptable per page? I won't hold you to the answer, I'd just like an idea.

A: Gerunds (words that end in "ing") and adverbs (many of which end in "ly") are not inherently wrong or right; they simply indicate a missed opportunity to write stronger and avoid repeating the same sounds. If you delete all of them and replace them with active verbs that tell, rather than show, consider yourself a winner. I'll take a stab at an answer, though, because you're right; not all can be deleted so easily (see?).

Let's say to strive for only ten "ing" words and ten adverbs per 50,000-word manuscript. If you can keep the volume that low, you positively power up your prose. Whoops! There's another adverb. If you cannot reach such an ideal level, one or two "ing" words and "ly" words per page would not stand out. On one page, though, four or more of either might be distracting or appear repetitive.

Do you have a question about writing or editing? Get a quick and personal answer by contacting Bobbie at Bobbie@zebraeditor.com or BZebra@aol.com.

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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 at <https://tinyurl.com/y7p9xkbb>.
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Three: Subjects of interest to writers

MEMBERS WRITE

Jill Jennings, who is quite knowledgeable about grammar rules, corrected me on something I said in the June newsletter. She writes as follows:

Your recent newsletter dealt with -ing forms of verbs. You said the sentence He was dancing was passive voice. This is incorrect. It is active voice, in the past continuous tense. It indicates an on-going activity. The simple past, active voice, would be: He danced.

To make it passive it would have to read: He was danced. Passive voice is always for a subject that is acted up by something or someone else, for example, He was praised. Or He was praised by his teachers. Most writers are told to avoid He was praised because it leaves the reader wondering by whom? It would be much better to use a subject that tells us that information: Professor Smith praised John.

I thanked Jill for the astute clarification. I am not a grammarian or schoolteacher, so I don't like to quote grammar rules. I should have said the verb shows no action. It is a linking verb that simply says one thing is another thing. Here's my point, though: no matter what the verb is called, using most forms of the verb "to be" is not the strongest, most creative way to write.

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Rogers George writes, "I have a comment on the shined/shone topic: I understand that although both words are correct, as you mentioned." He goes on to clarify that "shined" is transitive (he shined his shoes) and "shone" is intransitive (the sun shone brightly that day). A transitive verb needs an object to follow it (shoes, in this case), whereas an intransitive verb can stand alone without needing an object. Rogers George has been a technical writer for years and has an interesting blog our members might enjoy, although it sometimes conflicts with Chicago style, the style book publishers use. See <http://writing-rag.com>.

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Missouri Woman Persuades Merriam-Webster Dictionary to Update Definition of Racism

Read the full article here:  
<https://tinyurl.com/yc78vlmr>

#### ~~~~~ EDITING TIPS: BE STRONG; BE THE AUTHORITY

Are you writing narrative nonfiction, such as a memoir or a self-help book? If so, you want to be the authority. In a thesis or essay it's fine to quote other people, but in your book, you must be strong; you must be the authority. Here are some phrases to avoid in narrative nonfiction:

- I think
- I feel
- I believe
- I guess
- I assume/presume

Examples  
Instead of this: I believe that angels exist, and I have proof  
Consider writing this: Angels exist, and I have proof.

Instead of this: Sam Smith, in his book about relationships, says to ask your partner what makes him or her feel loved.  
Consider writing this: Ask your partner what makes him or her feel loved.

#### ~~~~~ NEW WEBSITE HELPS BOOKSTORES SELL ONLINE

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Competition for Amazon? Read more at <https://www.wired.com/story/bookshop-org/>

~~~~~ LITERARY AGENT: EFFECTING CHANGE MEANS DOING THE WORK

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Jessica Faust at BookEnds Literary Agency examines the bestsellers in paperback nonfiction and adds her comments. <https://tinyurl.com/ybf2cjar>

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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

This month someone posed the following question to The Chicago Manual of Style Online:

Q. Should the word "nation" be capitalized?

The answer to this question isn't simple. 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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Interesting blog post by someone who did not start out with the intent to write mysteries: <https://tinyurl.com/yd56osaa>
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Four: Contests, Agents, and Markets

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In return, you will get paid \$50 for each article published.

For complete information see <https://morningchores.com/write-for-us/>.

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Mary Ellen Gavin from Gavin Literary Agency

Mary Ellen Gavin works only with the New York publishers who are interested in finding psychological thrillers, mysteries, police procedural mysteries, romance, and women's issues. She is open to queries. Message her at m.me/1388048541219997

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MYTHIC

Mythic is seeking diverse sci-fi and fantasy fiction. We publish both new, original fiction and reprints. Authors are encouraged to submit their stories during the specific reading periods listed below. Reading for Fall and Winter Issues: June 1 through July 31

At this time, we pay \$0.01 a word for NEW short fiction.  
At this time, we pay a flat rate of \$20 for REPRINT short fiction.  
We provide authors with one free copy of the issue in which their story appears.  
Payment made upon publication via PayPal. (We are not responsible for any transaction fees).  
Send all stories to [submissions@mythicmag.com](mailto:submissions@mythicmag.com).  
Be sure to read and follow all submissions guidelines here: <https://www.mythicmag.com/p/submissions.html>

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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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