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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

"I didn't sell much for a long time, and before I sold that first novel, I wrote five ghastly novels, about forty dreadful short stories, and twelve truly awful full-length plays, all of which have never seen the light of day and never will." -Robert Olen Butler

Pulitzer-Prize-winning author Robert Olen Butler's first published novel, THE ALLEYS OF EDEN, was published in 1981 after twenty-one publishers turned it down. He won the Pulitzer Prize in short fiction in 1993 for his collection called A GOOD SCENT FROM A STRANGE MOUNTAIN.

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One: From the Editor's Desk: EMOTIONS

Dear Fellow Writers:

If you follow me on Facebook, you already know part of what I am about to write, but I'll say it anyway.

I had to have a minor but painful procedure done at the doctor's office this month. The doctor said the Novocain injection would feel like a bee sting, and then I would feel no pain. I'm certainly not a fan of bee stings, so I braced for what would inevitably ensue. The nurse saw me tense up and gently rubbed my arm to relax me. To my surprise I burst into tears—not because of the "bee sting," but because I had not been touched, rubbed, or even hugged in five months, thanks to COVID-19. Yes the nurse's gentle human touch moved me to tears.

In the past I had heard the term "skin hunger," and I knew I was missing hugging my friends and siblings, but the full impact did not hit me until that moment. Skin hunger is a real thing, and I'm sure I'm not the only person who lives alone who is experiencing skin hunger. This pandemic has many far-reaching implications, some of which we may not even discover until much later.

Speaking of emotions and bursting into tears, though, I recently evaluated a proposal for a book that sounded exciting. The chapter descriptions in the proposal intrigued me, and I salivated to read the sample chapters. The actual chapters, however, read like a book report or a newspaper article. The chapters told of events that could have been fascinating, but the writing failed to make me react as a reader. As creative writers we have many tools to make readers lose themselves and feel they are living a story as it unfolds. We want our readers to feel surprised, happy, sad, intrigued, and maybe even angry when they read our stories. Strong writing appeals to as many of our five senses as possible: touch, smell, hearing, taste, and sight. Tell me about the texture of a dog's fur, the scent of a flower, the sound of a baby cooing, and the taste of an ice cream cone, and of course describe what the scene, people, and important objects look like.

Are you sure you write in a way that evokes emotion in readers? Do your stories make readers feel they are experiencing an event? Do your novels create suspense that makes us turn the page to see what happens next? Are you simply reporting an event or are you retelling it in a way that makes readers experience it for themselves? Do your essays touch our hearts, make us want to laugh, cry, or gasp in shock?

Do you have a tip to help writers make their writing more provocative, alluring, endearing, and enduring? Please let me know, and I'll share it with our readers.

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: MANUSCRIPT FORMAT ISSUES

Q: What format should I use to emphasize a word? Italics, underlining, bold text, ellipses?

A: Before the advent of computers, way back when dinosaurs roamed the earth and writers used typewriters, underlining words in a manuscript was a typist's way of indicating words that should be italicized when a manuscript was designed for printing. In those days, therefore, underlines were used to emphasize the occasional word. Underlines, however, have absolutely no place in today's computer-generated manuscripts—not for emphasis, not for titles, and not for anything else. Instead we can now generate italics on our computers, so forget underlines entirely. As for attempting to emphasize a word, strong writing indicates emphasis by itself without resorting to italics, although italics may be used on the rare occasion for emphasis. Instead use italics where they are meant to be used.

Italics are to be used only for the following:

Terms in a foreign language

Words used as words

Titles of works, plays, movies, books, paintings, and vessels, although song titles are in quotation marks, not italics

An author may choose to use italics to indicate thoughts, although Chicago style no longer advocates their use in such a case.

As for the other formatting possibilities, bold text should never be used in running copy. Boldface type is okay, but not required, to use in chapter heads, section heads, or perhaps chart labels. Ellipses do not emphasize a word. Ellipses indicate hesitant speech in dialogue, and in narrative, ellipses indicate words missing from a quotation. Ellipses have no other use in narrative.

Q: I have read that the word count generated by my computer is not accurate from a publisher's viewpoint. How do I calculate an acceptable word count for my story?

A: I have heard the same rumor from writers, but I have never heard it from a publisher. In most cases Microsoft Word gives an accurate enough word count, which is all a publisher needs.

The old way to estimate word count was first to be sure the manuscript was in standard manuscript format, which it should be, anyway. When a manuscript is in correct format, it averages about 250 words a page, so you can multiply the number of pages by 250. Again, it's an estimate, but it will tell you and your publisher whether the count is within acceptable guidelines.

If you're not sure what standard manuscript format (sometimes simply called SMF) entails, email me and ask for my free report on standard manuscript format.

Q: I'm writing a book that spans a long period of time. What's the best way to show the transition from one era to another?

A: The easy way out is not always the best way—simply to put the date at the beginning of a new portion as a subhead, a chapter title, or under the chapter title. Although that method works, it's too pat, too easy, and it's distracting to some readers.

The best way for the format to show a transition in time is either to start a new chapter or add an extra space between paragraphs. In fact standard manuscript format does not have extra spaces between paragraphs except to show a shift in time.

After adding the extra space, strong writing sets the era with events, music, and other references that are current in that era to help readers identify the new time setting.

Q: My writing organization is preparing an anthology. Would standard manuscript format apply? We are unsure of individual submission formats at this point. Please advise.

A: Standard manuscript format applies when submitting a manuscript to an agent or a publisher. Because you are going to self-publish the anthology, you may set the format any way you would like, but if an editor is going to edit the submissions, which I strongly advise, you would do well to ask for submissions in standard manuscript format. Requiring standard manuscript format gets writers in the habit of using it, plus it standardizes submissions for easier layout and design later. In addition standard manuscript format is easiest to read, which helps judges and editors with their work.

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.

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 at <https://tinyurl.com/y7p9xkbb>.

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Three: Subjects of interest to writers

MEMBERS WRITE

In the last newsletter I advised someone on how to make history interesting. Rosemarie Perry gave us even more information. Regarding historical fiction she writes, "I have had lots of fun researching the following when writing a period piece:

- the political environment - what is going on at that time, either at the location or in the nation that might have impact on the story or worth mentioning in conversation
- medical events - eg. yellow fever, cholera, insect infestations, etc.
- food - particular fruits and vegetables grown in that area, foods and libations served in that area at that time, time of harvest
- clothing - fabrics, styles
- concerns of the populace - coming war, unemployment, cultural upheaval, business opening or closing
- climate and significant weather events - a hurricane, flood, tornado, drought, etc
- news events of the time

When the writer includes such information, it catapults the reader into the time and place. Excellent writing secures the rest."

Thank you, Rosemarie. It's excellent advice for writers of historical fiction.

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Vicki Flier Hudson, chief collaboration officer of Highroad Global Services, consults with huge companies on how to work collaboratively across cultures. She honored me when she wrote, "WOW, fantastic piece on the challenges we face today and on the racism you grew up with. So well-written, courageous, and timely!"

Thank you, Vicki. That comment means so much to me, knowing the work that you do across cultures.

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Steve Moore had many comments regarding last month's newsletter. Here's one of them: "As young people in the sixties, our generation actively protested about many things, in my case, mostly Vietnam War protests (my first experience with tear gas occurred in the University of Maryland's very first protest), but also civil rights protests. My wife calls our current situation a perfect storm too. Unlike one of my old interests, chaos theory (even classical states that have the same initial conditions can grow exponentially apart), societal chaos usually disappears and new social orders take their place and wrongs are corrected. One can only hope."

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Cathy Oasheim writes, "I grew up in a bigoted family; anyone different from us was a sure target for comments among themselves. My siblings and I tolerated it until we pushed back and corrected them. Over time things changed. The best part was when my cousin found out that my father and his siblings were Melungeon. They were mostly a mix of Cherokee, African American, and white. When I got the news, I called my mother (who looks white but is one-quarter Cherokee) and shared the news with her. I then asked her jokingly, 'So are you going to tell your mother that you slept with a black man?' It was meant as a jab because of how she and Dad were so bigoted. Seriously, aren't we all mutts and unique? I find this whole thing ludicrous. I want to see the pure soul in every person. That's it. Nothing else matters." So true, Cathy; so true.

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EDITING TIP: Yea/Yeah/Yeh

"Yea" means "yes" in archaic English, but not in contemporary English. Example, "Yea, though I walk through the valley of death . . ."

"Yea" in contemporary language is a cheer that means hooray. "Our team won. Yea!"

"Yeh" is not a word.

In contemporary English, to mean a casual yes, use "yeah," rather than "yea" or "yeh."

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TEXT MESSAGES IN FICTION: How to Format

Many people have asked me how to format text messages when they appear in a novel. This information gives you choices:
<https://cmosshoptalk.com/2020/03/10/formatting-text-messages-in-fiction/>

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DOES MEAN APP OVERCOME WRITER'S BLOCK?

On the Wired website Margaret Rhodes reviews the most sadistic app ever created, but she shows that it does make writers overcome writer's block. See <https://www.wired.com/2016/03/sadistic-writing-app-deletes-work-stop-typing/>.

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

FOLLOW ZEBRA COMMUNICATIONS ON FACEBOOK

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: CMOS omits periods after any designator for United States organizations of any kind—e.g., US Army, US Navy, US Department of State. This format directly contradicts all official U.S. government writing guidelines. What prompted CMOS to make such a change?

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. You can also get the basics of Chicago style as well as hundreds of tips on grammar, punctuation, and creative writing by ordering PURGE YOUR PROSE OF PROBLEMS at <http://tinyurl.com/4ptjnr>.

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IS THIS THE TIME TO SUBMIT YOUR WORK?

Last month I had some information on writing about pandemics. This month I found an interesting article from Publishers Weekly about submitting projects during the pandemic. See <https://tinyurl.com/tc9napz>

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

WRITE IN STYLE uses humor, wisdom, and expertise to show writers how to strengthen their writing style and create a fresh voice. Available as an e-book or printed.

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

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INTERESTING WORD; MANUMISSION

When I saw the word "manumission," I thought it might mean "manuscript submission." Instead it means "Release from slavery, servitude, or restraint."

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FREE REPORT: Highlights of Chicago Style

You've heard of Chicago style, but you may not know its details. If you write novels or nonfiction books, you will want my free report titled "Highlights of Chicago Style." Request it in an email to me at [bzebra@aol.com](mailto:bzebra@aol.com).

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HEMINGWAY HELPER

Ernest Hemingway, originally a journalist, carried his sparse style into his fiction. As an editor I also advocate concise writing. The Hemingway App online might help some writers by pointing out writing that gets wordy or complicated. It doesn't give potential rewrites, but it claims to make your writing "bold and clear." All you have to do is copy your work and replace the sample on the website to get an immediate and free report. See <http://hemingwayapp.com/>
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Four: Contests, Agents, and Markets

ST. MARTIN'S MINOTAUR/ MYSTERY WRITERS OF AMERICA  
FIRST CRIME NOVEL COMPETITION

The competition is open to any writer aged eighteen or older who has never been the author of any published novel (in any genre), as defined by the guidelines on the website, and who is not under contract with a publisher for publication of a novel. Authors of self-published works may enter, as long as the manuscript submitted is not the self-published work. Only one manuscript entry is permitted per writer. Murder or another serious crime or crimes must be at the heart of the story. If a winner is selected, Minotaur Books will offer to enter into its standard form author's agreement with the entrant for publication of the winning manuscript and receive an advance against future royalties of \$10,000. The winner will be recognized at the Edgar Awards Banquet in New York City in April 2021. Submissions must be received by 11:59 pm EST on January 1, 2021.

See complete guidelines here: <https://mysterywriters.org/about-mwa/st-martins/>

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THE REVELATOR

The Revelator is open for pitches. Pay rates are \$300 for first-time contributors and \$350 for returning champions, for about 1,000 words. We run one freelance article a week at this rate. We also have room for up to one slightly more involved story a month paying up to \$550.

We are an environmental publication covering climate change, wildlife, pollution, and related topics. We want stories that raise the level of discourse and can generate conversation. The subjects we're interested in are listed on our submissions page. <https://tinyurl.com/v3vlt6l>

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The Lit Quarterly: Home to New and Emerging Voices

We accept submissions year-round, with acceptances taking place quarterly. We compensate authors fairly and equally around \$100 (Canadian) per acceptance, contingent on available funding and categorical genre (i.e. fiction, non-fiction, or poetry). We happily encourage multiple submissions, simultaneous submissions, and returning contributors.

All submissions must be previously unpublished; we reserve only first publication rights, and request acknowledgement for any subsequent, future appearances, as per your prerogative. Furthermore, if your simultaneous submission is accepted elsewhere, kindly notify us at your earliest convenience.

We seek short fiction ranging from 1,000-5,000 words, whether short story, excerpt, epistolary, theatre, interview, prose poem, among others. We tend to accept fiction that exhibits technical mastery of literary device, genre, or verisimilitude.

We prefer to publish verse poetry of 12-40 lines, albeit we remain open-minded to submissions of fewer and greater verses. Without demanding observance to any particular brand of formalism, we solicit poems that elicit emotional response and critical reflection.

We are proud to see nonfiction into print, chiefly in the form of essays between 1,500-5,000 words broaching political, historical, or sociological topics, but not excluding submissions of literary criticism, polemic, or satire.

For submission guidelines see <https://litquarterly.ca/submissions/>

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

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