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The Writers Network News

No Rules; Just Write!

Editor: Bobbie Christmas

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Some links in this newsletter may be 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

“You will find poetry nowhere unless you bring some of it with you.” —Joseph Joubert

Joseph Joubert (1754-1824) was a French moralist and essayist, remembered today largely for his *Pensées*, which were published posthumously.

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One: From the Editor's Desk: Celebrations and Losses

Dear Fellow Writers:

In December my company, Zebra Communications, celebrated its twenty-eighth year of being in business. Over these twenty-eight years I've edited close to a thousand books and hundreds of magazine issues and articles for authors and publishers. With many startup businesses lasting five years or fewer, I'm mighty proud of all that I have accomplished.

My heart warms when I think of all the writers and publishers for whom I've made books, magazines, business materials, poems, essays, blog posts, newsletters, and short stories the best they could be. I'm thrilled to think about all the writers I've taught and encouraged with my keynote speeches, seminars, meetings, and newsletters. For most of those years—twenty-six of the twenty-eight—I have produced a newsletter for writers.

Originally I wrote, designed, illustrated, printed, folded, stamped, and mailed the newsletter, and because of the costs involved, I had to charge for subscriptions. When I transformed the newsletter into electronic form, I stopped charging and even expanded the content. The Writers Network News is my way of giving back to a community that has supported my business and me for almost three decades. Thank you for being a subscriber, supporter, and fellow writer. If you're a client as well, then double the thanks.

Here's what's been going on with me lately: I'm gleefully writing memoirs about the odd, interesting, sad, or otherwise amusing incidents and people I've encountered in my long work life. I was pleased to find that some years ago I started a list of people and incidents I wanted to cover, because when I examined the list most recently, I saw that I would have forgotten to write about some of the things I'd jotted down over the years.

People often ask if they should create an outline before writing, as we were taught in grade school, when we had to write book reports. I say an outline doesn't have to be detailed; it's only a sketch, not a detailed roadmap, to remind us where we want to go. Best of all, whenever I sit down to write, I can look at that list (I won't call it an outline), and it fires me up to write again. No writer's block here, because I can clearly see all the incidents and people I want to write about. When I

look at my list, I know I can start wherever the urge strikes me and organize everything later.

The other thing going on in my life involves the man I have dated on and off for some sixty years. We met when I was sixteen and he was twenty-four. He was ready for marriage, and I wasn't. After his divorce he found me and we fell in love again. I had been married and didn't want to marry again, but he still wanted to be married, so he married someone else. Twenty years later he got another divorce, and although we still had a large age difference, we easily switched from friends into romantic partners again, about four years ago.

The pandemic kept us apart since Valentine's Day, but we've had many phone calls and FaceTime calls together since then. Now he is breaking my heart a third time. This time he hasn't left me in his prior way, to marry someone else. Instead at age eighty-four he is slipping into dementia. As a result it's too dangerous for him to drive to come see me. It's one of the saddest things I've experienced, and I've experienced a great deal of loss in my lifetime.

Some of my fellow writers have gone through similar experiences with a loved one, and I've been blessed with an outpouring of sympathy. Several folks reminded me that losing someone to dementia is like losing them twice. As a person who is usually upbeat, I'm thankful he's still alive and being well taken care of. I'm also grateful for the time we've had together, the memories we made together, and the strong bond we formed over the past sixty years.

I hope for a happy and healthy new year for all of you, my fellow writers. Stay in touch! Let me know what and how you're doing.

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*

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: Stop for a Spell

Q: Would it be alright to write an entire chapter about someone committing suicide?

A: It would be fine to write a chapter that focuses on one scene or one subject, but it would not be okay to spell "all right" as "alright."

Q: I see words spelled all sorts of ways, canceled and cancelled and acknowledgment and acknowledgement, for examples. How am I to know which way is the correct way?

A: Your examples show the American spelling first and the British spelling second. If writing for the American market, the correct spellings are "canceled" and "acknowledgment." To get definitive answers on which spellings are correct or variants, use Merriam-Webster, the dictionary recommended by most American book publishers.

Q: I am checking the proofs of my latest book and need a definitive answer on the spelling of a word. My sources give me conflicting answers. Coworker or co-worker ? Which spelling is correct?

A: Dictionaries differ in their answers, but most book publishers use Merriam-Webster as their final source. According to M-W, the proper spelling is coworker, with no hyphen.

Q: How should I spell the abbreviation for microphone in my novel? Is it "mic" or "mike?" I've seen it both ways.

A: Here's an answer you probably didn't expect. Don't use either abbreviation, except in dialogue. Chicago style does not recommend the use of abbreviations in the narrative. Merriam-Webster, however, appears to give the same weight to either spelling of the short form, mic or mike, for use in dialogue. Whichever spelling you use, however, be sure it is consistent throughout the manuscript.

Q: I am writing a book on relaxation. There are many books that give techniques and steps to relax, or to massage, or to breath (sic) correctly. For example, .. (sic) now breath (sic) slowly for 3 seconds, hold for.... or they give specific steps for massage or they do the same for specific yoga movements. I'm wondering if those steps are copywrited (sic) or can someone else write a book citing those same steps almost word for word?

A: Before I respond, let me make sure you plan to use the expertise of an editor before you submit your manuscript or self-publish it. I found at least four misspelled words in addition to other errors in the short paragraph I received. True, it was a first draft, not a polished paragraph, I'm sure, but those errors are still an indication of a tendency to miss obvious misspellings, so I want you to be aware of the issue. Don't let it stop you from writing your book, though; simply use a professional editor before you take the final manuscript into the publishing phase.

As to your question about copyrights, if you are an expert in the field of relaxation—that is, you have mastered the art and have a new approach for teaching it—you will automatically write your book from your own perspective and not cite the same steps word for word that someone else has written. Techniques cannot be copyrighted, but the words and word order used to describe the techniques can be, so don't use or even look at anyone else's descriptions of the techniques when you write your own, and then yours will almost certainly be unique. If your descriptions are unique, not copied from some other source, you won't have infringed on any copyright.

If you still have concerns, check with an attorney familiar with copyright law. To find an attorney with that expertise, check with the Volunteer Lawyers for the Arts organization closest to you.

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 or BZebra@aol.com. Read Bobbie's Zebra Communications blog at <https://www.zebraeditor.com/blog/>.

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

Ben Oswald writes, "I just finished reading a charming book titled WHEN WE WERE VIKINGS. The voice is that of a young woman in her early twenties who is a high-functioning victim of Fetal Alcohol Syndrome. The story is charming to almost the end when a close friend and mentor is beaten severely. Unfortunately this seems to be the lot of many women protagonists in the novels featuring strong women that I have read over the years. Where is it written that a significant female (or any woman, for that matter) must suffer this fate to make the story noteworthy?"

I responded, "I wish I knew. I wish I knew why every 'romance' scene on TV these days shows the couples kissing for the first time and then tearing each other's clothes off. Over the many years I've spent as a single woman I have experienced numerous first kisses without tearing the man's clothes off or having him tear mine off. I can't think of anything less romantic than a first kiss followed by immediate nudity and sex."

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Pamela Lord said, "I sent a fantasy manuscript sample with self-addressed stamped envelope to Tor Books back in January. In April I received the sample back with the envelope somewhat scuffed and an apology from the post office. The SASE was missing. I thought it odd, and then I received it about two weeks later postmarked Tortuga. My SASE had a vacation without me!

"I double-checked the TOR address—New York, etc.—and resubmitted. I got that manuscript sample back stamped: address unknown. What the heck? Have you heard of TOR publishers going belly up?"

I responded, "After much searching, I finally found this notice, a little obscured, on the Tor/Forge/Tom Doherty Associates website: 'Our open submission policy is currently suspended due to COVID-19.'

"My advice is to wait until COVID-19 has subsided considerably and then submit again, following all its guidelines."

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**Editing Tip: Pronouns for Deities**

Chicago style does not capitalize pronouns or other substitutes for deities. Examples: God in his wisdom gave Brian the eyesight to qualify him to fly airplanes. The creator knew what he was doing.

Because religious literature sometimes capitalizes pronouns for deities, authors may choose to follow the style of the intended publication, rather than Chicago style. Examples: God in His wisdom gave Brian the eyesight to qualify him to fly airplanes. The Creator knew what He was doing.

Interestingly, however, many newer Bible versions no longer capitalize pronouns for deities, and the capitalization of pronouns for deities is therefore not recommended.

Whichever style the author chooses, however, it's important to be consistent throughout the manuscript.

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Manuslip

[A slip in grammar, punctuation, or other error in a manuscript that results in humor; a manuscript blooper]

Here's this month's manuslip:

He wore striped suspenders over a blue button-down shirt and scuffed loafers.

[As written, the character wore suspenders over his loafers. A recast is needed for clarity, perhaps this: He wore striped suspenders over a blue button-down shirt. His loafers were scuffed.]

How would you recast that sentence for clarity?

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**Discover Your Repetition the Easy Way**

Go to <https://tinyurl.com/y7h6mv6v> and copy your manuscript into the form. It gives you the reading level of your manuscript—especially vital for children’s books—and will list all the repeated words. You can then go through your document and find ways to reduce any overuse of the same word.

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Be My Friend on Facebook

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

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CMOS Online Q&A

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

Q. I know an em dash marks an interruption in dialogue:

“I thought I might—”

“Might what?” she demanded.

But what happens if the same person speaks after the interruption? For example, “Can you bring me a— socket wrench, is that what you call it?” Is that space after the em dash correct?

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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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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Penguin Random House to Buy Simon & Schuster

Oh, no! This merger will probably mean writers have even fewer chances of selling to a traditional publisher. Read the article here: <https://tinyurl.com/y77uzx3n>.

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Use Your Muse

Bobbie’s Creative Writing Exercise for January

Raise the Dead

Read news articles for a few days, looking for reports of deaths. Look for articles that tell about the deceased’s traits, interests, careers, accomplishments, hobbies, home life, or other details. Save all those details. Once you have information from at least six people, perhaps even the cause(s) of death, create a fictional character that possesses some or all of the combined history you have compiled.

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

At around \$15, this book is the perfect gift for your writer friends or for yourself. 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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Get Paid to Write

Free webinar! Want to get paid to write? If so, this is for you. It's a free webinar that gives you step-by-step instructions for getting paid to write. <https://tinyurl.com/yb6999dv>.

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Spiegel & Grau, a Once-and-Future Publisher

New publisher spins off from Penguin. Plans to publish twenty books a year to start. See article here:

<https://tinyurl.com/y77uzx3n>.

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Read My Blog

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

My blog offers tips for writers, personal pet peeves, observations, memories, and all sorts of things. To read about the unusual way I came to be mother to a dear parakeet that has since flown over the rainbow bridge, go to

<https://www.zebraeditor.com/blog/the-story-of-bruce-bird/>

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The New York Times National Desk asked state poets laureate for some words of gratitude. We got a blizzard of lovely poetry in response. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/12/02/insider/poet-laureate-thanksgiving.html>

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Four: Contests, Agents, and Markets

EVENT Poetry and Prose

Fiction: We look for compelling characters, plots that surprise us, narratives that move us, stories that have something new to say. Due to a substantial backlog, we will not be open for general fiction submissions until further notice (most likely December 2020).

Poetry: We love poems that are lyrical without being overwrought, and profound without being pretentious. We look for honesty of emotion, and images that arrest us. Due to a substantial backlog, we will not be open for general poetry submissions until further notice (most likely August 2021).

Nonfiction: The creative non-fiction we publish mainly comes through our annual Non-Fiction Contest (October 15 deadline) due to limited page space. We look for real-life experiences told as riveting narratives with distinct voices. We publish essays that feel artful and true.

Your best bet at getting your work published in EVENT? Reading some of our issues. Find the current issue at Chapters/Indigo, libraries or local newsstands, subscriptions, or single issues in print or digital formats can also be purchased online or through our office.

How to Submit

EVENT accepts general, unsolicited submissions by Submittable only. There is no fee to submit. We encourage writers from diverse backgrounds and experience levels to send their work to EVENT. We generally have two open submissions periods during the months of August-September and December-January. Please note that submissions for fiction and poetry are currently closed as we catch up on a backlog. We're reading as fast as we can! Mailed submissions are no longer being processed or returned. We do not accept email submissions. Click here to submit: <https://eventmagazine.submittable.com/submit>.

The Malahat Review

The Malahat Review reads all year. To emphasize the contemporary nature of the writing it publishes, The Malahat Review seldom accepts work with more than one issue's delay in publication.

The best way to know what we are looking for is to order an issue from our website: \$14.95 in Canada (including shipping and postage), \$16.95 for U.S. orders, and \$17.95 for those from elsewhere. You can also subscribe to The Malahat Review.

Regular submission guidelines here: http://www.malahatreview.ca/submission_guidelines.html#general

Please note that the regular submission guidelines differ from each of our contest guidelines. If you're looking to submit your writing to one of our contests, please visit our contest information page.

Deadlines for contests: Long Poem Prize, Feb 1, 2021
Far Horizons Award for Short Fiction, May 1, 2021
Constance Rooke Creative Nonfiction Prize Aug 1, 2021

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Horizons  
<https://tinyurl.com/yamf78j7>

Horizons is published by Presbyterian Women, Inc. for the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A)  
Horizons welcomes articles, stories and poems of varying themes and topics (see list of upcoming themes and manuscript deadlines)

- Articles/stories should be between 600 and 1,800 words.
- Submissions should be double-spaced and printed on white paper.
- Submissions may be accompanied by a photograph, illustration, or a suggestion for design.
- Writers should include: name, address, day and evening telephone numbers, and social security number. Fax and email are helpful, if available.
- Should Horizons be unable to use your submission, your manuscript will not be returned.
- Horizons offers an honorarium of no less than \$50 per page printed in the magazine. The amount will vary depending on time and research required for writing the article.)

Writers can mail, email, or fax their article to Horizons.

Mailing address: PW Assistant Editor, 100 Witherspoon St., Louisville, KY, 40202-1396  
Email: [yvonne.hileman@pcusa.org](mailto:yvonne.hileman@pcusa.org)  
Fax: 502/569-8026

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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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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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