

In This Issue

One: From the Editor's Desk: Reality TV May Kill Me

Two: Ask the Book Doctor—About Editorial Opinions

Three: Subjects of Interest to Writers

Four: Contests, Agents, and Markets

The Writers Network News

No Rules; Just Write!

Editor: Bobbie Christmas

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Writer's Quote of the Month

A word is not a crystal, transparent and unchanged; it is the skin of a living thought and may vary greatly in color and content according to the circumstances and the time in which it is used. —Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr., jurist (1841-1935)

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ONE: From the Editor's Desk—Reality TV May Kill Me

Dear Fellow Writers:

The trend toward reality TV may be the death of me, metaphorically speaking. First of all, let's be realistic: there's nothing real about reality TV. Producers intervene in the lives of people willing to broadcast their daily doings, and those producers encourage participants to create scenes, situations, and setups that lure viewers in. I originally watched some of the Real Housewives shows, but soon realized that every show featured screaming arguments over the stupidest things imaginable. Sometimes the arguments got so heated that people threw things—often drinks in someone's face—but sometimes more dangerous things, like bottles and even tables.

What were the arguments about? Almost always about something someone said to someone else. "Mary told me that Elizabeth said you're a (fill in the blank with anything at all)." An argument always ensued and escalated into a full brawl.

The worst was the time one person said another person gave the third person "the evil eye." The third person confronted the person who allegedly gave her the "evil eye," but the person denied it. Screaming battles followed, as usual. Well, folks, the evil eye is one that is protective. It's a good thing. Those idiotic folks were arguing over something that isn't even bad. What the first person actually meant, though, was that someone gave another person "the stink eye," which is a look expressing annoyance, resentment, or disapproval and is much different from the evil eye, but no one in the whole show ever noticed the error or made a correction.

In my entire (real) life I have never seen an argument break out among my friends about anything anyone ever said. I've never witnessed a disagreement turn into things being thrown. Oh, I might add that alcohol is almost always involved on TV, and my friends don't drink much if at all. Maybe that's the difference. Or maybe my friends don't have producers egging them on to make "good" TV.

I soon stopped watching the shows that featured women with fake boobs, fake eyelashes, and heavy makeup screaming at each other. Instead I watch shows that involve people looking for love. Those folks don't scream at each other or wear quite as much makeup. They speak naturally, though, which means I hear all kinds of egregious errors in English. If the fights didn't kill me, the bad English will.

Most heard on romance shows: I's. It goes like this: "She's getting in the way of Robert's and I's relationship." What? Kill me now. "Me and" is another horrible error that makes my heart want to stop beating. "Me and Robert went shopping." You wouldn't say "Me went shopping; why would you say "Me and (anyone else)" did anything? It's supposed to be "Robert and I went shopping." Please, for heaven's sake!

"Feels" has taken on a new meaning as well. No longer do people have feelings on TV, they have feels. Ugh.

Last night I cringed when someone said, "I have a pit in my stomach." No, you stupid person, the idiom is "I have a feeling in the pit of my stomach." Leave the pits to peaches, please.

Maybe I should watch reruns of old shows, when English was scripted and spoken correctly. Have I turned into an old curmudgeon when it comes to the English language?

Uh-oh. Maybe I've always been one.

Do you hear things on TV that make you cringe? Share them with me.

Yours in writing,
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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—About Editorial Opinions

By Bobbie Christmas

Q: I have been steadily working on my corrections so I might start the search for an agent; however, when I asked my brother, who used the same editing services, to read through it, he ended up marking numerous areas that needed correction based on what his editor advised. I am confused. The editor for his manuscript recommends one thing, while mine never mentions it. I know the service I used employs many editors, and all editors have their own style. Should I just stick to what the editor who revised my writing corrected, or should I change the things his advisor says are wrong? If it's the latter, it almost seems like my book needs to be completely edited again.

A: Among editors we have an expression, "Ten editors, ten opinions." Every person who reads a manuscript will have a different opinion of what would improve it. When you use an independent editor—one that does not work for a publisher that bought the rights to your book—you have the right to agree or disagree with your editor. In the end the book and the decisions about it should be yours, until a publisher makes an absolute demand.

Some suggested changes may not refer to something that is wrong, but a missed opportunity to make the writing stronger. If it's not wrong, you don't necessarily need to change it, but consider whether you want to change it.

Gather all the opinions that you can and then make your decisions from your gut, deciding what is best for you and for your manuscript. If a complete rewrite seems out of the question to you, then don't do it—yet. You can always make that decision later, if the manuscript meets with too much rejection.

Q: Would the paragraph below be stronger if I changed the gerunds to past-tense verbs? The change sounds awkward to me and wouldn't give the situation the frantic nature I'm going for.

We huddled beneath the basement stairs and held each other more tightly with the sound of each new noise. Glass breaking. Objects crashing. Wood beams splitting. Furniture colliding. For the first time I realized we were in the middle of a tornado.

A: On the good side, sometimes intentional repetition (of the "-ing" sound, in this case) adds a poetic touch to a paragraph. For the purposes of discussing gerunds and strong writing, however, I'll ignore that potential, to make my point about how to make the paragraph stronger. The example has many sentence fragments (crashing, breaking, splitting, and colliding are not verbs). In addition, it mentions things a little out of order ("each new sound" appears before the sounds). To eliminate extra words, delete weak adverbs, keep the action tight, put things in better order, and use active verbs, the paragraph would be stronger written this way:

We huddled beneath the basement stairs. All around us, glass broke. Objects crashed. Wood beams split. Furniture collided. With each new noise, we held each other tighter. I realized we were in the middle of a tornado.

I can see that the sentence fragments gave the situation a frantic nature, but my suggested rewrite does the same thing, while it avoids sentence fragments.

Alas, ask ten editors, and you'll get ten opinions. In addition, it is not the job of an editor to rewrite. I recast the example

for only one purpose, to illustrate what I mean about tight, strong writing in correct order. It's your paragraph, so you can decide how you would like it to be.

Bobbie Christmas is a book editor, author of *Write In Style: Use Your Computer to Improve Your Writing*, and owner of Zebra Communications. She 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/>.

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: Of Interest to Writers

Members Write . . .

Marcia West wrote, "I'm writing to respond to your question, 'Have you ever disagreed with a professional editor?' I've had a major disagreement with a Christian publisher who had major doctrinal differences with my writing. He dared to refuse to publish anything that referenced Ignatian spirituality or the teachings of Norman Vincent Peale and Robert Schuller. All these were major influences for me in my spiritual growth. I couldn't believe he could be so narrow minded. After pondering his comments, I concluded that every publisher has a right to choose specifics of what they're looking for. I need to decide whether I am not a fit for this publisher or to resubmit work that meets his criteria."

I responded that publishers have specific likes and dislikes, and they have the right to refuse to publish things they don't agree with.

Marcia has a tough decision to make. Does anyone have other suggestions, options, or personal experiences?

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Steve Moore wrote, "Responding to your call for lessons learned in this complex writing business, I offer the following advice from a mongrel author (both traditionally and self-published):

"Authors should explore what's available to find what works for them. I first went down the agent/publisher rathole, learning about rejection (> 1,000); tried the old-style PODs (Xlibris, Infinity), spinning my wheels for a while; progressed to e-books; tried two small presses; and have returned exclusively to e-books.

"Authors should take charge in the publishing process as much as possible, but avoid 100% DIY. Most authors aren't objective editors, cover artists, book formatters, or publicists; there are pros who are (finding them is sometimes difficult, part of the exploration process). I pay for editing and book-launch marketing, as well as cover art and formatting for "self-published" e-books.

I'm not a bad editor, so I make sure my editors receive the best MS I can create to make their work easier, but those extra sets of eyes are valuable (actually two sets when it comes to traditionally published works). (I also use beta-readers.) Errors still occur in editing and proofing, of course, but they're minimized.

"Authors should 'go wide.' They don't have to boycott Amazon like I do now, but they shouldn't be exclusive with that retail giant either. Even my traditional publishers use Smashwords, for example, and, for self-publishing, I use both Smashwords and Draft2Digital. The reason is simple and reflects that old marketing advice: one maximizes sales by displaying products at as many retail sites as possible. Vainglorious Amazon thinks they're the entire universe of publishing, so they distribute to no one. Both Smashwords and Draft2Digital distribute to many affiliated retailers and library and lending services.

"I could elaborate (as I do in my little course *Writing Fiction*), but those points represent my basic advice developed over twenty years of being serious about my storytelling, for what they're worth."

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Debra J. Mosely announced the completion of her journal that helps folks remember to maintain an attitude of gratitude. Having an attitude of gratitude each day can help your mental, spiritual, and physical well-being. See <https://www.amazon.com/Gratitude-Journal-Debra-J-Mosely/dp/1953956017>.

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Bobbie's Blog

Newest blog post: "At What Point Can You Call Yourself a Writer?"

See <https://www.zebraeditor.com/blog/at-what-point-can-you-call-yourself-a-writer/>.

For other writing tips and some personal experiences, access the *Write In Style* blog here:  
<https://www.zebraeditor.com/blog/>

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June is National Pride Month

Pride Month is celebrated every June as a tribute to those who were involved in the Stonewall Riots in New York. "We're getting ready to dust off our rainbow flags, douse ourselves in glitter, and go join in the fun." With parades, festivals, and concerts going on across the globe, there's always some way for you to get involved, as well as learn some important social history along the way. For freelance writers it's a good time to collect stories, take colorful photos, and write

heartwarming articles about local LGBTQ+ folks and events and sell those stories to local and national periodicals.

You don't need to identify as LGBTQ+ to attend a pride march and be a supporter. Everyone is welcome to show their support for gay rights and equality for all, so check out what's happening in your community and join in the fun.

I'm proud of my nieces, nephews, and cousins who identify with the LGBTQ+ community. I love and support them in every way.

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Be My Facebook Friend

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

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. What is the CMOS ruling on the following: "esports" or "eSports"? Are esports games (e.g., Call of Duty: Warzone) italicized or put in quotes? Or neither?

For the detailed and interesting 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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Chicago Style Cheat Sheet

Although the information is not completely up to date (another edition has been issued since this information was collected), it goes a long way toward explaining some of the details of Chicago style. See <https://tinyurl.com/nh5362s2>

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FOUR: Contests, Agents, and Markets

Browne & Miller Literary Associates

Browne & Miller Literary Associates is Chicago's leading literary agency and specializes in full-service representation of a select clientele. Our taste is very eclectic and we value exceptional writing and storytelling above all else. We have represented thousands of books over the past 40+ years—fiction and nonfiction—and our clients include several New York Times bestselling authors and numerous prize- and award-winning writers. Browne & Miller Literary Associates represents projects for the adult commercial book markets. Authors seeking representation by Danielle Egan-Miller may direct their queries to [mail@browneandmiller.com](mailto:mail@browneandmiller.com).

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In 1992, Candlewick Press opened its doors as an independent children’s publisher, and we remain the world’s leading creatively led independent publisher of books and content for children today.

Publishes hardcover and trade paperback originals, and reprints. “Candlewick Press publishes high-quality, illustrated children's books for ages infant through young adult. We are a truly child-centered publisher.” Publishes 200 titles/year. 5% of books from first-time authors. Pays authors royalty of 2½-10% based on retail price. Offers advance. Accepts simultaneous submissions. “We currently do not accept unsolicited editorial queries or submissions. If you are an author or illustrator and would like us to consider your work, please read our submissions policy online to learn more.

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