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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

“We have defined a story as a narrative of events arranged in their time-sequence. A plot is also a narrative of events, the emphasis falling on causality. 'The king died and then the queen died' is a story. 'The king died, and then the queen died of grief' is a plot. The time-sequence is preserved, but the sense of causality overshadows it.... If it is in a story we say 'and then?' If it is in a plot we ask 'why?'" -E. M. Forster, *Aspects of the Novel*

Edward Morgan Forster was an English fiction writer, essayist, and librettist. Many of his novels examine class difference and hypocrisy, including *A ROOM WITH A VIEW*, *HOWARDS END*, and *A PASSAGE TO INDIA*. *A PASSAGE TO INDIA* brought him his greatest success.

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One: From the Editor's Desk: Mental Health

Dear Fellow Writers:

As I write this newsletter, a few leaves are turning brown and falling to the ground, the weather has cooled a little in Georgia, and autumn is officially here. Fall has never been my favorite season. My joy often deserts me during this time of the year, because I've experienced some of my biggest losses in autumn. Before the season even began this year I was hit with another couple of losses and other bad news. I won't go into it or I'll get sad again, but my point is that many of us are affected by changes in the weather, seasonal changes, changes in our health, and losses in our lives.

Thankfully in the last year or two I've seen a good trend toward recognizing and destigmatizing mental illness. During this pandemic as well as when we are at our lowest times, some of us find that getting to a counselor's office is too daunting, so I'm happy to see the volume of therapists who now offer online visits.

Many writers and other creative people tend to be emotional. Those of us who have sensitive swings would do well to get help from counselors, therapists, and doctors. I'm thankful that my only dip into true depression happened more than twenty years ago. Therapy and short-term medication got me through my darkest time. I now know the difference between temporary sadness and deep depression. I also know what to do in the case of either.

If you ever feel unable to face the day for more than a few days in a row, I encourage you to see your physician first. Once when I thought I was dipping into depression again, my doctor's tests revealed that my thyroid levels were low. Adding thyroid medication to my daily routine soon improved my physical and mental status. Crisis averted.

We writers and editors tend to be sedentary, whereas physical activity is vital to our physical and mental health. I don't love to exercise, so the pandemic fed into my wish to spend more time in a chair than on my feet. I knew something had to change, so I rejoined the gym and my bowling league as soon as I was fully vaccinated, and now I've also had my booster shot. Now I swim and perform water aerobics three days a week and bowl two days a week. My body needs the exercise, and my mind gains benefits as well.

As the days grow shorter and we get less mood-elevating sunlight, we must be aware that fall and winter can be difficult times for some of us. To be good writers we must maintain the right attitude and do our best to maintain our health. What are you doing to take care of yourself? If you have any help or suggestions for fellow writers, let me know. I'll share your ideas with all 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: Show Versus Tell and Dialogue

By Bobbie Christmas

Q: Which is more important when writing a story, dialogue or descriptions?

A: Without a doubt dialogue is more vital to a story than descriptions. I've read stories composed only of dialogue and even written one or two. The stories worked because the dialogue showed the conflict, moved the story forward, and resolved the plot.

Descriptions tell, while dialogue shows, and one of the first tenets of good creative writing is to show, rather than tell. Although some folks may disagree, I've heard it said in several creative writing courses that a good novel is about 70 percent dialogue.

Q: My main character gives a powerful political speech to a room full of his constituents. Saying he shouted into a microphone seems too aggressive, but saying he spoke loudly seems too plain and lazy. Any ideas?

A: My recommendation is to show, rather than tell. When narrative says that a character shouted or even spoke loudly, it tells, rather than shows. Many times when we're tempted to use an adverb (such as "loudly"), we are telling, rather than showing. Consider instead showing what the character does during the speech. Does he lean into the microphone and make his voice boom? Does she slam a fist on the lectern? Does he step back and stomp his foot? Does she raise both fists in the air? The strongest writing shows readers how a character acts, rather than tells how a character acts.

Q: In dialogue, or in narrative too, for that matter, what do you call the place of business where you take your clothes to be dry cleaned? A dry cleaner? A dry cleaners? A dry cleaner's?

A: The answer may depend on the sentence in which it appears, but in general I would say "dry cleaners." "I'm taking these clothes to the dry cleaners."

Q: How much useless banter should there be before you get to the story? For example, if my parents come over in my novel, how much do I chat with them about the car, my daily medications, or my work before I ask them a question about something I need help with?

A: The job of a novelist is to entertain readers and keep them enthralled with a story. For that reason banter is good when it reveals information important to the plot or intrigues and piques their interest. If the car, medication, and work have nothing to do with the plot, though, then don't address those things in dialogue. Stick to vital dialogue, keep the story moving forward, and keep readers wanting to know more.

Q: Can a writer be overly descriptive?

A: Yes. The classics often had long descriptions, but many of those writers were paid by the word. While contemporary literary works still may have long descriptions, mainstream novels tend to keep the telling down to minimum. Descriptions tell, rather than show. Today's readers want a story; they don't care as much about the setting or what characters look like or wear. Keep the description to a minimum and concentrate instead on action and dialogue.

When I give presentations I often explain the difference between literary novels and mainstream novels this way: Literary novels may win awards, but people buy mainstream novels.

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

Three: Subjects of interest to writers

MEMBERS WRITE

Ken Slutsky sent me a copy of his book, BETTER GOVERNMENT THROUGH BETTER HIRING, recently released. I edited the manuscript, and I was impressed with the message. It offers strong suggestions for how to improve our government by using systems Ken used running his personnel company. The book doesn't lean one way or the other in politics; it simply offers some wise alternatives. It's available on Amazon, and I highly recommend it.

Janet Hogan Chapman sent me what I consider a love letter in response to last month's newsletter that reported that writers need to practice 10,000 hours to perfect our skills. She wrote, "I just had my fourth novel released this past spring. My readers say it's my best yet, and I agree. Each one has improved many times over. Sometimes I think I should go back and rewrite the first three. Does anyone ever do that? Would it be worthwhile for the time and effort?"

"By the way, we met briefly at an Atlanta Writers Club event. I recommend your newsletter and publications to all the writers I know. PURGE YOUR PROSE OF PROBLEMS sits right beside my desktop computer for quick reference. You are the go-to expert for any questions I have. Thank you for sharing your expertise."

Janet has authored the following books: MADAM MAY, AFTER MADAM MAY, DOROTHY MAY, MOTHERLOVE, and THIS TEACHER TALKS.

Cookie Levine sent me a copy of her new book, WALKING WITH SADIE, which I had the honor of editing. It's a great gift book for anyone who lives in Georgia, likes dogs, or simply enjoys upbeat, heartwarming stories. It's available on Amazon.

Creative Writing Tip: As I Said/Like I Said/As Stated Earlier/As Mentioned Before

Granted I'm dealing with a personal pet peeve, but I dislike hearing people say, "Like I said" or "as I said," plus I don't like to read, "As stated earlier." I want to ask, "If you've already said something, why repeat it? In addition, if you have decided to repeat it, why would you admit you're repeating it?" When we speak we sometimes repeat things, but when write we must delete repetition to avoid boring readers.

Although in some cases repetition adds clarity, stating that it is repeated information wastes time. Simply say what you have to say.

Uncreative: As I mentioned before, I recommend using hand cream before going to bed.
Better: I recommend using hand cream before going to bed.

(Excerpt from PURGE YOUR PROSE OF PROBLEMS, a book doctor's desk reference, available only at ZebraEditor.com.)

Writers Beware

From the Florida Writers Association website:
<https://tinyurl.com/24jfaery>

In addition, another writer posted that eWriter Solutions, which uses freelance writers, has not paid her for her work, so beware!

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/>

2022 Sunshine State Book Festival

The annual Gainesville, Florida, book festival is produced by the Writers Alliance of Gainesville (WAG), a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization of writers. Nonfiction and fiction authors of all genres are invited to participate. Additional details, the author registration form, and a tour of previous festivals are available at www.sunshinestatebookfestival.com.

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

Follow Zebra Communications on Facebook for news for writers, writing-related cartoons, immediate updates, and other good stuff. <https://tinyurl.com/ydyn3pcu>.

CMOS ONLINE Q&A

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

Q. "The majority of samples were/was extracted from regular biopsy procedures." I think I should use "was," but "were"

sounds better to the ear. What is the correct way?

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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Manuslip Time: Avoid things such as impossibly long roofs

Culled from a novel I edited, here's another of what I call "manuslips," sentences that don't say what they mean:

From the window in her room she could see the radiant crystal-blue ocean, the immense blue sky peppered with cotton-ball clouds, and the green hills covered with pink and white houses with red roofs all the way down to the beachfront.

[As written the red roofs reached all the way down the beachfront.]

Potential correction: From the window in her room she could see the radiant crystal-blue ocean, the immense blue sky peppered with cotton-ball clouds, and the green hills covered all the way down to the beachfront with pink and white houses with red roofs.

Even better correction, to reduce the wordiness, overly long sentence, and confusion: From the window in her room she saw the crystal-blue ocean, the blue sky peppered with cotton-ball clouds, and the green hills. Pink and white houses with red roofs covered the hills all the way down to the beachfront.

You can probably come up with an even better solution. Feel free to send me your suggestions.

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Four: Contests, Agents, and Markets

Freelance Opportunity for Journalists

Do you want to be your own boss? Have you lived in your town for several years? Are you up to date on what's happening in your community? If you're a talented journalist who answered "yes" to any of these questions, then you are the ideal candidate for an independent publisher at Patch Labs.

If you're not sold yet, take it from someone who is already using Patch Labs. "It can be scary to start your own business," says Rick Amburgey of Warren County Online News. "This platform has allowed me to take a dream to a reality. It allows me to do what I love and do well: create content for my readers."

For more information see <https://tinyurl.com/ynwn86bm>

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Bullitt Publishing Launches New Imprint

We are looking for fresh, new talent with crisp, modern storylines to launch our new contemporary romance imprint, Tempo Romance.

Tempo's stories can be sweet or sassy, serious or hysterically funny as long as they tell a story that today's woman can relate to.

The Tempo romance is approximately 70,000 words with an upbeat storyline and no graphic sex scenes. See Submission Guidelines for information on how to submit your manuscript for consideration.

Tempo Romance is published utilizing Print on Demand and eBook. See full guidelines here:

<https://bullittpublishing.com/submission-guidelines.html>

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ParanorMalice Press

ParanorMalice Press publishes paranormal stories that include a touch (or a lot) of malice.

All novel submissions must be a minimum of 65,000 words, include a paranormal element in mystery, suspense, cozy,

thriller, or horror genres. However, we will look at exceptional shorter novellas.

We are NOT looking for children's books, cookbooks, memoirs, or graphic novels.

We are looking for well-written stories, mysteries, suspense, horror, with a supernatural twist. They can be dark, serious, or humorous, but must catch our attention in the first three pages. When writing your synopsis, please do not send a back-cover blurb. Tell us what your story is about and how it ends.

For full submission guidelines, see
<https://paranormalice.fictionandart.com/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 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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