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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

“The way you define yourself as a writer is that you write every time you have a free minute. If you didn't behave that way you would never do anything.” —John Irving (1942 - )

John Winslow Irving is an American-Canadian novelist and screenwriter. Irving achieved critical and popular acclaim after the international success of THE WORLD ACCORDING TO GARP in 1978. Many of Irving's novels, including THE CIDER HOUSE RULES, A PRAYER FOR OWEN MEANY, and A WIDOW FOR ONE YEAR, have been bestsellers. Many have been turned into movies.

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One: From the Editor's Desk: Skin Cancer

Dear Fellow Writers:

I'll bet the thought of skin cancer doesn't instill excitement in you. It didn't instill excitement in me either, especially when I heard the results of my recent biopsy. Folks, I've had brown patches on my face for years. Several dermatologists have removed them at various times and declared them merely keratoses, nothing to be concerned about. They popped up in new places sometimes, but they kept returning on one place in particular. Over the years I've them removed four times, at least, and maybe more. My family members so often had such things removed from our faces and necks that my nephew called it "getting pruned."

Because of the pandemic, however, I have avoided going to doctors. The marks on my face didn't bother me, so why bother a doctor?

When two people at two different times asked me what that "thing" was on my face, though, I grabbed a magnifying mirror and examined the dark mark. This time it looked more ominous than usual. I called the dermatologist. It took a week to get an appointment and two weeks to get the biopsy results. My surgery was scheduled for three weeks later. On October 1 the surgeon sliced from my lower eyelid to the bottom of my cheek to remove all the cancerous places. I left the office with a long bandage that covered much of one side of my face. The surgical trauma left my eye so swollen that I could barely see out of it. In addition to the pain, swelling, and bruising, having to remove the bandage each day, treat the wound, and re-bandage it was extremely difficult, because one end of the wound reached so close to my eye.

Today the bandages are off, the stiches have been removed, and the swelling has mostly gone down. I'm now allowed to

use scar therapy gel to try to reduce the scarring. Most importantly, I've learned my lesson. I won't delay seeing my dermatologist again.

I hope you will all get checked for skin cancer regularly too. Since my diagnosis quite a few of my friends and family members have said they too have had skin cancers removed. I had no idea skin cancer was so prevalent.

Last month I touched on how we writers must take good care of our mental health. This month I have to say to watch out for our physical health as well. We have ideas that we must get down on paper, and we need to avoid having to deal with mental or physical pain. Such things get in the way of our ability to be creative. It's easy to let things slide, but we can't take our health for granted.

After writing last month's editorial about mental health, I found new information. The Federal Communications Commission adopted 988 as a new three-digit number to be used nationwide to reach the National Suicide Prevention and Mental Health Crisis Line. The change in the hotline number doesn't take place until July 16, 2022. Until then continue to dial 1-800-273-TALK to reach the national crisis hotline. Please don't hesitate to call that number when you need someone to hear you.

Yours in writing,  
Bobbie Christmas [Bobbie@zebraeditor.com](mailto:Bobbie@zebraeditor.com) or [bzebra@aol.com](mailto: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: About Purple Prose

By Bobbie Christmas

Q: My editor marked some passages in my literary novel and labeled them "purple prose." I prefer to write creative passages and descriptions and often spurn traditional descriptions. By noting some of my creative passages as purple prose, what is my editor saying?

A: The difference between purple prose and flowery, poetic, or literary prose may sometimes be difficult for the writer to spot, but trust me, the difference is huge.

Well-written literary passages evoke images or emotions. Purple prose can evoke confusion or even laughter.

Genre fiction sometimes follows a formula, but literary fiction is more serious. The overall tone of literary fiction is introspective and the story is character driven rather than plot driven, which allows for creative passages here and there. Sometimes writers go overboard in trying to add a dramatic effect, though, and instead of writing literary prose, they write purple prose.

Whereas literary prose can be flowery, purple prose incorporates a far-fetched idea, often combined with overwriting. Purple prose conveys concepts that readers cannot visualize, and rather than adding dramatic effect, those concepts can come off as being more like a cartoon than high art.

We writers may be able to spot purple prose in the work of other writers, but we rarely see it in our own work. A good editor will point out or delete purple prose, though.

What do I mean by saying that purple prose combines overwriting with a far-fetched idea? Below are a few passages I've lifted from manuscripts I've edited. I've used pronouns rather than character names, to hide the identity of the unintentionally guilty writers. See if you agree with me that the following passages were overwritten and/or conveyed far-fetched ideas and therefore qualified as purple prose:

The autobiography drips with famous names that roll off the tongue like bacon grease sliding down the slippery sunny-side-up slope of a fried egg.

Her even tone caused the anxiety in his heart to swell and dominate his guilt.

His reaction made the bare bones truth a walking, breathing dragon that burned a hole in their friendship.

Her smile served like armor, protecting me from the stress and illness beyond her protection.

Confusion slipped across her features.

Her hatred was enough to boil sixteen pumpkins and throw the leftover skins into a billowing campfire of flames.

Acute disbelief skimmed the far edge of horror.

She said the words that stamped the cruel edge of reality over the fragile fiction of his life.

His resolve toppled like a sandcastle built too close to the shore; the incoming tide, with its crashing waves, releasing a

flood of raw emotions.

Splendors avoid this distant isle.

Their rhythm, timed by centuries of experience, serves as a lifeline for their future.

A flicker of hope formed in the sorrow of her heart.

In conclusion, purple prose passages are often the very ones we writers labored over, thinking we were creating something fresh and priceless. We love those passages and think we gave birth to something new, which is the reason we editors say, "Kill your babies." When you think you have delivered a passage that someone else might consider purple prose, it's time to ask an editor or hit the Delete button on your computer.

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](mailto:Bobbie@ZebraEditor.com) or [BZebra@aol.com](mailto:BZebra@aol.com). Read Bobbie's Zebra Communications blog at [ZebraEditor.com/blog/](http://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>.  
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Three: Subjects of interest to writers

#### MEMBERS WRITE

One of our subscribers who has produced quite a few books reports, "Appreciated your recent From the Editor about mental health. I've been in therapy and on psychotropic meds almost all my life, diagnosed with bi-polar type 2."

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Tara Dillard remarks, "I've enjoyed your newsletter for years; have passed it forward many times. Great news, your exercise and mental health." She adds, "Serotonin and dopamine are from the gut; don't neglect your gut biome" and reminds us to "be conscious of what we eat, the types of oils, nothing processed, and real organic in real soils."

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Jim Rathbone writes, "Just finished my thirteenth novel thanks to you."  
Wow! Way to go, Jim.

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#### Creative Writing Tip: Adjective Strings.

Strong writing avoids stringing adjectives together. The slender, tanned, henna-haired, twenty-two-year-old junior editor, for example, would be way too many adjectives strung together. One or two is enough per sentence. One is better than two. The best writing reveals descriptions a little at a time, rather than all in one sentence or one paragraph. Editors often mark adjective strings as follows: 1 + 2 = 1/2 or 1 + 2 + 3 = 0, because when adjectives are strung together, the effect diminishes.

Writers who are intent on using adjective strings should know that adjectives should appear in the following order: opinion, size, age, shape, color, origin, material, purpose. Incorrect: The blue, large old attractive porcelain vase stood on the shelf. Correct: The attractive large old blue porcelain vase stood on the shelf.

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

#### ~~~~~ Errors in Your Published Book? Maybe Not.

Shop Talk from the Chicago Manual of Style blog tells you what to say when friends say you made errors in your book. Note it also recommends that you use an editor, but read all the other interesting comebacks and facts here: <https://tinyurl.com/4285yvxt>

#### ~~~~~ 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/>

#### ~~~~~ Famous Rejection Slip

Stephen King received the following note on a rejection slip: "2nd draft = 10% of 1st draft."

Writers, is your second draft considerably shorter than your first draft? The second draft (and future drafts) should be tighter than the one before, after you have deleted all the superfluous chapters, scenes, phrases, and words.

#### ~~~~~ Please Be My Friend on Facebook

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>.

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CMOS ONLINE Q&A

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

Q. Is a comma used after “But” or “And” at the beginning of a sentence?

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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Editing Tip

When You Write Books

Book manuscripts, query letters, and synopses should follow the style set out in THE CHICAGO MANUAL OF STYLE, and the seventeenth edition states that numbers one to one hundred be spelled out. The seven children collected one hundred dollars for charity.

Also spell out whole numbers one through one hundred when followed by hundred, thousand, or hundred thousand. I’ll never forget the three thousand customers who frequented my store. Some 2,500 more came in only once or twice.

Always spell out numbers at the beginning of a sentence. Four thousand people attended the rally.

Approximate numbers above one hundred are also written out, whereas exact ones are in numbers. We spent a thousand dollars on airfare, but only \$242.50 on food for the trip.

Dates are always in numerals. We wanted to find an area in America that was still living in the 1960s, so we left town on October 16, 2006, to begin our search.

Numerals in dialogue, with the exception of dates, are usually spelled out. “I’ll meet you at six o’clock.”

Compound numerals call for hyphens. Forty-two people voted. Three hundred fifty-five signs led to the event. Three-fourths of the members were present.

Avoid informal use of dates in narrative. Instead of William King was born in ‘02, write out the whole year. William King was born in 1902.

Numbers with decimal points can be used as numbers in narrative, but not in dialogue. The average age of dogs is 12.1 years. Tom said, “The average age of dogs is twelve point one years.”

When You Write Essays or Articles

Ask the editor for the style guide it follows, because styles differ. Some publications may follow AP Style, which has a different set of rules for how to use numerals.

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Nobel Prize in Literature

Abdulrazak Gurnah won the 2021 Nobel Prize in literature, announced the Swedish academy. The judges commended “his uncompromising and compassionate penetration of the effects of colonialism and the fate of the refugee in the gulf between cultures and continents.”

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Five-time-award-winning WRITE IN STYLE leaves grammar to the grammarians. Instead it uses humor and expertise to show writers how to strengthen their writing style and create a fresh voice. Available as an e-book or printed.

Have you removed all the superfluous words in your manuscript? This book tells you what to look for and change or delete. Watch all your writing improve with tips from this brilliant book on creative writing.

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Four: Contests, Agents, and Markets

Piecework Magazine

<https://tinyurl.com/n86t5f62>

Join us as we celebrate the historic needlework created to adorn and enliven daily life. Send PieceWork your article and project proposals for the Summer 2022 issue.

We are looking for:

Feature articles—Tell us more about the history of needlework—stories, profiles, and biographies.

Historical and historically inspired projects—instructions using bobbin lace, tatting, embroidery, knitting, crochet, or other needlework techniques, all made by hand.

How-to articles—tell us how a historical needlework technique is done.

Have an idea that doesn't fit our theme? Send that to us, too! We may be able to use it in an upcoming issue.

We are also always looking for content for our website. If you have an idea for a shorter piece, about 300 to 500 words, please submit your proposal to us.

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Berrett-Koehler Blog

Berrett-Koehler is an independent publisher with the mission of connecting people and ideas to create a world that works for all. To write a guest post for its blog, see the following guidelines: <https://tinyurl.com/szsw7dhc>

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Rachel Phares, acquisitions manager and editor  
Rachel@BenBellaBookscom

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BenBella operates on a simple business philosophy:  
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Provide our authors with true partnership in every aspect of the publishing process  
Creatively and aggressively market every book we publish  
Generate significant value for our authors  
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The Writers Network News: a newsletter for writers everywhere. No Rules; Just Write!

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