

In This Issue

One: From the Editor's Desk: Down and Up

Two: Ask the Book Doctor—Writers Block

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

Thus, in a real sense, I am constantly writing autobiography, but I have to turn it into fiction in order to give it credibility.

—Katherine Paterson, *THE SPYING HEART*, 1989

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We Can't Change Your Address; You Have to Do It

If your address changes and our email to you bounces, our system automatically unsubscribes you. If you plan to change your email address, subscribe again with your new address. We cannot add you or change your address, because of our double-opt-in, no-spam policy. Please go to <https://www.zebraeditor.com/> and sign up with your new address, and do it before you stop using your old address.

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One: From the Editor's Desk: Down and Up

Dear Fellow Writers:

I've written that many folks are battling depression because of the isolation and restrictions brought on by a pandemic. While people are down, prices are going up. Will the craziness never stop?

The other day someone commented on Nextdoor.com that the local Chinese restaurant had doubled its prices. I went online and saw that indeed what used to cost \$9.50 for a dinner was now priced at \$18.00. I'm accustomed to paying \$18 or more for dinner (mostly takeout or delivery in these pandemic days), so the price didn't strike me as unreasonable, except that Chinese food used to be the least expensive casual dining available.

As a writer I've watched the ink prices for my printer go up, up, up, but I've adjusted. I don't print everything that I used to. I keep more electronic files now.

When I started my business in 1992 a ream of paper cost about \$2.50. Today a ream of paper costs between six and eight dollars. I don't use as much paper as I used to, though.

When I started my editing business in the early 1990s, we printed manuscripts and snail mailed them. I therefore also printed the detailed reports I wrote for each manuscript, many of which were forty to fifty pages long, and mailed them back with the edited manuscripts. Today much of that work is done through email and digital files, saving paper, postage, and time.

Another way I've avoided buying paper is that I reuse it. Whenever I print a draft or anything that will stay inhouse, I print it on the back of previously used paper. Even my boarding passes and things I've had to take outside the house have other printing on the back, and no one seems to mind. I started reusing paper in the 1970s, when I worked with a newspaper. Although we were a weekly newspaper, we daily received packets of press releases. Out of every stack of

news releases I used one or two in the newspaper and used the backs of all the rest to type all the stories I submitted to be published. Yes, we typed on typewriters in my journalism days, and yes, I'm a tree hugger. I also hug my pennies, which might be why I have been able to sustain myself as a writer and editor all these years with little to no outside support.

What have you been doing to keep your expenses down or to help the planet? Let me know, and I'll share your suggestions with your fellow writers.

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: Writer's Block

By Bobbie Christmas

Q: How can I unblock my mental blocks and get my creative side back?

A: This question arises often lately. I suspect more writers than ever are experiencing writer's block.

The first step might be to seek the reason for experiencing writer's block. Instead of tackling the blockage, we can then tackle the reason for it.

One cause of writer's block is depression, and the current pandemic has left many of us mildly to severely depressed. Although depression is not the only reason for writer's block, it can be one of the easiest to detect, although not the easiest to overcome. Depression often leaves us feeling unmotivated and uninterested in doing even the things we used to enjoy.

When writers become clinically depressed, medication plus therapy may be in order. If the depression is only a dip into sadness, it may be something that will pass on its own, although in times of sadness I've found immense help in support groups that dealt with whatever was bothering me at the time. Other folks may find that simply pushing themselves works for them. For example, joining a writing class or forcing themselves to sit down and write, even if it's garbage.

Sometimes a block can happen to writers when they begin to perceive writing as work. They then become resistant to work. In that case, if those folks can somehow change their mindset and see writing as a reward, a release, a joy, a privilege, or anything other than work, the block may disappear.

Regardless of the root cause of writer's block, fellow writers and I have offered suggestions in the past. I'll list a few.

Listen to good music and relax.

Read something you like.

Read something you don't like. It may motivate you to write something better.

Read poetry and let it roll around in your head for a while. Soon you'll hear poetic thoughts coming to you too.

Meditate.

Light candles.

Clean your office; soon you'll want to stop cleaning and start writing.

Set a time and be at your computer, whether you have any ideas or not, and just type. You'll produce a great deal of junk, but something may come of it too.

Read what you wrote before. Your mind will soon be working out what comes next or how to improve what you've already written.

Start with a character and let the character take over. See what that character has to say and what he or she does.

Watch a documentary about a subject that interests you. You might then want to draft an article, poem, or even a book on that subject.

Look for a writing contest and decide to enter it.

Most of these suggestions imply that you must mentally get out of your own way and let your muse take over. I wish it were easy.

All of us procrastinate when we don't want to do something, so we have to figure a way that makes us want to write. Some writers need to change their mindset, while more pragmatic writers accept the fact that writing is, in truth, work. Like any other work, they set a time to do it, a deadline by which it must be done, and get started. Ephemeral open-ended tasks are not motivational. If we can finish a project anytime we want, we tend to procrastinate. Procrastination is another form of writer's block.

Years ago the publisher of the first edition of *WRITE IN STYLE* gave me a deadline to complete the book. I had sold the book to the publisher after I had written only two chapters and the proposal. I had a deadline. All I had to do was figure out how much I had to write each day to meet that deadline. I had already listed the chapters in my proposal, so each day I looked at that list of chapters and decided what chapter I would work on that day. I didn't try to write the book from page one to the end. I jumped all around, each day working on a part that spoke to me that day. In that way I felt inspired each

day. I had a goal, and I met it. Yes, it was work, but having a deadline motivated me. I had no time for writer's block. In that case the publisher set the deadline, a goal, but we can set our own deadlines as well, and remember the adage that "A goal is nothing but a dream with a deadline."

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 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

In the last newsletter I said we writers need to cut down on our holiday obligations to make time to write. Mark Diamond responded, "Fran, Skyler, and I have also said 'no more' to this year's imminent Hanukkah. No more gifts. No more cards. No more parties. Bah! Humbug!" [Full disclosure: Fran is Mark's wife and Skyler is their talking parakeet I am honored to babysit (bird sit?) now and then.]

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Terry Wynne wrote, "Am I the only one who finds the phrase 'went missing' odd during newscasts? I would have said, 'She has been missing since Thursday' instead of 'She went missing Thursday.'"

I responded, "Interesting question, Terry, because I don't like the phrase either. To be honest I thought it was British. My search on the internet said it was Australian. I then went to the source: Merriam-Webster. There I found information I feel more certain I can trust, and the result surprised me."

Merriam-Webster says the phrase may grate on some people, but it's correct and acceptable in American and British English and has been around a long time. It is not recommended in AP style, however, which some newspapers use, so if writing for a newspaper that doesn't accept it, it's wise to avoid using it. See <https://tinyurl.com/bd3vvb> for the full article.
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#### Creative Writing Tip: Writing Natural Dialogue

Does your dialogue sound natural and authentic? When should you use contractions in dialogue?

For an easy determination, read your dialogue aloud and listen. If your written dialogue does not use contractions, does it sound too stilted? Does your written dialogue use so many contractions that it sounds dumbed down? Only you can tell how each of your characters may speak, but if you read it aloud and listen to yourself, you will know what sounds natural for your characters.

Remember, however, to avoid writing in dialect. It's difficult to write well and even more difficult for readers to read.

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

How to Mention a Real Newspaper, Book, or Song in Fiction and Nonfiction Books

<https://tinyurl.com/5hdw323f>
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Writer Beware delves into what it calls a "Very weird solicitation" from Monica Susan Main, who apparently has sent letters to many writers offering a co-author deal with Judith McNaught. Victoria Strauss does a deep dive into the intriguing story fraught with deception, fraud, and bankruptcy. <https://tinyurl.com/mphbwket>  
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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/>
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#### Avoid the Slush Pile

The pile of manuscripts that agents and publishers receive daily can be overwhelming and is often called the slush pile. Like the writer of this Writers Services blog about how to get your manuscripts noticed in the slush pile, years ago I too was an evaluator and dug through hundreds upon hundreds of submissions to a literary agency. Although this blog entry refers only to printed manuscripts and today many agents and publishers prefer electronic submissions, the information for the most part is spot on and worthy of reading. Except for the mention of paper, everything still applies today. See <https://tinyurl.com/yckcwbct>  
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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. My sister-in-law recently claimed that the card we get from the DMV that allows us to legally drive is supposed to be referred to as a “driver license” instead of a “driver’s license.” I would love to hear your input as this has been bothering me for a few weeks now!

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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Spanish Mystery Award Reveals True Mystery

Spanish mystery author Carmen Mola won the 2021 one-million-euro Premio Planeta de Novela prize for the book LA BESTIA (THE BEAST). At the awards ceremony three men showed up to receive the prize. It turned out that Carmen Mola, who poses as the female author on the cover of the book, is actually the pseudonym for three men, Agustín Martínez, Jorge Díaz, and Antonio Mercero.

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

We’ve been told to write tight, but how can we know when we’ve overwritten? In my five-time-award-winning book WRITE IN STYLE, you’ll learn how to use your computer to find and delete or rewrite words, sentences, and phrases that weaken your writing.

Five-time-award-winning WRITE IN STYLE leaves grammar to the grammarians. Instead it uses humor and expertise to show writers how to tighten and 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.

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

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Four: Contests, Agents, and Markets

Epic Wants True Stories

“Epic publishes extraordinary true stories that get noticed. More than twenty-five of our articles have been optioned by Hollywood, including Argo, which won the Academy Award for Best Picture, and Fox Film Studios has signed a first-look deal with us.” Pays \$1 to \$2 a word for stories that are between 5,000 and 6,000 words long. To submit your story, go to <https://epicmagazine.com/submissions/>.

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Boulevard

Available in print and online, Boulevard is a biannual literary magazine publishing contemporary fiction, essays, interviews, and poetry. Based in St. Louis, Missouri, the magazine is read internationally. Established in 1985.

“Boulevard strives to publish only the finest in fiction, poetry, and non-fiction. While we frequently publish writers with previous credits, we are very interested in less experienced or unpublished writers with exceptional promise. If you have practiced your craft and your work is the best it can be, send it to Boulevard.”

To get a feel for style, content, quality, and form of the work we publish try a sample issue or subscription.

Accepting submissions from November 1 to May 1. Pays up to \$300 for prose. Read submission guidelines here: <https://www.boulevardmagazine.org/guidelines>

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Journal of Experimental Fiction
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The Journal of Experimental Fiction was founded in 1986 by novelist Eckhard Gerdes in order to gain wider attention for the incredible innovative fiction writing being done at that time. JEF has been proud to be able to introduce the reading public to many fresh, original voices in the world of literature, and it continues its ongoing quest to find and introduce such material. JEF also acknowledges the great voices of innovative writing of years past and publishes essays about those voices of innovation. We publish a general fiction issue bi-annually, or thereabouts, as well as introducing new novels to the reading public, novels that most likely would find themselves locked out by the larger presses, who have no time for or interest in innovation anymore and only care about their bottom lines.

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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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