

The Writers Network News: Will You Fail or Succeed at Your Resolutions? February 2022

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The Writers Network News

No Rules; Just Write!

Editor: Bobbie Christmas

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Notes:

Some links in this newsletter are shortened with help from www.tinyurl.com, a service that converts long links into short ones.

In the past I indicated italics—such as in the use of book titles—with all capital letters, one of the acceptable ways to indicate italics in copy that doesn't support italics. I have come to think that all caps appear to be shouting, as in a text message, so I am using the alternate way to indicate italics with an underline before and after words that should be italicized.

Writer's Quote of the Month

“The pen is the tongue of the mind.” -Miguel de Cervantes

Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra was a Spanish writer widely regarded as the greatest writer in the Spanish language and one of the world's pre-eminent novelists. He is best known for his novel _Don Quixote_, a work often cited as both the first modern novel and one of the pinnacles of world literature. -Wikipedia

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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.

One: From the Editor's Desk: Will You Fail or Succeed at Your Resolutions?

Dear Fellow Writers:

I've belonged to one gym or another for dozens of years. Every January I've witnessed an influx of new folks enthusiastically signing up, showing up, and working out. We regulars, however, know the wave is temporary. By mid-February or early March the volume of attendees drops back to the original stalwart members who have gone to the gym regularly for years. I pity those who prepay for a year and then stop going after a month or two.

What happened? The newbies all made great New Year's resolutions to join a gym and work out, but statistics show that such resolutions don't last. Change is hard. Folks quickly return to their old routines.

Starting in January you probably saw an increase in ads for weight-loss programs for the same reason. On New Year's Eve many people resolve to lose weight, but by February or March they give up and return to their usual eating habits.

I bring up this point because when a new year starts, many of us resolve to write more, submit more of our work, or even just finish that novel that has been languishing on our computers. Perhaps we work on those things in January, but are we still working on them in February, March, April, and May? Usually not. Simply saying we resolve to do something doesn't make it happen.

Frustrated writers often ask me, “How can I find time to write?” That’s the problem. We have only so many hours in a day; we can’t “find” more than twenty-four hours.

What’s the difference, then, between folks who churn out a book a year and gain a huge following and those who are still looking for time to write? It’s the same difference between the regular folks at the gym and the newbies that don’t last: We “regulars” have a schedule.

I know that every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, it’s my “job” to get in the car and go to the gym at a specific time. While there I see all the other people who have also scheduled their time to go to the gym. The same holds true for prolific writers. They schedule their day to include time to write.

Newcomers, the ones with great aspirations and resolutions, must decide to go to the gym every time they go. The decision can be hard, though, when you have many other things to do or if your tummy hurts a little or your muscles are sore or you are expecting company or you want to cook a big dinner for friends or you’re feeling a little tired or if you can come up with any other reason to put off going to the gym. It’s easy to put off something that is not scheduled. When you have a doctor’s appointment you don’t break it because you want to go grocery shopping, do you? No. You have the appointment scheduled, so you go, and you shop for groceries later.

Let me clarify and reiterate I don’t decide to go to the gym each Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. No, it’s on my schedule, so I do it.

If you want to write more, don’t merely resolve to write more. Schedule it. Write in your schedule that you will write from “something o’clock” until “something o’clock” at least three days a week. Once it’s on your schedule—once it’s no longer a decision that you can easily change if something else comes up—you will actually sit down and write.

When I was in the corporate world I was schooled on the importance of scheduling each day and each task. It was one of Stephen Covey’s seven habits of effective people, and it works. Let me say it one final time: schedule your writing time instead of waiting for time to appear.

Let me know how it works for you, because I know it works.

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: He Said, She Said

By Bobbie Christmas

Q: I’ve heard conflicting information about attributions. Some places say that using “said” is the best way to attribute dialogue to characters in fiction or interviewees in nonfiction. Other sources say to avoid using “said.” What’s the scoop? Who’s right or wrong? What’s a writer to do?

A: Interestingly both views have merit. Attributing quotations keeps readers fully apprised of who says what. On the other hand, too much repetition of the same word leads to weak writing.

The issue is a creative one, not an issue of what’s right or wrong, so I have some creative suggestions.

It’s true that strong writing avoids overusing attributions, also called tags, when writing dialogue. Attributions include such words as said and asked, but they can also include stretches for other words, such as recalled, mumbled, repeated, cried, hissed, growled, remarked, replied, begged, added, answered, touted, expressed, explained, complained, grumbled, implored, shouted, countered, retorted, and such.

Strong writing, however, doesn’t stretch for new attributions, because they eventually stand out as a pattern too and are therefore best avoided. Agents, editors, and publishers call these alternate words—words used in an attempt to avoid “said or “asked”—saidisms. If you must attribute a quotation, don’t be afraid of the standard “said or” “asked,” as long as these words are not overused to the point of repetition. Readers find standard words less intrusive than overblown replacements.

I’m about to tell you ways to avoid using “said” or any saidism entirely and still clearly show who is speaking.

Attribution is rarely needed when only two characters are speaking, but only after the initial speakers are clearly defined. Conversation naturally then flows from one to the other, especially since in proper format, each speaker gets his or her own paragraph. Here’s an example:

Bryan said, “Michael, I’m tired of staying home every night.”

“What do you want to do, then?”

"Why don't we go to that old hangout where we first met?"

"I think it closed."

"Darn it. Okay, even a movie would be nice."

Notice that early in the opening I used one attribution and the other person's name, so readers know the conversation is between Bryan and Michael? I warn writers, though, not to use names in dialogue too often, because in real life we don't often call others by their names except during arguments or in group settings, such as meetings. It would be unnatural, then, to write this way:

"Michael, I'm tired of staying home every night."

"What do you want to do, then, Bryan?"

"Michael, why don't we go to that old hangout where we first met?"

"I think it closed, Bryan."

"Darn it, Michael. Okay, even a movie would be nice."

Here's my strongest suggestion for avoiding tags: Show who's speaking through action. This trick gives the reader much more information through the character's actions and reactions. When a new paragraph begins with a character doing an action, the reader knows that person is also the one talking in that paragraph. Be sure to use this action/reaction method of attribution early in the paragraph in each new scene.

Here are three potential scenes that begin with action to show who speaks:

John ran his tongue over his teeth. "I just came from the dental hygienist. Can you tell?"

Marsha cleared her throat. "I have something to tell you about the car."

"The sherry is superb." Ed dabbed his lips with the corner of a cocktail napkin.

Some writers use attribution plus action (or gerund), when only the action is needed. This practice adds words and sets up a pattern sometimes repeated throughout a manuscript. Example: "Yes," John said, pushing back his chair. Better: "Yes." John pushed back his chair.

Be sure to change up the location of the attribution, as well, to avoid patterns. For example, instead of the following scene:

Jack said, "Let's go fishing."

John said, "I'd rather slit my throat."

Jack said, "That can be arranged."

John responded, "Very funny. Can't we see a movie instead?"

Consider a rewrite such as this one:

Jack said, "Let's go fishing."

John shook his head, "I'd rather slit my throat."

"That can be arranged." Jack smiled.

"Very funny." Jack tilted his head. "Can't we see a movie instead?"

One final point. People cannot smile, cough, laugh, or blink dialogue. I have to delete such things from many manuscripts that I edit. Here are some examples: Scott smiled, "I like your new hairdo." Wrong! The correct usage would go like this: Scott smiled. "I like your new hairdo." Did you see the period after the action word "smiled?" Good.

I hope this information helps you use new ways to attribute dialogue and write strong prose.

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

Award-winning poet Jill Jennings gives her advice on a way to lose weight and save the environment at the same time. "One thing I have been doing for years is easy to implement. First I keep a selection of clean food containers in a stand-up fabric bag behind one of the seats of my car. To diet I divide the entree in half before I start eating. The to-go boxes most restaurants give out don't degrade; they pollute. This way I don't overeat, I have a safe way to take food home without polluting, and I don't throw away uneaten food. I save the restaurant the cost of a non-recyclable container and am modeling green behavior."

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Creative Writing Tip: What's Okay?

OK, O.K., or okay are all acceptable, but be consistent within the manuscript. Don't use OK in one place and then O.K. in another. By the way, ok and o.k. are not okay. My personal preference is okay, written out, because it blends in with the other words without drawing attention to itself.

(Excerpt from Purge Your Prose of Problems, a book doctor's desk reference, available only at ZebraEditor.com.)

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Words Matter Week

Words Matter Week takes place March 6 through 12 this year. In its thirteenth year, Words Matter Week is celebrated annually the first full week in March by the National Association of Independent Writers and Editors. Read more here: <https://naiwe.com/wordsmatterweek/>

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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 Scams and Bad Self-Publishing Companies

Writer's Digest addresses vanity press scams and self-publishing companies to avoid. See <https://tinyurl.com/2p834kz7>

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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. I have run across the phrase "comprised of" multiple times in a book I'm editing. Depending on context, Google Docs wants me to use "composed" or "consisting" or "comprises" or whatever fits. I know M-W says that while the phrase is not technically incorrect, it does sometimes receive scrutiny. Does CMOS have an official standpoint on its use?

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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From The Washington Post

It was around September 2020 when a Pulitzer Prize-winning author received an email from a well-known book editor asking for a copy of the writer's upcoming novel in a Word document format. The author promptly replied with the manuscript, prosecutors said.

But the person making the request wasn't the esteemed editor. It was a notorious scammer who for years fooled hundreds in the publishing industry into sending over precious unpublished manuscripts, according to an indictment.

Read the whole story here: <https://tinyurl.com/2c2b6ysw>

Also: Be sure to get your facts straight. Read this story about a million-dollar error: <https://tinyurl.com/2s45rtap>

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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

##### Insider

Insider is a website that focuses on a variety of subjects and pays freelancers \$170 or more for personal essays. Visit its website at <https://www.insider.com/> and submit essays here: <https://www.insider.com/contact>

##### ~~~~~ The Victorian Writer

Writers Victoria is an Australian not-for-profit charity that supports and advocates for writers, illustrators, editors, and literary-sector workers to be paid for the work that they do. The Victorian Writer welcomes submissions from writers in all genres. All pitches and submissions go through an editorial committee in the first instance. We publish poems (\$70), and articles of 600 words (\$100) and 1200 words (\$200) in the print edition with particular interest in the craft of writing and the writing life.

If you would like to be considered for print publication, please submit a 100-word pitch with your article idea or poem, a short author bio (and an example of your work if you haven't been published with us before) by the issue's deadline date.

##### Themes

- March – May 2022 (Autumn edition): Flicker. Submissions close: 1 January, 2022.
- June – August 2022 (Winter edition): Dusk. Submissions close: 4 February 2022.
- September – November 2022 (Spring Edition): Tapestry. Submissions close: 6 May, 2022.
- December 2022 – February 2023 (Summer Edition): Unravel. Submissions close: 5 August, 2022.

To make a submission to The Victorian Writer, go to <https://writersvictoria.submittable.com/submit>

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Winner will be announced on the first day of each month along with our new prompt. To see the prompt, go to <https://www.press53.com/53word-story-contest>

Email your 53-word story to 53wordstory@gmail.com by the 15th day of the month.

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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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With the exception of Zebra Communications, information in this newsletter is not to be construed as an endorsement. Research all information and study every stipulation before you enter a competition, pitch or accept an assignment, spend money, or sell your work.

The Writers Network News: a newsletter for writers everywhere. No Rules; Just Write!

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