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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

Say all you have to say in the fewest possible words, or your reader will be sure to skip them; and in the plainest possible words or he will certainly misunderstand them. —John Ruskin (1819 - 1900)

John Ruskin was an English writer, philosopher, art critic, and polymath* of the Victorian era. He wrote on subjects as varied as geology, architecture, myth, ornithology, literature, education, botany, and political economy. Ruskin's writing styles and literary forms were equally varied. [Wikipedia]

*a person of encyclopedic learning

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One: From the Editor's Desk: Failure Is Good!

Dear Fellow Writers:

When I read an interesting article about failure, I immediately thought about how it applies to creative writing. A study published in a 2020 issue of *Nature Communications*—revealed that optimal learning occurs when we fail 15 percent of the time. We learn the most when something or someone challenges us, our information, or our writing.

I began my writing career as a journalist and business communicator. After making my living as a writer for several decades, I assumed I knew how to write. When I tried to write a novel, though, I joined a critique circle for feedback and was embarrassed to find out how little I knew about creative writing. Creative writing differed drastically from the journalistic writing I had done for years. I couldn't believe how many flaws and oversights others were finding in my first efforts at writing a novel.

Ah, but when I came home from a meeting of my critique circle and checked all my notes and the comments others had

said, I revamped my work and improved it. My failures led to my greater knowledge. Through my failures I learned more than I ever learned from any conferences I attended, classes I took, or books I'd read.

Turning to experienced editors and writers to point out our specific flaws and shortcomings teaches us how to improve our writing. Refusing to seek feedback or assistance results in our making the same mistakes and oversights, because we don't know what we don't know. Let me repeat: we don't know what we don't know. Without failure and feedback, we'll never improve. Without failure—and learning where our failures are—we never learn and grow.

On the opposite subject of failure, I want to point to my greatest success in life so far—Zebra Communications, the company I founded in 1992, celebrates thirty years in business this year. Statistics show that most small businesses fail in the first five years. Determined not to let my company become a statistic, I continually increased my knowledge. I had a few small bumps along the way, but each one led me to learn more, avoid the same mistakes, or take another path to keep supporting myself and keep a roof over my head. Using only my mind, a computer, and my continuing knowledge of writing and editing, I've supported myself very well, bought and paid for a house, and maintained a good life. When writers ask me if they can earn a living writing, I say, "Yes, as long as you remain flexible, keep learning, and grab every new opportunity."

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: Common Word-Choice Errors

By Bobbie Christmas

Q: What are the most common errors you find in manuscripts you edit?

A: I find and correct errors in word choice, punctuation, spelling, grammar, and more, so the answer is far too long to address in full here. My *Purge Your Prose of Problems* reference book (available only through my website, ZebraEditor.com) cites more than seven hundred errors I've spotted repeatedly in manuscripts I've edited. Here I'll address a few specific word choices that confuse many writers.

COMPLIMENT/COMPLEMENT

Compliment as a verb means to flatter. (I complimented her on her dress.)

Compliment as a noun means an admiring remark. (She smiled at the compliment.)

Complement as a verb means to complete. (The mask complemented her costume.)

Complement as a noun means something that completes or makes perfect. (The written report was the perfect complement to her business proposal.)

INSURE/ENSURE

Ensure means to make sure. (I took a course in CPR to ensure I could help my husband if he had a heart attack.)

Insure means to cover with insurance. (The policy insured my house, but not my car.)

AFFECT/EFFECT

Affect is a verb that most commonly is used in the sense of to influence. (He learned how smoking affects his health.)

Affect can also mean to feign for effect. (She affected an English accent to impress her future boss.)

Effect, however, can be either a verb or a noun.

As a verb effect means to bring about or execute. (The layoffs were designed to effect savings.)

As a noun effect means something brought about by a cause or an agent; a result. (The new carpet had a dramatic effect on the room.)

Use extreme caution when choosing between affect and effect. "These measures may affect savings" implies that the measures may reduce savings that have already been realized, whereas "These measures may effect savings" implies that the measures will save money.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT/ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Many Americans get the spelling of acknowledgment wrong because Brits spell it with an extra e, but Americans should not. If publishing in America, spell acknowledgment with no e after the g.

INSIGHT/INCITE

Incite is a verb that means to cause someone to act in an angry, harmful, or violent way. (She intended to incite a riot with her comments.)

Insight is a noun that means the ability to understand people and situations in a very clear way. (After listening, she had more insight into his character.)

SIGHT/SITE

Sight refers to a view, picture, or display. (The sight of the sun rising filled her with excitement.)

Site refers to a location or position. (The building site was near a river.)

LEAD/LED

Lead (pronounced "leed") is a verb. (She always leads the parade.)

Led (pronounced "led") is the past tense of to lead. (She led the parade last Saturday.)

Lead (pronounced "led") is a noun. (Car batteries contain lead.)

As a last but vital entry, many folks get nauseous and nauseated confused.

NAUSEOUS/NAUSEATED

Nauseate and nauseated are verbs that mean to feel or cause to feel nausea, loathing, or disgust. (The smell nauseated the workers.)

Nauseous, however is an adjective that mean causing nausea or sickening. (A nauseous odor rose from the decomposing body.)

If you write that a character was nauseous, it means the person was making other people sick.

Nauseated suggests a condition induced by an external cause. By contrast, nauseous is an adjective that refers to a state whose cause may be unknown. (He became nauseated when he looked at the nauseous color of her gown.)

Caution: If you say, "I feel nauseous," it means you are making other people sick. The correct word choice is nauseated. "I feel nauseated." Choosing the wrong word may make your editor nauseated.

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/>.

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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

Ken Parkany, author of many articles as well as the book *_A Call to Inspire_*, responded to my message about scheduling time to write rather than waiting for time to magically appear. He wrote, "Couldn't agree more. During my corporate working years I wrote magazine feature articles (state and national magazines) and a weekly outdoor newspaper column (*_Hartford Courant_* in Connecticut), all while traveling 35 percent of time and going to grad school evenings for six years. Oh, I was also a devoted husband and father of three, and my wife and I just celebrated fifty-four years together this past October. So scheduling time to let the 'pen be the tongue of the mind' can be done." He added, "Pardon my creating a new word, but one must procrastinate or schedulate!"

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### Creative Writing Tip: Inanimate Possessives

Inanimate objects cannot own anything, so avoid making possessives out of inanimate objects. This guideline is not a fixed rule, merely a recommendation for whenever such usage is avoidable.

#### Weak Stronger

The car's tire The car tire

The dresser's mirror The dresser mirror

The church's steeple The church steeple

The truck's passenger side The passenger side of the truck (however, ironically, it reads better to use possessive when referring to driver's side of a vehicle)

(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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Free Webinars for Writers

My favorite publisher, BookLogix, is offering (mostly) free live webinars for writers each Wednesday. Go to <https://booklogix.com/events/> to get all the details. Sessions are complimentary unless otherwise indicated.

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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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Fifteen Million Dollar Book Deal

Britney Spears has reportedly locked in one of the biggest book deals ever. The pop superstar secured a deal that could be worth as much as \$15 million with publishing house Simon & Schuster. The "tell-all" memoir will cover her career and family life. Read the full story here: <https://www.complex.com/music/britney-spears-15-million-dollar-tell-all-book-deal>

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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. Is it "companies and people who dodge taxes" or "companies and people that dodge taxes"? What if the order is changed?

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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\_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.

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Four: Contests, Agents, and Markets

Metamorphosis Literary Agency

Our mission is to help authors become traditionally published. We represent well-crafted commercial fiction and nonfiction. Metamorphosis Literary Agency works with authors to ensure that every book is in the best presentable form. Our publishing connections come from experience, numerous conferences, hard work, and genuine care. To read which agents are open to general queries, what genres they handle, and how to submit, go to <https://www.metamorphosisliteraryagency.com/submissions>.

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ADI Magazine Accepts Short Stories

Adi Magazine is a new US-based literary journal rehumanizing policy. <https://adimagazine.com/about/>

Adi accepts short stories. Here's what the website says about Adi Magazine: "So often there is a vast gulf between the people most affected by policies and those making the decisions, leading to dangerous misunderstandings and flawed interventions. Through narrative journalism, experimental essays, fiction, poetry, commentary, and art, Adi celebrates the conversations often marginalized from mainstream Western debates on policy, creating a space for nuanced exploration and insisting that policy reflects lived experiences. To start a conversation about a submission, idea, or collaboration with Adi, email [meara@adimagazine.com](mailto:meara@adimagazine.com)."

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Parents Magazine

"We're always looking for new talent to add to our pool of writers. Before you send your query to us, please take the time to look at the guidelines. They're designed to help you write an effective query letter in a form that's easy for us to read and respond to." https://www.parents.com/parents/file.jsp?item=%2Fhelp%2Fwriters_guidelines

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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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