

The Writers Network News: Electronics Hell, April 2022

In This Issue

One: From the Editor's Desk: Electronics Hell

Two: Ask the Book Doctor—Chapter Length, Page Counts, and Rhetorical Questions

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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Notes:

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

This format that does not support italics, so italics are indicated with underlines before and after words.

Writer's Quote of the Month

The only reason for being a professional writer is that you can't help it. —Leo Rosten (1908 -)

Born in Poland, Leo Calvin Rosten was an American humorist in the fields of scriptwriting, story writing, journalism, and Yiddish lexicography.

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One: From the Editor's Desk: Electronics Hell

Dear Fellow Writers:

I spent four days this past month dealing with iPad and iPhone issues. It got so bad I was frustrated and seething. I told friends I was in electronics hell. Even worse, when I thought I'd put out the fire, the flames rose even higher.

First my iPad stopped holding a charge and then wouldn't charge at all. Before I could resolve that issue, my iPhone stopped charging too. One search on the internet said to unfold a paper clip and use the end to gently sweep out the connection hole on the iPad. I did it. It didn't work. I went back the internet and the next video said never, never put anything metal into that hole—exactly what I had just done. Rats! This video said to use a new toothbrush to gently sweep that connection hole, or whatever it was called. I did that. It didn't work.

I next switched out what I thought was every combination of chargers, cords, and power strips in the house. No go.

I made four trips—one more than forty minutes away—to a variety of stores to attempt to get repairs. One "helpful" clerk talked me into buying a reconditioned iPad for only \$10 more than the repairs would cost. I spent two infuriating days trying to set up the reconditioned equipment only for it finally to inform me that it didn't have enough memory. When I tried to return it, that same "helpful" clerk refused my return, stating it was against company policy. I told him the thing wouldn't work. He repeated that company policy would not let him accept a return. When I told him I would report the fraud to my credit card company, a manager finally came out and allowed me to return the useless thing for a full refund.

After days of irritation, although I thought I had checked out all the accessories, I bought new chargers and new charging cords for both appliances, and voila! Everything is working fine again.

The point to my story is this: When I thought I had solved the problem by going to that first, far-away store, I came home to write about my frustration. I didn't yet know that the problem was not resolved, but writers write. Writing out all the details of every fix I tried and every failure, setback, trip to a store, and encounter with unwavering clerks relieved some of my tension and helped me cope. I may never finish writing that story in full, now that the issue is settled, but simply writing about it was a form of therapy that got me through days of exasperation.

Yes, writers write. We see everything that happens around us as material that might end up in a novel, a memoir, or a personal essay. Even if we never do anything with our writing, writers must write. Sometimes it's publishable. Sometimes it's practice. Sometimes it's therapeutic.

Whenever I hear about successful writers who didn't start writing until they were seventy, eighty, or even ninety, I shake my head. I know the kernel, the bud, was inside those folks from the start. Those writers may not have put pen to paper until later years, but everything was stored in their mental filing cabinets until it came out at last.

Prove me wrong. Haven't you always viewed people, events, and settings as something you will write about someday?

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: Chapter Length, Page Counts, and Rhetorical Questions

By Bobbie Christmas

Q: For a two-hundred-page novel, how short is too short for the chapter length?

A: The length of a chapter has only to do with the scene or scenes that need to be covered in a novel or the subjects to be covered in a nonfiction book. No rules apply to chapter length. I've seen a one-word chapter, albeit a contraction, in *Angela's Ashes*. If I remember correctly the word was "T'was."

While I don't recommend one-word chapters, logic should prevail when it comes to where to break chapters. In novels a new chapter can start after a time shift or a scene shift, for example. In nonfiction a new chapter may be appropriate when the subject matter changes.

Allow me, however, to address another issue this question unintentionally raised.

Editors and publishers don't refer to manuscripts by the number of pages. They work with the word count, not the page count, so authors should do the same. Too many elements can affect the page count of a manuscript. Is it single-spaced or double-spaced? Is it twelve-point type or larger? Is it in Courier or Times New Roman? Does it have large margins, small ones, or standard one-inch ones? Does it have many chapters, all of which have correctly started on a new page, one-third of the way down the page, or has the writer not followed standard manuscript format?

On the other hand, when you say your book contains 55,000 words, agents, publishers, editors, and others in the publishing industry will have a clear understanding of the length of your manuscript. Knowledgeable writers therefore think in terms of word counts and convey word counts when speaking to others in the business.

To be clear, page counts should refer only to published books, not to manuscripts.

Q: My wife and I have been editing one of my books, and we came to a disagreement over a question used as a statement. This was all I could find on Google:

"Questions, commands, and advice are typically not statements, because they do not express something that is either true or false. But sometimes people use them rhetorically to express statements."

Here is the sentence in question: "You're not interested in justice unless it can be found in a bottle ... are you?" The character is an attorney who presents a statement, sometimes accusatory, and then adds something that turns it into a question to avoid an objection from the other side about not asking a question. Here's another. "You had an ax to grind, didn't you?"

My wife thinks that the sentences are not questions, therefore I should not use a question mark. I understand her point, but what do you think?

A: "Are you" and "didn't you" in these cases are intended as questions, regardless. I would therefore punctuate the first example this way: "You're not interested in justice unless it can be found in a bottle, are you?" It could also be written this way: "You aren't interested in justice unless it can be found in a bottle. Are you?" The recast changes the meaning a little, so I'd stick with the comma, as shown in my first example.

The second example is fine just as it is: "You had an ax to grind, didn't you?"

Even a rhetorical question is still a question.

In this case you win, but break it to your wife gently.

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

Marsha Maurer wrote, "Congratulations to you and Zebra on 30 years! Quite a milestone. . . and helping other writers so much along the way! Blessings to you for many more learning and growing years ahead."

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Vicki Flier Hudson wrote, "Wow! Happy 30-year anniversary! And thank you for inspiring me to go into business for myself."

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Mark Diamond, a fellow writer who has a talking parakeet named Skyler that I am honored to babysit at times, wrote, "Teaching 'Happy Anniversary' might be too much for Skyler. How about Happy 30th?"

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#### Creative Writing Tip: Conjunctions

Linking words (conjunctions) are best used to join elements of a sentence (I like jam, and he likes jelly.) Strong writing avoids beginning a sentence with conjunctions such as *and*, *but*, *so*, *or*, *yet*, *or* *therefore*, *except* on rare occasions for emphasis or in dialogue. Sometimes the issue is resolved by linking two sentences. *He headed for his house. But he never made it home* becomes *He headed for his house, but he never made it home.*

Often a comma should not follow a conjunction. Incorrect: *I liked him but, I did not love him.* Correct: *I liked him, but I did not love him.*

Guidelines aside, an author can indeed begin a sentence with a conjunction for the purpose of emphasis, but the technique works only if used infrequently, maybe twice or three times in an entire book-length manuscript. *She loved him dearly. But it's hard to keep loving a jerk who runs away with your best friend.*

(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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Personal Essays

Noah Michelson, head of *HuffPost Personal*, in an interview said the following about personal essays: "Personal essays can be about anything. Sometimes they're written in response to a current event or a news story, but more often they're about something a writer experienced and how it affected them or what they learned from it. These experiences might include being misdiagnosed by a doctor or being discriminated against in the workplace or the death of a pet. I've found there is no topic that won't work as long as the writer is approaching it with honesty and their essay offers the reader the chance to learn something new or share an experience that is meaningful. Readers want to encounter stories they haven't seen before, but they also want to read pieces that are able to describe things they might be feeling or have felt in the past in ways that truly resonate."

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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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Bestseller Turned into TV Series

Garrett Basch's new company, *Dive*, won the television rights to *Afterparties*, Anthony Veasna So's best-selling collection of stories that HarperCollins published last year. It will be a half-hour series based on characters and stories So wrote about the lives of Cambodian-Americans. The author, the son of former Cambodian-American refugees, died before the book was published.

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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. When a quotation is introduced with “According to So-and-So” or “As So-and-So said,” is the first word capitalized?

To get the answer to this question and many more based on Chicago style, go to <http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/qanda/latest.html>.

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\_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

Stories About Singles Wanted

Refinery29 is an American multinational feminist digital media and entertainment website focused on young women. It is owned by Vice Media. Refinery29 seeks pitches for its Single Files, personal essays that explore the unique joys and challenges of being single right now. If you have an idea you’d like to submit, email it to [single.files@vice.com](mailto:single.files@vice.com).

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The Rights Factory - Literary Agency

“It used to be that writers had editors to watch their backs, but over the past century the literary agent has risen to stand by the writer, to help them birth their literary works, to polish them until they are ready for submission, and to help authors find the best publishing homes – eventually leading their works to widespread markets and audiences.

“This is what we do at TRF. Whether you are a debut author just finishing your first novel, an expert, teacher, or journalist working on a narrative non-fiction or prescriptive work, someone with a memoir or great life story to tell, or a graphic novelist, we’re interested in hearing from you – if you haven’t heard from us first.

“Every agent at TRF is looking for work they can get excited about, in every genre and category. If you’re in the market, we encourage you to look at the agents here and see if one of them seems like the perfect business partner for you.”

To learn more about the agents at The Rights Factory and how to submit your manuscript to the correct agent, go to <https://www.therightsfactory.com/agents-list>

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Climate Fiction

Fix, Grist’s solutions lab, invites you to submit a hope-filled climate fiction short story for our second annual contest, *Imagine 2200: Climate Fiction for Future Ancestors*.

Stories must be set anytime between today and the year 2200, and show a path to a clean, green, and just future. We especially want to read — and share — narratives that center solutions from the communities most impacted by climate change and stories that envision what a truly equitable, decolonized society could look like. In 3,000 to 5,000 words, show us the world you dream of building.

We’ll be looking for these core elements:

- Hope
- Vivid characters
- Cultural setting
- Creative solutions
- Decolonized futures

We will also judge submissions based on the quality of artistic voice, originality, craft, and technique, as well as the depth of the environmental, scientific, historical, and/or cultural background that informs the story.

What we're offering to winners:

- Cash prizes
- Publication on Fix's site in the fall of 2022
- A reason to stay hopeful

The winning writer will be awarded \$3,000, with the second- and third-place finalists receiving \$2,000 and \$1,000, respectively. An additional nine finalists will get \$300 apiece. All winners and finalists will have their story published in an immersive collection on Fix's website — each with its own original art — and will be celebrated in a public virtual event.

The deadline for submission is May 5, 2022, by 11:59 p.m. U.S. Pacific Standard Time. Full guidelines here:

<https://tinyurl.com/3d7dj349>

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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](mailto:Bobbie@zebraeditor.com) or [bzebra@aol.com](mailto:bzebra@aol.com). Deadline: 18th of each month.

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

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