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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](http://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

Inspiration is wonderful when it happens, but the writer must develop an approach for the rest of the time... The wait is simply too long. —Leonard Bernstein (1918 - 1990)

Leonard Bernstein was an American conductor, composer, pianist, music educator, author, and humanitarian. Among the most important conductors of his time, he was also the first American conductor to receive international acclaim.

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One: From the Editor's Desk: Toddlers Get it Right

Dear Fellow Writers:

Parents and grandparents who walk their children to and from the leisure pool at my gym must walk around the lap pool, where I work out three times a week. Adults walk toward their destination with their gaze forward, eyes on their target, while the children, most often toddlers, dawdle. They stop and glance this way and that, a look of wonder on their faces. The small kids, unlike their parent or grandparent, observe and absorb everything within view or earshot. They notice the adult swimmers in the lap pool with me. They see the people sweating in the dry sauna. They examine the folks in the bubbling spa. They watch the flags fluttering over the lap pool, people's colorful bathing suits, and the flippers, water bells, and noodles people use. They gape at swimmers stroking through the water. They see that some wear goggles and some do not.

The kids, but not their guardians, appear to observe that some swimmers wear bathing caps and some do not. Some swimmers have blond hair, some have brown hair, some have gray hair, and some have no hair. Toddlers see everything and walk and stumble around in wonder at all that surrounds them. Their brains must buzz with activity, soaking up and storing all that encircles them. The adults, meanwhile, have only one thing in mind: their destination.

I, like many of you, have become the adult who stares at my goal and trudges forward taking the shortest route. Sometimes doing so is a good thing, but as a writer, I should be like a toddler. I should glance around and observe every color, every difference, every new thing.

“God is in the details,” said Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, one of the most significant architects of the twentieth century. Along with Frank Lloyd Wright, he is regarded as one of the pioneers of modernist architecture. He is right about details. We writers need those details if we want our writing to zing, pop, and sizzle. We need to think like toddlers when we sit down to write.

Are you being the inquiring toddler or the plodding parent? How do you take note of all the things around you? What new observations have you made that might show up in your writing?

Yours in writing,

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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: Single Quotation Marks

By Bobbie Christmas

Q: Do single quotation marks indicate irony? Do they indicate thoughts? When should I use single quotation marks?

A: Use great caution when using single quotation marks. Many writers use them incorrectly, perhaps because their use in American English differs from the British. In American English single quotation marks should be used only inside double quotation marks, with the exception of headlines. Following is information on single and double quotation marks from my book doctor’s desk reference book titled *Purge Your Prose of Problems*:

Quoted words, phrases, and sentences run into the text are enclosed in double quotation marks. Single quotation marks enclose quotations within quotations; double marks, quotations within these; and so on. The practice in the United Kingdom and elsewhere is often the reverse: single marks are used first, then double, and so on. For American audiences, use American punctuation.

Never use single quotation marks in running text for any purpose other than as a quote within a quote.

In headlines, chapter titles, and titles, however, single quotes are more appropriate than double quotes. Example: ‘Appropriate’ Behavior Depends On Culture

Note that it is a fallacy that thoughts belong in single quotation marks. They don’t. Period.

Here’s another entry in *Purge Your Prose of Problems* about thoughts:

A writer’s job is to train the reader to understand when characters speak and when they merely think.

Sticklers remind us that thoughts always tell, rather than show, because in reality we cannot read someone’s thoughts. Strong writers therefore avoid revealing characters’ thoughts. Instead they show what characters are thinking through their self-talk or dialogue.

If adding thoughts to a novel, however, here are important things to know:

Format: While Chicago style no longer advocates using quotation marks or italics for thoughts, many readers are accustomed to seeing thoughts printed in italics, and that format is acceptable, even though not recommended, as long as it is consistent.

Direct thoughts: Direct thoughts are always in first person and are usually in present tense.

Example: Mike pondered, Should I go to the meeting or stay home with Brenda?

Indirect thoughts: Indirect thoughts often include “that,” even though the word may be understood and not stated.

Example: Bill thought the rain would never stop. (“That” is understood.) Indirect thoughts never call for quotation marks or italics. Example: Ezra thought he’d like to get new shoes.

Creative Writing Tip: Instead of complicating a manuscript with italics or repetitions of “he thought/she thought,” strong writing uses characters’ body language to show, rather than tell, that the characters are thinking.

Examples:

Ray blinked. She was the sexiest woman ever to walk through his door. Was she married?

Was four dollars a decent price for the bag of flour? Sam rubbed his chin. He never had to buy supplies before.

Mary pushed her hair behind one ear. Did the interviewer have any idea she lied on her résumé?

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 <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

Regarding my letter last month about being in electronics hell, Ruth White wrote, "Misery does indeed recognize company. I understand all your frustrations with trying to get your computer to work properly. You are not alone!"

Jim Gilbert shared his latest great news: "I recently had a couple of articles published in the spring issue of *The New Pioneer*, a national homesteading magazine, and I have another article coming up in the summer issue too. It started when I sent an email to the editor to comment on an article in the magazine. She liked what I said and offered me the chance to write my own article on the topic, and I jumped on the chance. It turned into two articles, and now it's about to be three. To say that I'm ecstatic is putting it mildly."

He added, "Now I need to find an agent to represent my novels."

I responded, "Congratulations! Sounds like you're doing a great job." I added, "I wish it were easy to find an agent, but the best method I've heard is to pitch to an agent at a writers conference. Let me know how it goes."

Vicki Flier Hudson, chief collaboration officer at Highroad Global Services wrote, "I felt for you about the electronics hell, but I loved your message about writing and difficult circumstances."

Claudia Caporale reported, "I have written and published along fifty to sixty years and am still going strong. Yes, all my frustrations resulted in a story. I love looking back at them and their memories. Living in Texas now has supported more and different stories." She also said, "I currently have a more than thirty-thousand-word story since my husband's passing January 2, 2021. It has provided grief release, forgiveness relief, regret release, and an outpouring of love as well as reporting daily frustrations at work I'm now having to do that was usually his job." She finished with "Writing is a cure."

Yes, it is, Claudia. It has been my form of therapy from the time I was a preteen.

Ellen Holder recently purchased *Purge Your Prose of Problems* and wrote, "I am devouring your book! My eyes are hungry for every single line. Best money I ever spent. God bless you!" The reference book is available only at <http://tinyurl.com/4ptjnr>.

#### ~~~~~ Creative Writing Tip: Manuscript Titles

A good title alone will not sell a manuscript, but a title should reflect the author's creativity. Strong titles grab, intrigue, or entertain. The title should not merely be a label. If labels were effective, we could name all manuscripts *A Novel* or *Short Story*.

Avoid one-word titles, which more often sound like labels, unless your one word can be taken several ways, such as *Deliverance*.

Successful authors choose titles with double meanings; titles with rhythm, alliteration, or rhyme; or titles that intrigue. The title should lure readers into the story.

Fiction titles should relate to the contents. Think of titles of some of the best-known novels, such as *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *The Catcher in the Rye*, *Charlotte's Web*, *Alice in Wonderland*, *Angels and Demons*, *War and Peace*, and *Gone with the Wind*, to name a few.

Nonfiction how-to or self-help books often need a title that gives the premise and then implies a promise. Ponder the most successful titles on the market: *Think and Grow Rich* = Think (premise) and Grow Rich (promise). Other examples of titles that give a premise and imply a promise include these: *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, *Swim with the Sharks Without Being Eaten*, *The One-Minute Manager*, *Who Moved My Cheese?: An Amazing Way to Deal with Change in Your Work and in Your Life*, and *What Color Is Your Parachute?: A Practical Manual for Job-Hunters and Career-Changers*.

Writers who plan to self-publish absolutely must brand their books with titles that explain the contents and perhaps make a promise to the reader.

Speaking of appropriate titles, bestseller author Mary Higgins Clark's first book, *Aspire to the Heavens*, was not a

commercial success, because bookstores thought it was a prayer book and put it in the religion section. Fortunately her agent and publisher took another chance on her.

Be sure the title of your novel or nonfiction book is alluring and helps people understand the content.

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

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Book Banning

More than 1,500 book bans have been instituted in US school districts in the last nine months, a study has found, part of a rightwing censorship effort described as "unparalleled in its intensity." The Subcommittee on Civil Rights and Civil Liberties held a hearing to examine the ongoing efforts across the country to ban books from schools and public libraries. To read all about it, see <https://oversight.house.gov/news/press-releases/at-subcommittee-hearing-witnesses-detail-the-devastating-impact-of-book-bans-0>

On the other hand, I've read that the sales of banned books is soaring. What does that piece of information say about what readers want, as opposed to what the government wants?

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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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Blonde as a Noun

For many years the spelling "blonde" was acceptable as a noun that referred to a female with blond hair, as in this sentence: The blonde in the bikini sipped a soda.

In 2021 the folks at The Chicago Manual of Style began advising against using either blond or blonde as a noun except in a direct quotation, advice that applies equally to brunette or redhead. It discourages writing that reduces people to physical characteristics or gender stereotypes (as in a phrase like "the blonde in the front row").

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Oprah Champions Books

Oprah Winfrey has been selected as the 2022 PEN/Faulkner Literary Champion. The annual commendation recognizes a lifetime of devoted literary advocacy and a commitment to inspiring new generations of readers and writers.

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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. CMOS 5.195 says that "compare with" is for literal comparisons and "compare to" for poetic or metaphorical comparisons. What is a "literal comparison," and how does it compare with a "poetic or metaphorical comparison"?

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.

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Manhunt: Praise and Condemnation

A transgender author is facing a backlash over her novel that depicts JK Rowling’s violent death. Although some readers praise *Manhunt*, Gretchen Felker-Martin’s post-apocalyptic fantasy about a virus that turns men into zombies, others have panned the book as “misogynistic bile” from an “unhinged” writer. An imprint of Macmillan produced the novel.

Rowling has faced a barrage of abuse in the past few years over her views on the trans debate, including death threats. The Harry Potter author has been accused of being transphobic because of her claims that biological sex is real. Felker-Martin’s novel *Manhunt* depicts the death of Rowling at the hands of trans activists.

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#### Four: Contests, Agents, and Markets

##### Neon Door

Neon Door is “an immersive literary exhibit” that accepts fiction, nonfiction, and poetry. For guidelines see here: <https://neondoorldit.submittable.com/submit>

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Danya Kukafka, Literary Agent

Danya Kukafka is actively building her client list at Trellis Literary Management.

Danya is interested in representing literary fiction with particularly propulsive storylines. She is seeking literary suspense, sophisticated thrillers, speculative fiction, and experimental fiction. She also loves true crime that feels attuned to today’s cultural conversations and upmarket fiction you can read in one gulp.

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##### Scribe

We are a trade-publishing house (that is, we publish books for general readers that are made available nationally and internationally through the book trade). Accordingly, we consider only proposals for books of this nature. We are generally interested in literary fiction and serious nonfiction.

Scribe accepts unsolicited and unagented submissions. However, to help us cope with the volume of submissions we receive, we now only accept pitches and short writing samples in the body of an email during seasonal three-week windows. In 2022 the April window has closed. Send during the following window: 1 September through to 21 September. Any submissions received outside these periods will be neither read nor responded to.

Please read our submission guidelines carefully. Any submissions that fail to meet our criteria and do not follow our format requirements will not be read — don’t go to all that trouble for nothing.

Please note that, at present, we do not accept poetry, plays, young adult fiction, individual short stories, or children’s picture books for Scribble (see the Scribble site for its submission window).

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

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