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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.

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

Writer's Quote of the Month

“Any word you have to hunt for in a thesaurus is the wrong word. There are no exceptions to this rule.” —Stephen King

Moving? You'll Have to Resubscribe

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One: From the Editor's Desk: Even More Change

Dear Fellow Writers:

Last month I revealed my plans to downsize from a house with 2,200 square feet of space to a tiny apartment with about 800 square feet of space. In sorting through a lifetime of acquisitions and deciding what to donate, what to sell, what to throw away, and what to keep, it hit me how my business has changed through the years.

When I began editing manuscripts for a living more than thirty years ago, every manuscript had to be printed and delivered. I used red-ink pens to edit the manuscripts. If I made a mistake I covered it with white correction tape and wrote over it. I printed a cover letter and a full evaluation that was sometimes fifty pages long, boxed up each manuscript along with the printed evaluation in a report cover, and shipped everything by mail or FedEx.

Nowadays clients email their manuscripts, I use Track Changes to show my edits, and I email the edited manuscripts back, along a file that contains the evaluation. Much simpler. I still have reams of printer paper, however, plus shipping boxes, packing materials, red-ink pens, report covers, and more than twenty-four unused dispensers of correction tape. I also still have a fax machine and a copier. My printer makes better copies, and when was the last time I needed a fax machine? What to do with all my antiquated equipment and supplies?

Of course I will donate most things and hope someone else can use them. Still, it's a reminder of how my entire method for doing business has changed over the years. For example, people used to send a check with their manuscripts. Now they pay by PayPal or Zelle. Again, much simpler.

I love making manuscripts the best they can be. I'm pleased that I can make a living doing what I love, so I've kept up with the changes as they come about. Finding all these old supplies, though, brought me back to those earlier days. Out

with old! Embrace the new! Write on!

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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Members Write:

After I wrote about my plan to downsize, many subscribers wrote me with encouraging words. Here are a few:

May the move be as easy as is possible and may you love your new home. Keep us posted. -Francine Kaplan

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Congratulations on a decision that making this move at this time is in your best interest. The "experts" tell us that most people wait five years past what would have been optimal for them.

I continue to read and benefit from your newsletter. You helped me once, decades ago, when I lived in Roswell. I am now finishing my "final" book (I am 84), which will be my 16th self-published Christian work. - Terry Dodd

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Still reading your newsletter from top to bottom every time. Kudos on that!

One way I eased my own process of downsizing was to take photographs of the meaningful items that I knew I was crazy to keep holding on to. Having the photos made it much easier to say ta-ta.

I made great use of my Covid-sequestering time to write a memoir, and the subsequent query letters are in agent in-boxes now. They sure are backed up! A lot of writers used their sequestering time well, I'm sure.

Take care, and good luck with your move -Meredith Rutter (upcoming pen name perhaps Meredith Rutter Marple)

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I empathize with your consideration to move to a more manageable place. I am in the same position. Having someone who can help sort and dispose is a great idea. But oh, to get rid of those special things that bring back memories of a life well-lived? Very painful. -Ruth White

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Thank you all for writing. I hope to hear from even more folks. Your notes inspire me to keep providing this free newsletter for writers.

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Two: Ask the Book Doctor: About Punctuation

With September 24 being Punctuation Day, I'm pulling out some of the questions I've been asked about punctuation. All my answers are based on Chicago style, the style that most book publishers follow, and Chicago style often differs from the styles we see in periodicals or on the internet.

Q: I keep hearing about em dashes and en dashes. I'm new to all this. What are they, and how can I find them on my keyboard?

Alas, you won't find them on your keyboard, but your keyboard can produce them for you, as you'll see. Here are the rules for en dashes and em dashes and how to create them:

Use em dashes (—) to denote an abrupt change in thought or an emphatic pause. We will fly to Paris in June—if I get a raise. An em dash is longer than an en dash, which is longer than a hyphen. I'll explain en dashes later.

A hyphen is not an em dash; however, in Word on most computers, if you type two hyphens in a row followed immediately by a letter or whole word, the computer will automatically change the two hyphens into an em dash. You can also use two hyphens to indicate a dash. I would like to tell you--emphatically--you are brilliant. In Microsoft Word, you can also go to Symbol, then Special Characters, and choose Em Dash and Insert. Whether using the true em dash or two hyphens, be consistent; don't use a dash in one place and two hyphens in another.

Do not space before or after an em dash.

An en dash (-) is a typographical symbol that indicates a range. It is a little longer than a hyphen (-) but shorter than an em dash (—). Use an en dash rather than a hyphen to mean through, such as in a page range (pages 4-7) or a date range. (April 7-19). The use of en dashes this way applies to lists and citations, but not narrative. In narrative it's always better to use words rather than symbols or special characters. (pages four through seven) (April 7 to April 19).

To find the en dash in most Word programs, go to Insert and then Symbol, and then Special Characters. Most computers using Word may also automatically change a hyphen to an en dash if you hit the space bar, type a hyphen, and hit the space bar again, but you'll need to remove both spaces afterward.

Q: I was taught to use a comma after an introductory phrase, but my editor takes out many of them. What gives with that?

A: Chicago style says a comma is not required after a short introductory phrase—about five words or fewer—unless one is necessary for clarity. For example no comma is required after "For example."

Q: What's wrong with exclamation marks? When you edited my manuscript you took out dozens of them and replaced them with periods. I am certainly confused!

A: Exclamation marks belong only in short exclamatory sentences, which often begin with how, what, why, or are short bursts of words. Examples: What a beautiful sunset! How embarrassing! Oh! Damn!

Strong writing does not use exclamation marks to show surprise. If the words themselves don't convey passion, exclamation marks won't help. William Styron (author of *Sophie's Choice*) said it well: "Every writer should be given just one exclamation mark per career."

When exclamation marks are used to indicate surprise or humor, they become repetitious and indicate a low-level form of writing called schoolgirl style. Schoolgirl style, a casual, playful style of writing that is fine in emails, text messages, and personal letters, is not recommended in novels or nonfiction books.

Q: Why did my editor remove more than half my semicolons?

A: Without looking at the actual manuscript, I'd guess the editor had one of two reasons for doing so. Either the sentences were too long or the semicolons were used incorrectly.

Long sentences reduce the comprehension of the material. For that reason it's best to keep most sentences at ten words or fewer.

Correctly used, semicolons can be used to do the following:

- Indicate a greater separation of thought and information than a comma conveys but less than the separation that a period implies. He hid the body; otherwise he would have been the first person the police suspected.
- Clarify a series or separate elements of a series when individual segments contain material set off by commas. Mary packed lunch with two apples, one for each child; three sandwiches, one ham, one chicken, and one vegetarian for herself; and a six-pack of beer, which she would keep for herself.

Note that the semicolon is used before the final and in such a series.

- Link independent clauses when a coordinating conjunction such as and, but, or for is not present. Four tables filled the room; one table was empty.

Unless a particular literary effect is desired, the better approach in many circumstances is to break independent clauses into separate sentences, to avoid long sentences and/or overuse of semicolons.

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 [ZebraEditor.com/blog/](http://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

'Til

'Til is a variant of till and often has the apostrophe turned the wrong way when using curly apostrophes. In dialogue both 'til and till are pronounced the same way, so use the more common spelling, till. It's always better to avoid variants. Better to use till or until instead of 'til.

(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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Foreign Words and Phrases

Recently while editing two separate manuscripts I caught foreign phrases that had been translated incorrectly. Yes, we should translate or explain anything that a common reader might not understand, but we must be sure to be correct in our translations or explanations. Google Translate may help, as will several other websites that offer free translations, but please be sure that your answers are correct; computers can do only so much.

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Who Needs an Editor?

You do, if you want your book to sell. Regardless of whether you hope to sell your book to a publisher or want to self-publish, your book must first be marketable. Zebra Communications edits manuscripts with marketability in mind. Two of the three services we offer include developmental editing and an extensive report filled with advice, explanations, and suggestions on how to improve the manuscript's marketability even more. Look for our services, pricing, reviews, and more at [www.ZebraEditor.com](http://www.ZebraEditor.com). Zebra Communications: Excellent Editing for Maximum Marketability

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How to Write a Lead

How can I begin? I tell writers rather than worrying about that first paragraph when you write your first draft, simply write the story, article, letter, or whatever it is you're writing. After the first draft you can go back and write a good entry into the piece. Purdue University has a great article on how to write the lead of a news article. The same truths apply to writing other articles for publication, especially when writing anecdotal leads. Some of the information can also be applied to starting a new chapter, starting a new novel, and more. See https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/subject_specific_writing/journalism_and_journalistic_writing/writing_leads.html

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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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Manuslips

Do you see what's wrong with the following sentence that appeared in a manuscript I was editing?

Last night while making dinner, my dogs ran to the sliding glass door barking and carrying on.

That's right. As written the dogs were making dinner. This sentence is typical of one with a missing modifier. How would you correct that sentence? Here's what I recommended: Last night while I was making dinner, my dogs ran to the sliding glass door barking and carrying on.

Here's another manuslip that might have been a typo, but it gave me a giggle because it was true as written, although it wasn't what the author meant. The author was trying to say that prospecting was sacred time, vital for success. Instead the author wrote this:

Prospecting time is scared time.

See why every manuscript needs a good editor?

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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. Should there be a space on either side of an ellipsis in the middle of a line when using the Unicode ellipsis rather than three spaced periods? Example: Should there be a ... space ... like this?

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

Have you removed all the superfluous words in your manuscript? \_Write In Style\_ tells you what to look for and change or delete. Watch all your writing improve with tips from this brilliant book on creative writing.

We've been told to write tight, but how can we know when we've overwritten? In five-award-winning \_Write In Style\_ you'll learn how to find and delete or rewrite words, sentences, and phrases that weaken your writing.

\_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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Writing for the Internet

There's good money in writing copy for clients' websites, but only if you know how to write SEO (search-engine-optimized) copy. Learn much more about writing for the internet in this article:

<https://www.shannonpruittandco.com/blog/keyword-research>  
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21 Top US Literary Agents Accepting Submissions

<https://writingtipsoasis.com/us-literary-agents-accepting-submissions/>

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Adornment

5070 Bonnie Branch Rd.
Ellicott City, Maryland 21043
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elyse@jewelryandrelatedarts.com

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Adornment is published three times per year with several feature articles in each edition on subjects ranging from ancient Egyptian broad collars to Victorian jewelry to 20th century jewels by important jewelers such as Van Cleef & Arpels.

It also features articles on historic costume and objects of precious materials. "Readers are collectors, appraisers, antique jewelry dealers, gemologists, jewelry artists, museum curators—anyone with an interest in jewelry. You need to have a good working knowledge of jewelry subjects, or we are not interested."

Accepts queries by mail or e-mail. Sample copy free as an e-mailed PDF. Guidelines free

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PTOtoday.com and PTO Today

PTOtoday.com and PTO Today magazine are essential resources for leaders of parent groups (often called parent-teacher organizations) at the 80,000-plus elementary and middle schools across the United States. Content focuses on helping the volunteer leaders of these groups run their organizations more efficiently and support their schools more effectively.

The magazine is published four times a year, based on the school calendar; issues are labeled Back to School, Fall, Winter, and Spring.

We run instructional pieces, best practices, idea roundups, and more. The tone is conversational and informal rather than newsy. We never talk down to readers, we use PTO-specific examples to express concepts, and we prefer writers who can use the language of parent groups.

Email [queries@ptotoday.com](mailto:queries@ptotoday.com) with your story ideas. Indicate the subject of your proposed article, the angle you plan to use, whom you plan to interview (if applicable), and why you think the article is of interest to our readers. If you have been published before, please include several samples of your work with the query letter; if you have previous parent group leadership or volunteer experience, please let us know. For full guidelines see <https://www.ptotoday.com/pto-today-submission-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](mailto:Bobbie@zebraeditor.com) or [bzebra@aol.com](mailto:bzebra@aol.com). Deadline: 18th of each month.

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If someone forwarded this newsletter to you, please sign up to get your own subscription. Simply go to <https://www.zebraeditor.com/> to subscribe to The Writers Network News. My promise: I never share your address or send out spam.

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

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