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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 ezine format that does not support italics, so italics are indicated with underlines before and after words.  
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Writer's Quote of the Month

“Some editors are failed writers, but so are most writers.” —T. S. Eliot (1888 - 1965)

Thomas Stearns Eliot OM was a poet, essayist, publisher, playwright, literary critic, and editor. Considered one of the twentieth century's major poets, he is a central figure in English-language Modernist poetry.  
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One: From the Editor's Desk: What to Keep?

Dear Fellow Writers:

I'm downsizing. I'm leaving a two-story house with 2,200 square feet of living space and moving into an 879-square-foot apartment. In doing the math I realized I had to get rid of about three-fourths of everything I own if I want to fit in that tiny space. The work has been hard and sometimes emotional as I have had to decide what to keep, what to toss, what to sell, and what to donate.

The hardest part for me, though, was going through boxes and boxes of old writings. Finally I had to decide to let it all go to the recycling center. I'm a much better writer than I was back in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, and I didn't have time to read everything to decide what to keep, anyway. I tell my clients never to delete or throw away books they've written and never published, because one day they might want to return to them and improve them to the point of readiness. Today we can keep things digitally much easier than I could keep musty old binders and boxes of my mental meanderings from decades ago, much of it handwritten.

Photos also represented a challenge. I used to be an avid photographer, often the one who documented every family gathering, trip, and event in great detail. I even built a darkroom onto my prior house and made copious prints there. After finding more than six large boxes of photographs in my closets, though, I admitted defeat. I kept the photo albums I'd made from various trips but decided that if years ago I didn't think a photo was worth putting in an album, I didn't need to keep it. Into the garbage they went.

I look forward to my simpler, less-cluttered life in my new place. As I age it became urgent for me to leave a house that has steep stairs and a steep driveway, both of which became a danger to me. In my new place I'll have elevators instead of stairs and I won't be responsible for the maintenance and upkeep of a large house anymore. My move is set for October 5. Wish me success. The next newsletter will come from my new apartment, providing I get my internet connection completed in time.

Oh, and note that as long as I was downsizing and getting rid of things, I got rid of my landline. If you want to call, my cell will be the way to reach me or text me, so keep this number handy: 404-433-7507. I've changed my website to reflect the cell number as well.

Here's to my uncluttered future!

Yours in writing,  
Bobbie Christmas Bobbie@zebraeditor.com or bzebra@aol.com  
Author of two editions of Write In Style, owner of Zebra Communications, editor of The Writers Network News, and senior editor of Enjoy Cherokee Magazine

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Members Write:

Last month's newsletter had a link to an article from Purdue University on how to write a lead. Mark Diamond, who while teaching creative writing throughout the school system was known to his students and Mr. D, responded this way: "In my workshops, I taught teachers and kids to write SHORT leads that were either a line of dialogue, a small movement or action, or a thought or feeling. It was amazing how many doors those keys unlocked."

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An Apology

Last month's newsletter had a link to a page that listed literary agents accepting submissions, but several people wrote to say the site wasn't available. I'm sorry. It worked when I wrote the newsletter, but I wrote it long before I sent it out. Things come and go on the internet, so here's another site that lists agents accepting submissions, and this one works: <https://blog.reedsy.com/literary-agents/new-adult/>

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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 Gerunds and Participles

Q: One of my critique partners said I use too many gerunds and participles and said I have several dangling participles. I thought I knew the parts of speech, but I'm not sure what the person is talking about.

A: In simple terms, a participle is a form of a verb (often ending in "ing") that is used as a modifier, as in the following: the dancing bear.

A gerund is a present participle used as a noun, as in the following: Sleeping nightly is essential.

The use of too many words that end in "ing" can slow the pace, weaken writing, and become repetitive. They often turn potentially strong verbs into weaker forms: nouns or adjectives.

As adjectives, participles don't always harm the quality of writing (We laughed at the dancing bears), but when linked to the verb "to be," "ing" words replace active, more powerful verbs and lead to loose writing. Loose: The bats were hanging by their feet. (Tight: The bats hung by their feet.) Loose: The boat was bumping across the waves. (Tight: The boat bumped across the waves.)

Often the pesky "ing" form hides after began and started. Loose: The monks began chanting in the background. John started sneezing. Tight: The monks chanted in the background. John sneezed.

Save began and started for special times when the action actually begins. She began her lecture with, "Dear friends and enemies." John started to sneeze, but pressed his nose to suppress the urge.

Also avoid gerunds when infinitives are better. Weak: They planned on staying until midnight. Better: They planned to stay until midnight.

Rather than delete every gerund and participle, make sure each one has a reason for existing. For example, the gerund existing in the previous sentence does not detract from the strength of the sentence. Another example of an acceptable gerund: We admired the choir's singing.

Many writers get into a pattern of overusing participles at the beginnings of sentences. Strong writers, however, avoid overusing any structure, especially one that relies on too many "ing" words.

In the worst case, sentences that begin with "ing" words can lead to dangling participles if not handled correctly. Example of a dangling participle: Waving goodbye, the boat pulled away while we watched. As written, the boat waved goodbye, because the word waving refers to the next noun that did the action, the boat. To correct the sentence, recast it, perhaps this way: We waved goodbye while the boat pulled away.

What does dangling really mean? Modifying—or descriptive—phrases must have logical relationships to the nearest subject in a sentence. When those words are omitted—when the person or thing who actually performed the activity does not appear in the sentence—the phrase dangles.

Dangling or missing modifiers, however, do not have to involve “ing” words. If something is missing that makes the sentence say something other than what was intended, it is still a dangling modifier. Here’s an example: After college graduation I paid for my son to travel Europe for a summer. In this example the sentence is in essence saying, “After I graduated from college, I paid for my son to travel.” The correction would be something like this: After my son graduated from college, I paid for him to travel Europe for a summer.

Q: I have recently written a novel in Farsi and I have translated the first seventeen pages of it to English. Even though the story line has been of interest to some publishers and agents in US and UK, I could not get them to commit. I am willing to rewrite it, and I would like to know what I should address to interest publishers in America.

A: It’s been my experience that people translating from Farsi use quite a few gerunds and participles (words ending in “ing”), but contemporary American publishers prefer authors to avoid them, because they not only get wordy, but they also often rely on passive verbs (such as forms of “to be”) instead of active verbs. For example, instead of “She was planning a trip to Florida,” publishers might prefer “She planned a trip to Florida.” Instead of “They were dancing in the street,” a strong writer might choose “They danced in the street.”

Also, those who learn Farsi first sometimes then learn British English, which is more elevated than US English. American publishers often expect the writing to be at about a sixth- or seventh-grade level, rather than higher, as British English tends to be. I would avoid using British terms too, such as amidst, amongst, whilst, and towards, when in America we use amid, among, while, and toward. These things are minor in comparison to the story, though, and American publishers want a compelling story peopled with interesting characters. Americans want plenty of plot-related action and dialogue and a satisfying ending, even though it doesn’t have to be a happy one. Contemporary publishers rarely purchase literary writing—which tends to have long, flowery descriptions and such—and prefer tight, active, writing.

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

Creative Writing Tip

As I Said/Like I Said/As Stated Earlier/As I Mentioned Before

Granted I’m dealing with a personal pet peeve, but I dislike hearing people say, “Like I said” or “as I said,” plus I don’t like to read, “As stated earlier.” I want to ask, “If you’ve already said something, why repeat it? In addition, if you have decided to repeat it, why would you admit you’re repeating it?” When we speak we sometimes repeat things, but when write we must delete repetition to avoid boring readers.

Although in some cases repetition adds clarity, stating that it is repeated information wastes time. Simply say what you have to say.

Uncreative: As I mentioned before, I recommend using hand cream before going to bed.

Better: I recommend using hand cream before going to bed.

(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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Manuscript Thief Arrested

Twenty-nine-year-old Filippo Bernardini, a rights coordinator for Simon & Schuster U.K., is believed to be the manuscript thief who had become notorious in the publishing industry. He was placed under arrest by the Federal Bureau of Investigation. The motivation behind the scheme, which targeted manuscripts by both high-profile and emerging writers alike, remains unclear. (New York Times)

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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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Book Ban Update

Details have been revealed about a January 10 meeting in which a school board in Tennessee moved to ban Art Spiegelman's graphic novel *Maus*, an account of the Holocaust, because of "eight curse words" and an image of a naked woman in the book. In an interview with CNN, Spiegelman remarked that the ban "has the breath of autocracy and fascism about it. I think of it as a harbinger of things to come." (NPR)

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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

Sometimes writers come close to using the intended word, and when they fail, it can sometimes be funny. Here are a few examples that I culled from manuscripts I edited:

- People put him on a pedal stool. (pedestal)
- I stood in a scolding hot shower. (scalding)
- Information was my heroine. (heroin)
- He wore a porkchop hat. (porkpie)
- She drank her fruit smoothly. (smoothie)

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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. Does CMOS prefer a slash or parentheses to denote an alternative? For example, "on/off" vs. "on (off)."

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.

Order your copy today at <https://tinyurl.com/y8fp5nym>.

Want to buy the book in Kobo through Rakuten? Easy. Go to <https://www.kobo.com/us/en/ebook/write-in-style-3>

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Four: Contests, Agents, and Markets

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Cloudbank's Vern Rutsala Book Contest 2023  
<https://cloudbankbooks.com/contest-rules/>

Cloudbank's Vern Rutsala Book Contest 2023 is open for submissions.

A prize of \$1,000 is awarded, plus publication of the manuscript.

Submissions will be accepted through October 31, 2022.

The first 50 writers submitting to the contest receive a Cloudbank book or journal.

- Submit 60 to 90 pages of poetry and/or flash fiction, including a Table of Contents and Acknowledgments page. Reading fee is \$25.
- Electronic and postal submissions are accepted from around the world with no citizenship limitations.
- To submit electronically through our submissions manager click here.
- To submit by mail send manuscript to: Cloudbank Books, P.O. Box 610, Corvallis, OR 97339-0610. Make check for fee out to Cloudbank. Mailed submissions are not returned. A self-addressed, stamped envelope (SASE) can be included for notification of the judge's decision.
- Submissions should include two title pages, one with title only, one with title and author name.

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Janklow and Nesbit Associates  
<http://www.janklowandnesbit.com/submissions>

This agency is open to submissions. Please note that we can only accept submissions via email.

If you would like to submit your work to Janklow & Nesbit, please include the following:

For fiction submissions, send an informative description, a brief synopsis and the first ten pages. Please include the sample pages in the body of the email below your query.

For nonfiction submissions, send an informative description, a full outline, and the first ten pages of the manuscript. Please include the sample pages in the body of the email below your query.

For picture book submissions, send an informative description, full outline, and include a picture book dummy and at least one full-color sample. Please attach a picture book dummy as a PDF and the full-color samples as JPEGs or PDFs."

For graphic novel submissions, send 10 illustrated pages with text (attached as a PDF) and a synopsis in the body of the email below your query.

Please direct your submission to an individual agent and send your material to [submissions@janklow.com](mailto:submissions@janklow.com).

Due to the volume of submissions received, please note that we cannot respond to every query. We shall contact you if we wish to pursue your submission.

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Perugia Press Prize  
<https://perugiapress.org/contest/>

Poets must be women, which is inclusive of transgender women and female-identified individuals. Because gender inequity still occurs in publishing, it is part of our explicit feminist mission to support and promote women's voices in print.

Winner of the Perugia Press Prize receives the following:

- Book publication and a \$1,000 prize
- Ten author copies and an ongoing discount of 50% off of the cover price for additional copies
- Time to work with the editor to create a book she loves with input into book editing, design & promotion
- Mentoring from the Perugia Poet Liaison during the publication and promotion of her book
- Review copies and entry copies to a range of post-publication contests, provided and sent by the Press
- Some book launch events planned by the Press, with a partial travel stipend and reading honorariums provided
- Ongoing publicity support through our website, newsletter, and social media
- Exposure through Press attendance at local and national book fairs to promote the work of Perugia poets

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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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