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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

“A writer is a person for whom writing is more difficult than it is for other people.” —Thomas Mann

Paul Thomas Mann was a German novelist, short-story writer, social critic, philanthropist, essayist, and the 1929 Nobel Prize in Literature laureate. His highly symbolic and ironic epic novels and novellas are noted for their insight into the psychology of the artist and the intellectual.

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One: From the Editor's Desk: More Time to Write

Dear Fellow Writers:

I'm in my new place and settled. My moving-related stress is gone. Here are a few of the lessons I've learned while shedding myself of more than a three-quarters of a century of accumulations and trying to find places for the things I kept:

If I use a smaller hamper, I'll wash clothes more often. If I wash clothes more often, I don't need as many clothes. If I don't keep as many clothes, I don't need all the dressers that once filled my bigger space. We used to live in houses with small closets. What made us think we need so many clothes today?

I don't need to document absolutely everything in my life. I threw away a dozen big boxes of old journals and logbooks. I never read them anyway.

Photos I tossed into a box almost thirty years ago are photos I don't need to keep. I already put the important ones in an album.

Living in a small space means I can no longer buy in bulk, so I don't need a membership to a big-box store.

Poetry isn't the same as short stories. Some of my poems are perfect as they are, but my prose writing has improved over

the years. I kept my poetry anthologies but ditched hundreds of pages of prior prose.

Books are replaceable. I donated hundreds, some unread. I can get many on Kindle or borrow them from the library.

My biggest lesson was this one: fear is always False Evidence Appearing Real. I created my own stress when I feared any of the zillion details would go wrong. Everything happened as it should and when it should, and my stress and fear was a waste of energy. I kept good lists of all that I had to do, and I gradually accomplished each task.

Oh, and one lesson I learned a long time ago, which came to light once again: If money can take care of it, it's not a problem. Everywhere I turned I had to pay for something I hadn't planned for. Long ago, though, I learned that money is like the tide. It flows out, but it always flows back in again. It's useless to try to stop the flow.

I'm in my new smaller space. I have fewer things than I once had, yet I have everything I need. I no longer have to maintain an aging house with three deteriorating decks and a large yard. Life is simpler, and I'll have more time to write.

Have you done anything lately that will give you more time to write?

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:

"I purchased Write In Style a couple days ago. Now I'm falling all over myself trying to kick my heinie for not buying it earlier. This is the book I've been wanting for years but didn't know it existed." -Will Bontrager

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Sandra Beckwith [sb@buildbookbuzz.com] wrote, "Good luck with the move, Bobbie! I can only imagine how hard it's been to part with so much of your life.

"I recently cleaned out my office file cabinets...lots and lots of old articles in those files! I knew they were too old to be useful now as writing samples. I also knew that my daughters wouldn't be interested in reading or even scanning any of them after I'm gone, so I put them in the recycling bin. No regrets!

"Living in a smaller space will be so-o-o-o much easier for you. I hope you're happy with the apartment and location you've chosen."

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This note came in from Marlene Clark: "That was a stellar newsletter. Plus, you are my downsizing hero!

"Photos are problematic for me. Unfortunately I rarely put photos in albums, and I too once dumped most of a whole box of photos, keeping perhaps one or two of each event so there is a chronicle.

"Many years ago I copied an idea from a friend who had cut up photos and filled album pages with partial photos, like a crazy quilt. Bad move! I have no context, and I don't recognize some of the people.

"Wishing you the best!"

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Others also sent me positive notes regarding what was then my upcoming move. 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 Plurals and Possessives

by Bobbie Christmas

Q: Is The Chicago Manual of Style the standard for editing nonfiction book manuscripts? What do you say about the comments below made by two editors I've used?

Original line of text from the manuscript:

In the late 80's, I was living in Dallas, Texas running a company that I had founded.

Here's the ensuing discussion over it:

Editor 2: 80s (no apostrophe because there is no possession—and you might want to use 1980s to make it even clearer)

Editor 1: This is a question of style. Each publisher will have its own style. This is one style.

A: Chicago Style is preferred by most book publishers, so it is safest to use it for any book-length manuscript, whether fiction or nonfiction. Let me address one point at a time.

Editor number two was correct: In the late 80s, without the apostrophe, is acceptable and complies with Chicago style. Without the apostrophe 80s is plural and refers to many years. With an apostrophe it would be possessive, meaning something that belonged to the 1980s. The editor is also correct that for clarity it's better to write the full number: In the

late 1980s.

If the author wanted to say something that belonged to that era, it would be written with an apostrophe: “One 1980’s spokesperson said...”

The state should be set off by two commas, one before and one after, another issue of grammar. I’m surprised neither editor addressed that point. Correct: “In the late 1980s, I was living in Dallas, Texas, running a company...”

You touched on a point that disturbs me whenever I see it. I spot the term “writer’s conference” all the time, and that form means that writers own the conference. The correct form should be “writers conference,” which means it is a conference for writers; it is not owned by writers. You’ll notice that my own ezine is called The Writers Network News for exactly that reason. It is for writers. It is not owned by writers, although you could say it is owned by one writer—me.

Overall my point is editor number one was incorrect; the issues were not a matter of style, but of grammar, and grammar remains the same in any style.

Q: Which is correct?

His patience and soft-spoken sense of humor helps students make sense of the sometimes confusing world wide web.

Or

His patience and soft-spoken sense of humor help students make sense of the sometimes confusing world wide web.

The latter, right? I don’t teach grammar, but the latter sounds correct.

A: The latter is correct, because of the plural subject (patience and humor). Strip the sentence of the extraneous words and use just the two abstract nouns as the subject, and it’s easier to see that it is plural: “Patience and humor help students ...”

I spotted other issues, though. The sometimes confusing world wide web should be written this way: The sometimes-confusing worldwide web. Worldwide should be one word, and because both sometimes and confusing refer to one thing, the web, the term should be hyphenated.

Q: Explain to me this: it’s, its, and its’.

A: I always have to stop and think about it too, because it goes against convention. We think of words that end with an apostrophe followed by an “s” as being possessive, but in this one case, the possessive does not have an apostrophe. I’ll explain in detail.

“It’s” (with the apostrophe) is the contraction for “it is.” Example: It’s okay if John comes along. (We know “it’s” is a contraction, because the sentence can be written this way: It is okay if John comes along.)

Its (without the apostrophe) indicates the possessive. Example: The seminar had its own schedule.

Its’ is not a valid word.

The “its” words often get confused because they break the rules of possessive apostrophes. If you confuse these two words, you are not alone. Here’s a helpful hint: Every time you use it’s or its, ask yourself, “Am I saying IT IS?” If so, only then do you use the apostrophe (it’s).

Book Doctor Bobbie Christmas, author of *Write In Style: How to Use Your Computer to Improve Your Writing* and owner of Zebra Communications 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 blog at <https://www.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: Voice

If you want to understand voice, return to the classics. For a prime example of voice, reread *\_Catcher in the Rye\_* (J. D. Salinger). The narrator of the story is a teen trying to find himself. The character “speaks” in the style of a teenage boy, rather than using the perfect style of a literate writer. He repeats specific phrases often and displays repetitive patterns. His voice comes through loud and clear. As we read, we “hear” the character talking in that distinct voice. Here’s the opening sentence: “If you really want to hear about it, the first thing you’ll probably want to know is where I was born, and what my lousy childhood was like, and how my parents were occupied and all before they had me, and all that David Copperfield kind of crap, but I don’t feel like going into it, if you want to know the truth.”

To create strong characters, give each main character a distinctive voice that sets him or her apart from the others. Show

education through language patterns. A high-school dropout might say, "Gimme one of them cancer sticks, huh?" A student studying for the bar might say, "I know better than to smoke, but may I have one of your cigarettes?"

Listen to speech patterns. What sets speakers apart? Does one person say, "Know what I mean?" a little too often? Does another clear her throat before telling a lie? Does one person speak in clichés and another speak in fragments?

Not every character in a book must have a unique voice. Like anything else, too much is too much. The main characters, though, should have distinctive traits that set them apart from each other.

Remember not to rely on dialect, however, which is hard to read, difficult to write well, and disliked by readers and publishers alike. A word or two of dialect goes a long way. Instead, rely on word choice and word placement to get dialect across.

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

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Ada Limón Named Poet Laureate Consultant

Librarian of Congress Carla Hayden appointed Ada Limón as the twenty-fourth Poet Laureate Consultant in Poetry to the Library of Congress. Ada Limón was born in Sonoma, California, in 1976 and is of Mexican ancestry.

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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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Should You Self-Publish or Try to Sell to a Traditional Publisher?

Are you trying to decide whether to self-publish or try to find a traditional publisher? Here's some enlightening information from FirstWriter.com on the pros and cons of self-publishing:

https://www.firstwriter.com/selfpublishing/why_self_publishing.shtml

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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 don't get words in the correct order. When a word is juxtaposed to the wrong word, the result can be funny. Here are a few examples that I culled from manuscripts I edited:

A van with tinted windows playing Beethoven's "Für Elise" drives down the road. [As written the windows were playing music. To correct the error in juxtaposition, the sentence might be rewritten this way: A tinted-window van playing Beethoven's "Für Elise" drives down the road.]

The man asked us to get off the elevator with a smile. [As written the man asked us to smile when we left the elevator. To correct the error in juxtaposition, the sentence might be rewritten this way: With a smile, the man asked us to get off the elevator.]

He just gazed at the morning dawning and heard his first bird finishing the last piece of silverware. [One is left to wonder what the birds did to the silverware, right?]

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Yes or No to LatinX?

Latinx is popular in academic circles and among some younger Latinos because of its ability to be gender-inclusive, but outside academia, a large majority of Latinos don't use the term to describe themselves. Awareness of the term has grown in recent years, said Pennsylvania State University history professor A.K. Sandoval-Strausz, but a 2020 Pew Research Center study found that less than a quarter of Americans who said they were Hispanic or Latino were familiar with Latinx.

"'Latinx' not a preferred term among Hispanics, survey says," according to The Washington Post.

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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:

us here.

Narratively is devoted to original and untold human stories. We are always interested in adding new, diverse voices to the mix. We accept both pitches for story ideas and completed submissions, and we use a platform called Submittable to manage that process. Check out our contributors' guidelines and pitch your story here.

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Crime Short Stories Competition

Find out more here: <https://whiskyglass.com/crime-short-story-competition/>

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

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