

The Writers Network News: A Circular Story/January 2023

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

Writer's Quote of the Month

"There will come a time when you believe everything is finished. That will be the beginning."

—Louis L'Amour (1908-1988)

Louis Dearborn L'Amour was a prolific American novelist and short story writer. His books consisted primarily of Western novels; however, he also wrote historical fiction, science fiction, nonfiction, poetry, and short-story collections. Many of his stories were made into films, including "The Gift Of Cochise," published in Collier's in 1952. Before Hondo Lane became a Western icon, he was the subject of the Louis L'Amour short story.

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One: From the Editor's Desk: A Circular Story

Dear Fellow Writers:

In getting dressed to go bowling recently, I reached into my jewelry box for a pair of earrings and spotted a gold ring I hadn't worn in many years. The large but fake sapphire represented my birthstone for September, and on each side were tiny diamonds, although I never knew if they were fake as well. The ring had sentimental value. My parents gave it to me for my sixteenth birthday.

Sixty-one years have passed since I received that gift. I wore that ring for at least ten years before it no longer fit my ring finger and became relegated to my jewelry box. It was, however, always there, although over the years it got pushed farther into the reaches of its container.

During my recent move, the ring must have jiggled its way into the front of its drawer again. When I spotted it, I tried to slip it onto my ring finger. It wouldn't go over my knuckle. Instead I slipped it onto my pinkie. It fit better there, albeit a bit loosely.

Off I went to bowl and have lunch with my sister. While bowling I kept checking my ring, and there it was, sparkling on my

pinkie, reminding me of the sixteen-year-old who had big dreams about one day becoming a writer. That little girl achieved her dreams and then some, and I felt proud of her and, of course, myself.

After lunch I stood to leave the restaurant, and my purse knocked over my water glass. Not only did it spill water across the table and onto my sister's jacket, but it also knocked a sugar container onto the floor. I'd made a huge mess. Before I left I apologized to the server for the mess I'd made. She said, "No problem," but I knew I'd made more work for her or someone else. While I drove home I chastised myself for being a klutz. Those thoughts were all that occupied my mind.

At home while I checked my email on my computer, I looked down at my hands for the first time in hours. My ring was gone. Did it fall off at the bowling lanes after I'd checked for it? Had it fallen off when I washed my hands? How about at the restaurant during the water fiasco?

As soon as I could, I called the bowling lanes and the restaurant, but no one had reported finding a ring.

The ring was gone.

An odd sensation overcame me. Instead of feeling a sense of loss, I felt a little excitement. I recalled many years earlier when I found a silver ring while I was walking down a rural road. A simple band, it fit my pinkie perfectly, and I wore it happily for years. I thought about the joy I felt at finding that little silver ring, and then I thought someone would probably find my sweet-sixteen ring. I hope he or she also feels the joy of finding something special. I hope the finder wears it and lets the ring live on, as it should, long after I'm gone.

My feelings surprised me—joy at what might happen rather than a sense of loss at what actually did happen. Joy is usually a fleeting emotion, but I keep feeling it when I think about someone finding that ring on the restaurant floor or at the bowling lanes. I enjoyed the ring for years, and now it's someone else's turn, someone else's story.

Hm. A story about finding a ring and then losing a ring, and the circle never ends, just like the rings themselves. Yes, stories present themselves everywhere, don't they? That's why I'm a writer.

May you have a joy-filled, productive 2023!

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:

"Your book [*Write In Style*→] has been invaluable to me. I haven't worked all the way through it with my current manuscript, but I've been using the first few chapters to do what I call 'cutting BAIT.' (BAIT = but, and, it, there)." --Martha Geaney

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Steve M. Moore, author of many sci-fi, mystery, and thriller novels, novellas, and short stories, wrote regarding the *Chicago Manual of Style*, "Having traditionally published a few novels, I have anecdotal evidence that traditional publishing's editors force that [style] on authors only because their books will not be accepted by author organizations otherwise (ITW in my case). I think it has major limitations: One, I can't afford a copy, so I can't tell if an editor is correct or if there's an alternative interpretation. Two, it's useless for a lot of American English dialect and slang (the *NY Times Manual of Style* is slightly better and much less expensive). Three, I write a few British-style mysteries, and the UK lexicon isn't covered at all well (I include a glossary in those books for that reason). Of course, even some English authors don't follow the Oxford-comma rule (I do). Their adherence to the Chicago manual is one reason I said goodbye to my traditional publishers. I don't like constraints! (There were other reasons too.)"

I responded, "Thank you for your opinions of Chicago style. While the book is pricey indeed, it's an investment I have to make every time a new edition hits the market, which I'm thankful to say doesn't happen often. I think I've had to buy only four editions in my thirty years of editing books. I used Associated Press style before that, when working strictly for periodicals that followed that style. The AP stylebook was cheap in comparison."

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I heard from Jim Gilbert, "You asked [if I'd ever had one of those days] in your latest newsletter. Even though this isn't a contest, I'll go you one better: Ever have one of those decades?"

"I have. In the span of ten years I lost my mother and grandmother, lost my dog, lost my job of thirteen years, had to live on my credit cards (which I'm still paying off) while attending college, had to get student loans to pay for college (which I finally paid off), faced dozens of cruel and vicious romantic rejections (including a woman who turned me down because she decided to become a lesbian only after I asked her out, and another who called me a pervert when I asked her out on a coffee date because I was all of two years older than her when we were both in our thirties), crashed my paid-off car, had one of my students try to stab me with an umbrella, etc."

"Actually, writing was the one bright spot in those years. I joined a fan club for Anne McCaffrey's *Dragonriders of Pern* books. We put out a fanzine every other month, and I had stories, illustrations, and cartoons in the magazine.

"I wrote my first book in that decade, *A Host of Ghosts*. It was published as an ebook, got great reviews, won an award, and was a finalist for another award. I wrote my second book soon thereafter, *The Once and Future Now*, also published

as an ebook. It got good reviews, too. I've been trying to find a literary agent to represent me and my books ever since. No luck yet, but I'm still trying."

He's says he's now working on his fifth book, a science fiction novel and says, "Writing has been a saving grace for me for a variety of reasons, so I keep at it."

Jim adds, "Your e-newsletter every month has been a wonderful boost for me, especially considering the number of rejections I've received so far. (I know that even Stephen King got hundreds of rejections before he hit it big, but it's still extremely frustrating.) So thank you for the work you put into your e-newsletter for those of us struggling out here to make our writing dreams come true."

I wrote, "I can't beat that decade of yours, Jim, but I can see a book in there somewhere for sure. I'm glad you were able to be so productive. Keep up the hard work. Let me know when you land an agent, because I need encouragement too."

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Ellen Holder writes, "I recently read [an article titled 10 Famous Writers Contradict Common Writing Advice on a website called medium.com.] I forwarded it to my writing group, commenting that starting a sentence with a numeral is a no-no. Someone informed me that the title of an article is considered a headline, and numerals are preferred in headlines, even at the beginning. She referred to the AP style. I suppose they would be concerned with space. However, online I don't see that as an issue.

"I've tried to find where CMOS stands on this, but can find only the rule about not starting a sentence with a numeral. I looked through your desk reference, and found nothing about this AP rule. Working as a copyeditor, we would follow the CMOS style anyway. What are your thoughts on this? As always, I thank you for sharing your wealth of knowledge. If I can't find my answer anywhere else, I know I'll find it with you."

I responded, "Because I specialize in editing books, the style preferred by book publishers, my expertise is in Chicago style; however, I found this information regarding AP style, and it comes from the horse's mouth (APstylebook.com). "In general, spell out numbers at the start of a sentence. A few exceptions are years and combinations of letter(s) and number(s).

This is new guidance in the 2018 AP Stylebook, and note the use of 3D, no hyphen, as well."

For the full quotation, see <https://www.facebook.com/apstylebook/photos/a.118833031473125/2078126412210434/>

"This rule, however, applies to sentences, not titles or headlines. In looking into the issue, I found it interesting that the movie 12 Angry Men is based on the book titled (and spelled out) Twelve Angry Men. I do think sometimes it's expedient to use numerals in headlines, and headlines that promise a specific number of tips, such as the one you quote, are catchy and therefore popular.

"When CMOS doesn't specify an exception, I assume there is no exception to its style. That said, there are many ways to avoid starting sentences with a numeral, and only a lazy writer wouldn't look for a way to recast a sentence to improve it."

To reiterate, headlines aren't sentences; numerals are often used in headlines.

Thank you all for writing. Your notes inspire me to keep providing this free newsletter for writers.

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Two: Ask the Book Doctor: Chicago Style Wins Over AP Style in Books

Q: I am writing a non-fiction book about basketball teams, and my editor and I are confused about the use of numbers in the book. I have been going by The Chicago Manual of Style, but he is a former sportswriter and thinks the AP Style should apply.

The key Chicago rule is that numbers from zero to one hundred should be spelled out and 101 and above should be expressed in numerals. The AP Style says to spell out single digits and use numerals for double-digit numbers. The first question is which style manual applies to non-fiction books?

Here are some more specific questions:

1. We both think that all game scores should be shown in numbers, e.g. 8-5, 34-21, 97-63. 112-86. I searched the Chicago style manual in vain for an exception. Are we correct on this point?

2. The next question applies to a single score in a sentence, e.g. "Smith was the Rams' leading scorer with eighteen points." My editor thinks it should be expressed as "18" points, since it would follow AP style. Another example would be "The Rams scored a record thirty-two points in the third period."

3. Another question is about a player's height: is he six-four, six-foot-four, 6-4, 6-foot-4, 6'-4" or some other variation? I saw one example that showed it as "five-foot-ten guard" (i.e. used as an adjective) but as "The` Rams' star forward was six-feet-five inches tall," I have looked in other sports books and seen all these variations.

4. The last question is about time. Is it, "the 7:00 game" or "the seven o'clock game"? Or is it "With "a minute and twenty-six seconds on the clock" or "With 1:26 remaining"?

I tried emailing the Chicago people several weeks ago and got nothing. I tried calling and a very nice young man explained that the help desk handles only technical questions, not editorial inquiries.

A: First off, I'd like to mention that Chicago style spells the word nonfiction without a hyphen, rather than non-fiction.

Next, when The Chicago Manual of Style does not address a specific issue, it is left up to the publisher, and consistency becomes the guide. That said, Chicago style does address the questions you asked, and Chicago style is the style primarily used in books. AP style is more often used for newspapers and some magazines. I don't recommend using a combination of the two.

As for the first question, when giving scores, use numerals; however, according to Chicago style, an en dash, not a hyphen, should separate the numbers, because the en dash will signify the word "to." The en dash is slightly longer than a hyphen and can be found in Microsoft Word after you go to "insert" then "symbols" and then "special characters." Example: The Scorpions won, and the game ended with a score of 2-6.

Before I respond to question number two, note that Chicago style also differs from the style we see in newspapers and magazines when it comes to the use of possessive proper nouns. The general CMOS rule is to add an apostrophe s to create a possessive noun, even with proper nouns, and including most names of any length ending in sibilants (s or sh sounds). For that reason, the possessive of Rams in Chicago style is Rams's.

When referring to single numbers in a sentence, as shown in your example, write out numbers that don't exceed one hundred. Example: Smith was the Rams's leading scorer, with eighteen points.

For question three, write out heights when they are part of a sentence, not in a list or a chart. The use of "foot" or "feet" depends on the use in a sentence and whether the word is an adjective or a noun. Example: A five-foot-ten-inch guard went up against a forward who was six feet, five inches tall.

As to question number four, times of day in even, half, and quarter hours are usually spelled out in text. More exact times are written as numerals. Examples: The game was supposed to start at seven o'clock. Because of rain, the game didn't start until 8:22. Jordan Hufstедler scored the final touchdown with a minute and twenty-two seconds left on the clock.

Before you proceed any further, you'll have to inform the former sportswriter that he was correct in using AP style when he wrote for newspapers and magazines, but you're correct in adhering to Chicago style when writing books.

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 or 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>.

Three: Subjects of interest to writers

Editing Tip: Anti-venom/Antivenin

Although popular use has made the word anti-venom acceptable in some circles, the correct term for the fluid that counteracts a snakebite is actually antivenin.

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

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Is The Right Choice Everyday or Every Day? When Is Insure Right, or is it Ensure?

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Rev Up Your Manuscript: Free Seminar January 8

Join me by Zoom while I speak on the subject of "Rev Up Your Manuscript" for the Citrus Crime Writers, a chapter of Sisters in Crime, on Sunday, January 8. The information I give can be applied to almost any genre, and attendance is free. The meeting begins at 1:30 EST. To attend send an email to [citruscrimewriters@gmail.com](mailto:citruscrimewriters@gmail.com), and you will be sent the Zoom link.

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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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MANUSLIP

Manuslip Meaning:

A slip in grammar, punctuation, or other error in a manuscript that results in humor; a manuscript blooper

Etymology:

Coined by Bobbie Christmas (1944 -) in Write In Style: How to Use Your Computer to Improve Your Writing (2004, 2015).

Examples (actual outtakes from manuscripts I've edited):

She then runs a large cotton swab over each hand before depositing them in plastic tubes. [As written she deposited each hand into plastic tubes. The corrected sentence might read this way: She then runs a large cotton swab over each hand before depositing the swabs in plastic tubes.]

His eyes were glued to mine, not daring to leave at any sound or distraction. [As written not only did his eyes have the misfortune of being glued, but his eyes also did not dare to leave. A correct recast might go something like this: His attention was glued on me, while at any sound or distraction, he dared not to leave.]

Mistakes are typical; writers know what they mean to say, but sometimes their writing doesn't say what they mean. Only a good editor will catch and repair such flaws in a manuscript.

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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. Do you lowercase occupational forms of address like "waiter," "driver," "bartender," and "cook"? It seems that I got different opinions on various websites. Thanks for your input.

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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Shameless Commercial

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Four: Contests, Agents, and Markets

Airlie Press Offers Airlie Prize for Poetry Collection

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Entry Fee: \$25
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Lauren Albury Open to Fiction Submissions
Holloway Literary
submissions@hollowayliterary.com

Note you must carefully follow the instructions listed here: <https://hollowayliterary.com/submissions/>
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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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