

The Writers Network News: Memoirs Issue /May 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 created through TinyUrl.com, which converts long links into shorter ones.

Our format doesn't support italics, so italics are indicated with underlines before and after words.

Writer's Quote of the Month

"I cannot give you the formula for success, but I can give you the formula for failure, which is this: Try to please everybody." -Herbert Bayard Swope

Herbert Bayard Swope, Sr., was an American editor, journalist and intimate of the Algonquin Round Table. Swope spent most of his career at the New York World. He was the first and three-time recipient of the Pulitzer Prize for Reporting.

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One: From the Editor's Desk: When to Write Memoirs

Dear Fellow Writers:

It's no secret that I'm well into my seventies, and like most writers in their seventies, I've been writing my memoirs. What is a secret, however, is that I began writing my memoirs while I was still in my sixties, and boy, am I glad I did. I'll tell you why in a minute.

As I mention in my "Ask the Book Doctor" column, I've broken my memoirs into three books. The first one covers stories about my lifetime of trying to be in a rewarding romantic relationship (spoiler alert: regardless of all attempts, I've been single most of my life). My second in the series involved odd, funny, or otherwise interesting events that took place during my career. My third book reveals my experiences with animals of all kinds, from tadpoles to bears and everything in between.

I finished the first drafts of all three books and am now working on the second draft of my relationship memoirs, which I started more than ten years ago. In reading the material I'm astonished at the details that I remembered ten years ago, including copies of verbatim emails, text messages, and conversations. If I tried to dredge up such specifics today they would be much sparser; I'd forgotten much of it or left things on prior computers. As I've been reading I hear myself saying, "Oh, yeah! Now I remember."

I'm glad I wrote that first draft years ago, when my memories were fresher.

Some thirty-five years ago I read an autobiography by the then thirteen-year-old Drew Barrymore. I'm sure she had help, but that's not the point. People were saying, "How much does a thirteen-year-old have to say about her life?" Still, I found the book interesting, although I don't remember the details of it today. Instead my point is that I'm sure that if Drew read her book today, at age forty-eight, she too would discover details and memories she had forgotten.

When, then, should you write your memoirs? Start today, no matter how old you are. You can never be too young to record your life's events, highlights, and sad times, but you may get too old to remember some of the vivid details that make a book fascinating to read.

Have you started writing your memoirs yet? Today is the best day to start.

Yours in writing,  
Bobbie Christmas [Bobbie@zebraeditor.com](mailto:Bobbie@zebraeditor.com) or [bzebra@aol.com](mailto: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:

Dave Chatfield wrote, "I enjoy The Writers Network News, and my day is always brighter when I see your message in my inbox. I have shared your newsletter enrollment information with other members of our fledgling writers group that meets at the Chesterfield County, Virginia, Stonebridge Recreation Center. I hope some of them will also be receiving your thoughts and tips."

He also sent some of his writing and said he'd welcome my thoughts. Unfortunately I can't read and/or evaluate writing for free, since I'm a professional editor with only my time and expertise to sell. For free feedback it's best to have a critique circle or critique partner. Elsewhere in this newsletter I offer a free report on how to create and maintain a critique circle.

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William Speir, publisher and award-winning author, wrote the following helpful information: "In regard to your question if we use editors and what we have learned from them, I use a team of editors." He uses two grammar editors.

"Each one catches things that the other missed... the eyes see what the brain expects to see." He also uses a developmental editor who looks for plot holes, continuity errors, and factual inaccuracies. "I also use test/beta readers, and while not technically editors, they check the manuscript for its readability. Lastly I have two proofreaders who check the manuscript one last time before it is submitted for publication, to double-check that the edits I've made...didn't create other errors.

Just like it takes a village to raise a child, it takes a team to perfect a story so it will delight an audience without distractions or mistakes that take the reader out of the story." He adds that he's learned that "No matter how good the author thinks the manuscript is, it can always be better." As a publisher he contributes the following information: "Manuscripts need to be professionally edited (not by English teachers or family members or friends or colleagues, but by people who edit as their profession) to protect the author from...releasing garbage that reflects poorly on both the story and on everything that the author has written and will write."

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Ellen Holder brightened my day when she wrote, "My face always brightens when I see your ezine has arrived in my email. When you directed us to a link on the article 'At What Point Can You Call Yourself a Writer,' I clicked it and read it all without noticing who the writer was. I was completely absorbed in the article, and when I read the line, 'Have I made myself clear?' I laughed aloud. I knew you wrote it. It was without question your voice. You never talk down to your readers, but you absolutely make yourself clear. I read your books from cover to cover, then go back and read them again. Thank you for being you."

Thank you, Ellen for making me smile.

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Jean Shannon of Merimbula, Australia, wrote, "That was wise advice you gave to the woman whose friend couldn't sell her books. If people wrote only to be published, we would have lost a lot of great literature."

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Debra Spearman, author of Matthew's Rise sent in her suggested revisions to some of the weakly written dialogue attributions I had posted in last month's newsletter. Her revisions were solid, and she added, "The attributions don't matter. The words said by the character or the actions of the character should determine what the reader knows about the situation. Readers often skip over the attributions; I know I do."

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A writer I had quoted in a prior newsletter wrote, "Clipping off my comments to foster your opinions and passions was not fair."

I responded this way: Please understand that my newsletter is about writing. If writers express an opinion about editing or creative writing, I may or may not use the comments in my newsletter and may or may not shorten the comments. I do my best also to keep proprietary information private; the subjects of authors' potential books can be considered proprietary because the books have not yet been published. When your books are available to the public, send me a notice and a possible link to them on Amazon, and I may mention them in a future newsletter.

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

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## Two: Ask the Book Doctor: About Cutting a Manuscript Length

by Bobbie Christmas

Q: After five years I have completed my autobiography. After submitting many query letters with the word count of 777,568, I have been informed that as a new author no one is going to take a chance and publish my book because the cost would be too great. I am told the book should not be more than 90,000 words. How can you help me condense my book, and what would the cost be?

A: Publishers do prefer most first-time authors to keep their books at or under 100,000 words, and for good reason. Big books are poor investments for publishers. Long books cost more to produce, a fact that increases the necessary retail price, which in turn lowers the potential sales volume. Publishers therefore rarely accept manuscripts of more than 100,000 words unless the author already has a passionate fan following.

You have put a great deal of work into your book, though, and deleting 80 percent or more could be heartbreaking. I feel for you, and I can help, but not right away. Let me explain.

I assist authors, rather than scalp them, so let me make some suggestions. Whether your editor charges by the hour, page, or total word count, you can save a great deal of money by reducing the word count yourself before sending the book for editing. But wait! You won't have to cut out almost 700,000 words if you follow my advice.

Before I go further, though, I must ask if the book is an actual autobiography. The term usually refers to self-written biographies by celebrities, politicians, and other well-known people. If the author is an ordinary person writing about interesting personal experiences, the book should be labeled a memoir, rather than an autobiography.

If indeed it is a memoir, you're in luck. Memoirs give authors many ways to break their stories into several books. Whereas autobiographies cover a timeline and give a litany of facts, memoirs can be separated into categories. I've broken my own memoirs into three books by making one strictly about my life with animals. Another is about unusual or funny incidents that happened to me at work. A third covers odd or hilarious events I've experienced in my dating life.

One of my clients broke his memoirs into two books. One covered his travel adventures. The second covered stories about his challenges while living in a foreign country.

In your case perhaps one manuscript can concentrate on interesting incidents that happened to you during your youth and teen years. A second manuscript could cover events when you were in your twenties. Other manuscripts could concentrate on your thirties, and so forth. You can decide how you'd like to group your stories so that each book can stand on its own.

After you've broken the document into several manuscripts, you can go through each one and delete weak, least interesting, or least important events or chapters, thereby reducing the word count and making each standalone book even stronger.

Next you can read books such as mine, *Write In Style*, to learn which words and phrases to find and delete to make the writing even tighter.

Soon you'll find you've reduced the single manuscript of more than 777,000 words into five or more tightly written memoirs that may be closer to 100,000 words each. Only then is it time to send one or more of the manuscripts to me for editing.

When you break the original book into several books, I can work with each one individually and give you the best deal for your dollar.

Turning one too-long file into several means you won't have to gut your original manuscript. More of your stories will be preserved, each book will be economically feasible, and you'll have more books to sell.

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>. An excellent reference book for all writers groups.

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

Editing Tip: ALL CAPS

Chicago style spurns the use of all caps for emphasis and says that capitalizing a whole word or phrase is rarely appropriate in an attempt to emphasize something or show that someone is shouting. If capitals are specifically desired, such as to show a newspaper headline, CMOS says, "Small caps rather than full capitals look more graceful."

Examples of faulty use of all caps:  
"NO! Don't you DARE run away."  
The sign read TRESPASSERS WILL BE SHOT.

Better:  
"No! Don't you dare run away!"  
The sign read TRESPASSERS WILL BE SHOT. [Small caps won't be apparent in this newsletter style, so you'll have to use your imagination here]

Although some people think titles should be written in all caps, in actuality one of the few things written in all caps are acronyms, words made up of other words, such as AIDS or WAC. Otherwise, follow the usual rules for titles. The first letter is capitalized for store names, company names, book titles, ship names, and such. Book titles, movie titles, play titles, and ship names should also italicized, but not written in all caps. Chapter titles in the book itself, however, can be in all caps.

(Partial 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 Further or Farther? Anyday or Any Day? Appraise or Apprise?

Which word is correct? When is it one word or two? What needs to be hyphenated? Where do the commas go? You don't know what you don't know, and you may think you're right when you're wrong. Every book deserves a professional editor.

Zebra Communications offers three levels of service, two of which include developmental editing and an extensive report filled with advice, explanations, and suggestions on how to improve the manuscript's marketability. See 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 an Autobiography, Biography, or Memoir

Creative Writing News has a well-informed article that explains the process of writing an autobiography, biography, or memoir. See <https://tinyurl.com/25r74yp5>

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Bobbie's Blogs

With a high sense of humor an editor addresses a bunch of "high" words. Read more here:  
<https://www.zebraeditor.com/blog/on-my-editing-high-horse/>

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Poet Laureate News

Ada Limón, who has been the U.S. poet laureate for two years, has been given a second two-year term, marking the first time in history that a U.S. poet laureate has been given two two-year terms. Limón's second term runs from September 2023 to April 2025.

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Free Report: How to Create a Critique Circle

Being part of a critique circle has many benefits. You will get free and immediate feedback on your manuscripts and also be motivated to write regularly, so you'll have pages to present to your critique partners. You'll also learn from the feedback you hear your critique partners give others. Breaking into an existing critique circle may be awkward or impossible, though, so why not form your own, with your own rules and guidelines? My free report tells you how to form and maintain a successful critique circle. To ask for this free report, drop me an email at [bzebra@aol.com](mailto:bzebra@aol.com).

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MANUSLIPS

Some errors I find in manuscripts make me scratch my head and wonder what the author was trying to say. Here are a few examples lifted from manuscripts I've edited:

The louder the noise in our mind, the more deluded the belief in what will silence it as movement forward rather than see it as nothing more than energy spiraling in the same place, similar to a car tire stuck in the mud.

The dramatic crescendo may have drawn to it out of conscious awareness, but sometimes the events under the radar have impacted our direction more.

He had a sprightly gleam in his eyes, which looked like pieces of shiny coal tucked perfectly in the fatty ridges of his brow.

Splashing tonight's canvas with the afternoon colors of his world involved little conversation.

[Mistakes and missed opportunities for improvement are typical. Writers are too close to their own work to spot missed opportunities for improvement, which is why every writer needs an editor.]

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).

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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 "that" be capitalized in titles? Does it depend on usage? Take, for example, this title: "Features of the Website That Are Offered as Premium."

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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Interview with Sari Botton, Memoirist & Editor

<https://tinyurl.com/2uzyr9eh>

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A Quick and Easy Way to Improve Every Manuscript

In five-time 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\_ uses humor and expertise to show writers how to tighten and strengthen their writing and create a fresh voice.

\_Write In Style\_ is also available as an e-book or printed through the following source, although you may pay for shipping for the printed book: <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

Trust The Sun with Your Story

We publish personal essays, short stories, poems, and black-and-white photography in print and online in our monthly magazine. We're looking for narrative writing and evocative photography from all over the world. Send us work that maps the human landscape, where the light catches on the faintest joy, where darkness sometimes threatens to overwhelm, and where x never marks the spot because the truth is never so simple.

First-time authors and award-winners alike find their place in The Sun. We are particularly interested in submissions from marginalized voices.

We publish personal essays, short stories, and poems by established and emerging writers from all over the world.

We encourage submissions from writers whose perspectives are underrepresented in or missing from The Sun. We are particularly looking for work by writers of color, queer and trans writers, writers with disabilities, incarcerated writers, and others who are marginalized on the basis of their circumstances or identity.

Submission guidelines: <https://www.thesunmagazine.org/submit/essays-fiction-poetry>.

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The Writer: First Chapter Contest

Deadline: Tuesday, June 20, 2023

Category: Fiction, General

Entry Fee: \$20

Grand prize: \$1,000 and anthology publication.

All finalists will receive \$50 and anthology publication.

We're looking for first chapters that grab our attention and leave us wanting more. Your chapter should set the stage for the story to come, establishing key elements like character, world, and conflict.

Word count: 3,000.

Must be 18 or older to enter.

Contact Information:

Casey Peta

Managing Editor

[casey@bardsy.com](mailto:casey@bardsy.com)

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Sourcebooks

We are interested in books that will establish a unique standard in their subject area. We look for books with a well-defined, strong target market. Our list includes most nonfiction categories, including memoir, history, college reference and study aids, entertainment, general self-help/psychology, business, parenting and special needs parenting, health and beauty, reference, education, biography, love and relationships, gift books and women's issues.

In order to consider your nonfiction book for potential publication, we need to see a proposal that includes the following items:

- A brief synopsis in 1-2 paragraphs
  - Author bio or resume specifying credentials and publication credits, if any
  - A complete table of contents, plus estimated length of manuscript in words and pages
  - Two to three sample chapters (not the first)
  - A description of the target audience
  - One page/paragraph on your book's unique advantages
  - A list of competing or comparable titles and how your book differs
- Please do not send complete manuscripts unless a specific request is made for one. Queries only and simultaneous submissions are OK.

Please email your proposal to editorialsubmissions@sourcebooks.com

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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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