

The Writers Network News: Perfect Envy/June 2023

In This Issue

One: From the Editor's Desk: Perfect Envy

Two: Ask the Book Doctor—About Format Issues

Three: Subjects of Interest to Writers

Four: Contests, Agents, and Markets

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

Writing is the only profession where no one considers you ridiculous if you earn no money. —Jules Renard

Jules Renard was a French author who wrote poems, short stories, short plays, novels, and his famous Poil de carotte. Poil de carotte is an autobiographical novel published in 1894 that recounts the childhood and trials of a redheaded child.

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One: From the Editor's Desk: Perfect Envy

Dear Fellow Writers:

I belong to a bowling league for seniors, which means we're all more than sixty, and most of us are well more than sixty. We women mostly have gray or graying hair and bodies thickened with age. The men tend to have big bellies and little hair. Some members wear back braces, support stockings, or knee wraps. We're an odd but happy bunch.

Out of the more than eighty participants only a few have maintained their youthful figures and looks. I'm not among them. For a long time I envied one woman in the league in particular and privately called her Miss Perfect. Her naturally blond hair has maintained its bright color, with no hint of gray. Her flattering pageboy haircut frames her still-cute face. Her body is neither fat nor skinny, and her long legs look good in her jeans. She has dimples and eyes that sparkle and a sweet personality as well.

Miss Perfect made me wonder what it would have been like to grow up with good looks and blond hair. I'm sure doors would have opened to me that weren't open to me as a plain, short, dowdy brunette whose hair wouldn't hold a curl. I'd bet Miss Perfect didn't feel the brunt of bullies the way I did. Instead she would have been elected homecoming queen.

I studied Miss Perfect, not for her bowling skills, but for the way I imagined she must have breezed through life. My envy grew.

Recently while I watched Miss Perfect, I saw something I hadn't noticed. She walks with a slight limp, as if one leg is shorter than the other. Was it a birth defect or the result of a long-ago accident? Either way, she, and therefore her life,

wasn't perfect at all. She has had challenges, just as I have.

Like in real life where no one is perfect, the characters we invent for our novels and short stories shouldn't be all good or all bad either. Bad characters should have at least one or two good traits, just as good characters need to have flaws or challenges.

As an example I just read an article about a man who killed his parents when he was sixteen. He escaped from prison after a few years, changed his name, and spent the rest of his life as a successful salesperson, husband, and father, until he died in his sixties. Through DNA testing a detective found the man's son, who was shocked to learn that his loving but deceased father, who had told people he was an orphan, had actually murdered both his parents because they wouldn't let him go to a drive-in with a girl.

I will no longer envy the woman I labeled Miss Perfect. She has had her challenges. She looks great, but she has to deal with a limp. I'll think of her whenever I create new characters, though.

How will you give your bad guys a good trait and your good characters a weakness? Let me know your tips, techniques, or experiences, so I can share them with your fellow writers.

Yours in writing,
Bobbie Christmas Bobbie@zebraeditor.com or bzebra@aol.com
Author of two award-winning 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:

Ellen Holder wrote, "I'm requesting your free report on How to Create a Critique Circle. I belong to a private circle of four, and I lead a writers' group of about fifteen. Problems arise in a group so large, so any tips you have will be appreciated."

I hope my free report helped. The report is still available to anyone who asks in an email.

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Jim Gilbert had this to say: "I was so happy to read the part of your newsletter concerning submissions to Sourcebooks. While I primarily write novels, I have written a few magazine articles, and I also wrote a nonfiction book (on the suggestion of a colleague and friend) about math tricks, tips, and techniques for elementary school teachers. From what I read, I think Sourcebooks might just be the folks who will appreciate the value of my book.

"So, again, thank you, and thank you for the work you do in putting out this newsletter. Seeing it in my inbox makes my day."

Thank you for writing, Jim. I hope you have success with Sourcebooks. That publisher has been a client of mine in the past, and I admired the quality of the manuscripts it sent me to edit. I can't say the same for some vanity publishers that charge clients to self-publish.

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 Format Issues

Q: I want to ask about the TM symbol you use after your Find & Refine Method in your book *Write In Style*. How do I get this symbol smaller and high up in the copy? In Word, when I add this to my copy, the TM symbol hits in the middle of the last letter of what I'm trying to indicate is trademarked, not at the top of the letter, like yours. I'm not computer savvy, so I can't figure it out.

A: I have several answers. On my Mac I have to go to "insert symbol" and select TM, and it automatically is raised on the line when it appears. On my PC in Word, I type (TM), and when I type the second parenthesis, the computer automatically deletes the parentheses and changes the TM into the smaller superscript mark. I myself was shocked when it did it the first time. Yet another way on a PC is to type TM, highlight it, right click on it, go to Font, and choose Superscript. There may be other ways to format the trademark symbol as well.

Q: When I first started on a novel in 1995, publishers wanted italicized words to be underlined, even though we had the capability of changing the font on our computers. Is this still the case? Can we now use the appropriate font, or must we inquire from each publisher? I have visions of having two manuscripts, one with and one without italics.

A: It's always best to check with the publisher, but *The Chicago Manual of Style* says to use italics. When a designer flows the contents of a Word document into most design programs for layout, italics are usually maintained, and no one has to go back to look for underlines and change each one to italics, which could be a tedious process.

If you do underline words in your manuscript, though, be sure to tell the publisher and/or designer that underlined items are to be set in italics in the printed version.

Q: How do you format the name of a book or movie in text messages or emails when they should be italicized?

A: Most text programs and some email programs don't support italics, so your question is valid. Such messages, however, aren't formal manuscripts and don't have formatting standards we must follow. For that reason text messages and emails

don't have to be perfect.

Although no standards are set for text messages, emails, newsletters, and blogs, I have suggestions, but no absolutes.

1. Some people add an underline before and after a boat, book, or album title or other things that would ordinarily be set in italics, as in the following: Gone With the Wind was a bestseller and a blockbuster movie.
  2. Other writers may use quotation marks, like this: "Gone With the Wind" was a bestseller and a blockbuster movie.
  3. Some people simply capitalize the title and trust that the reader will understand, like this: Gone With the Wind was a bestseller and a blockbuster movie.
- Until a widely accepted style book is written about how to format plain text, writers are left to do the best they can.

Until a formatting standard is set for these types of electronic communications, choose a style that helps readers understand the content, and then be consistent. As for me, in text messages I simply capitalize titles that would be in italics, but in my ezine I put an underline before and after the title.

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 <https://www.zebraeditor.com/blog/> or visit <https://www.zebraeditor.com/>.

For much more information on hundreds of subjects 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 writing 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: Lightening/Lightning

Lightening: to make lighter. She is lightening her hair with bleach.  
Lightning: Electrical activity in the air. John hates thunder and lightning.

(Partial 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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Is The Right Choice Awhile or A While?

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. Zebra Communications: Excellent Editing for Maximum Marketability
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Outline or No Outline?

In an interview Dean Koontz said he doesn't create outlines. He feels they're constraining. He starts with characters, a premise, perhaps a scene or two. *Life Expectancy*, one of his favorites, opens with a deranged, chain-smoking, aerialist-abhorring menacing clown named Beezo in a 1970s maternity waiting room. "I give the characters free will," he says. "The novel becomes organic and unpredictable and much more interesting to me."

Read the full *Washington Post* article here: <https://tinyurl.com/4w3pp46j>

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Bobbie's Blogs

Who inspired you to write? See <https://www.zebraeditor.com/blog/early-inspiration/>

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A writing teacher got schooled by ChatGPT. Here's what he learned.

<https://tinyurl.com/4anyetyc>

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NPR Reports on the TV Writers Strike: "Being a TV writer has changed — and so have the wages, says 'The Wire' creator."

Read more here:

<https://tinyurl.com/bdfx2t3w>

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MANUSLIPS

Here's a few sentences I've had to fix in manuscripts I edited recently. Can you tell what's wrong with each one?

1. Aiming for dignity was an admiral goal.
2. The enthusiastic feeling that her daughter had for helping him through his physical dilemma and his bitterness about it loomed over her like an umbrella protecting her from any negative doubts about her ability to do so.
3. "He's foaming at the mouth like someone who has been bitten by a rapid animal!"

[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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How to Do Your Freelance Marketing in Three Hours a Week or Less

In June NAIWE will be chatting with Laura Pennington Briggs, NAIWE's Business of Writing Expert, on the very important topic of marketing your freelance business.

Marketing is often overwhelming and ignored by freelancers until they finish a big project or lose a client and realize they have nothing lined up. In this webinar freelancers will learn the importance of the statement "always be marketing" and how to make it an easy, consistent lift for your freelance brand. Discover how to find your highest-value marketing activities, schedule them, and consistently build a warm pipeline of work.

Laura Pennington Briggs is the founder and CEO of the Freelance Coach. A two-time TEDx speaker on how freelancing is changing the economy and the host of the weekly Advanced Freelancing podcast, Laura has helped more than 15,000 freelancers start and scale their business. She's an expert on systems, project and client management, marketing a solopreneur business, delegating to team members, retainers, and developing multiple income streams for writers of all stripes. Laura is the author of five books, including the Six-Figure Freelancer and How to Start Your Own Freelance Writing Business.

The cost for NAIWE members is \$10 and \$30 for nonmembers. To register for this webinar, which will be held June 22 at 2:00 p.m. eastern, visit <https://naiwe.com/training/>.

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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: I'm curious as to what proper Chicago-style formatting would be for referring to a person's pronouns. In informal communication I have found it standard to give them in roman and separated by slashes: she/her/hers. But should the pronouns be italicized because they are being referred to as words? I also wonder whether the slashes are proper Chicago style. Any guidance would be greatly appreciated.

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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The new fiction anthology Anonymous Sex has an unusual conceit: The twenty-seven contributors are identified within the book, but the stories are not individually credited. Such notable authors as Rebecca Makkai, Helen Oyeyemi, and Edmund White are among the contributors. "Some of our authors shared that they were able to write more freely because their names were attached to the book, but not to their own stories," said Cheryl Lu-Lien Tan, who coedited the anthology with Hillary Jordan. (Los Angeles Times)

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Write Tight: Learn What To Look For, How to Look for It, and What to Delete

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

Long Now Seeks Articles, Essays, Fiction, and More

Long Now is accepting pitches of essays, reported features, interviews, book reviews, shorter articles, fiction, and poetry for Ideas, our living archive of long-term thinking. Below you'll find a link to information on the kinds of stories we're looking for, how much we pay, and how to pitch us.

There is wisdom and clarity to be gained from taking the long view. Long Now Ideas gives our readers the context they need to take the long view on every issue we cover. Our stories rise above the ephemeral discourse and contextualize a given topic against a longer temporal backdrop, going further backwards and forwards in time than the typical news story. By "further" we mean decades, at a minimum, and millennia, ideally. How did we get to now, a Long Now story asks, and where might we go from here? The "we" of any Long Now story is "civilization."

<https://longnow.org/ideas/pitch-guide/>

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Ploughshares at Emerson

We accept submissions to the journal from June 1 to January 15 at noon EST. We greatly prefer online submissions—some submission categories require it. Please see the following pages for full submission guidelines:

To submit to the journal, excluding the Fall Longform Issue, please see our guidelines here.

To submit longform, longer works of fiction and nonfiction published in our fall issues, see the guidelines here.

To submit a Look2 essay to the journal, see <https://www.pshares.org/submit/look2-essay/guidelines>.

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The Clegg Agency is Interested in Representing Autobiography/Memoir, Literary Fiction, Narrative Nonfiction, and Poetry.

Bill Clegg says, "If you would like to make a submission, please send us an email at [queries@thecleggagency.com](mailto:queries@thecleggagency.com) with a little bit about the project, yourself, and how you heard about TCA. If we think we can be useful, we will respond directly and ask to see pages. We do not respond to all queries, and we cannot open attachments unless specifically requested. "

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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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Send a copy of this newsletter to all your writing friends. Tell them to join The Writers Network F-R-E-E by visiting <https://www.zebraeditor.com/> and signing up for The Writers Network News.

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 will 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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