

The Writers Network News: The Blank Page/July 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.  
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Writer's Quote of the Month

"Editing's just a more relentless and specific form of reading in which you read a book more closely than any sane person would ever think of doing. And an editor's responsibility to the author is to note page by page everything that crosses one's mind, pro or con, large or small, that might prove useful. Only the writers can make those calls, or come up with the best solutions to anything that also seems troublesome to them." -Gary Fisketjon

Gary Fisketjon was an editor at Alfred A. Knopf from 1990 to 2019.
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If our email to you bounces, our system automatically unsubscribes you. Before you change your email address, subscribe again with your new address. We cannot add you or change your address, because of our double-opt-in, no-spam policy. Please go to <https://www.zebraeditor.com/> and sign up with your new address, and do it before you stop using your old address.  
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One: From the Editor's Desk: The Blank Page

Dear Fellow Writers:

A few days ago I sat at my computer ready to write some brilliant passage that would inspire all my readers to write dazzling tomes of their own.

I stared at the white screen—the equivalent to the blank page when I first became a writer almost sixty years ago—and nothing happened. No gifted message came to mind.

I shut off my computer and walked away, deciding that time would deliver the message I wanted to impart in my readers.

At last I realized the message I needed to write. I had to share how I handle the awful feeling of having a blank page/blank mind, because many writers face a blank page at times and don't know how or where to start.

To be clear I'm not talking about the delightful times we have an idea we can't wait to write. I'm talking about the occasions when we sit down to write and nothing comes to mind.

I deal with a blank page/blank mind in different ways, depending on the project. In today's case I walked away for a few days until an idea came to me. At other times I've had a magazine article due and couldn't find a way to start it. Instead of worrying about the opening, I jumped in, sometimes in the middle; it didn't matter. After I had a rough first draft, I

could see the structure and gist of the article and then could conjure up a good opening. Rarely does the first line I write end up being the actual introductory sentence of my polished article.

When I face a blank page while I'm in the middle of writing a book I sometimes have to read a few paragraphs of what I've written, and soon I'm off and writing, continuing the stream of information.

If I belong to a critique circle at the time, I'm motivated to write something—anything—to bring to the upcoming meeting. That subject brings me to the most important thing that unblocks me: deadlines. Critique circles give me deadlines—whenever the next meeting is scheduled—and deadlines are my absolute best motivator.

Knowing that deadlines motivate me, I often set my own deadlines. I've made lists at times that outlined how many words I will write by a specific date.

For this letter my deadline was the end of the month. The page couldn't stay blank past that date, so here you go.

What gets you past that blank page? Share with me, and I might share your tips with our readers.

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:

"I was thrilled to read about your offer to share wisdom about critique circles. Please send info." -Kate Nixon, author of *The Heirloom Pearls*, *The Heirloom Brooch*, *Tales of Wisdom From My Pets*, and *Dear Fellow Cancer Warrior*

Margaret Knight wrote, "I loved your article titled 'Perfect Envy' in the June 2023 issue.

"Would you please send me the free copy of your report on 'How to Create a Critique Circle?'

"I belong to a writers group and three book clubs. Your report will be helpful with my writers group."

Sharon Love Cook reported, "I've written to you in the past, once when I discovered we were both in the anthology, *Seniorhood, No Place for Sissies*. I think I got that title wrong, as I'm not at home at the moment. Nonetheless, I just discovered another anthology that we have in common: *Haunted Encounters*. I wrote 'Ghost of Winthrop Hall,' a spirit who 'haunts' Endicott College in Beverly, Massachusetts, where I was teaching and became fascinated with the topic.

"I thought your story about your sister was startling and very moving. What a woman she must have been! My belated sympathies. Your memories are a fitting send-off to a beloved sister (so sad).

"Best to you, and thanks for your valuable information delivered monthly."

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 Capitals and Lowercase

by Bobbie Christmas

Q: I want to use TLC in dialogue ("Your sprained ankle could use some TLC.") What is the proper way to write this? Also, how do I write ASAP? I know there are different rules for different abbreviations, but how do we know when to use hyphens between the initials or, as in NASA, use them as a word? TLC, like so many others, does not seem to fit any category.

A: ASAP, NASA, and TLC do, in fact, fit specific categories. NASA and ASAP are acronyms (words created from the initial letters of its elements) and TLC is an abbreviation (something spoken as letters, not a word). Acronyms often appear in all caps, but some have become so common that they became words. Scuba and snafu come to mind as examples of acronyms that have become words that are set in lower case.

As for abbreviations, CMOS shuns most abbreviations in narrative, with the exception of titles, such as Dr. Dialogue often ignores rules and guidelines, so while I wouldn't use TLC in narrative, it's fine in dialogue. We are accustomed to seeing both TLC and ASAP in all caps with no periods, so that's how I would use it. Your example, "Your sprained ankle could use some TLC" is fine as is.

I don't know of any reason to use hyphens between initials. Perhaps you mean periods, which I have seen at the end of some abbreviations. (Examples: St., oz., lb.) That said, if you're writing a book, you should follow Chicago style and use such abbreviations only in specific cases, such as in charts or lists.

As if to confuse the matter more, some abbreviations have become commonly used as words and are lowercased, such as jpeg and pdf. When in doubt check the Merriam-Webster dictionary to see how best to format a specific initial or acronym.

Q: Should a pet's name be capitalized in academic writing, such as Lassie, Toto, or other famous animal names? Also, what about a person's own pets? Should these names be capitalized?

A: Pet's names are proper nouns, which are always capitalized. Lassie and Toto are capitalized just as John and Mary are capitalized.

Although a pet's name should be capitalized, its breed is not, but if part of its breed identity contains a proper noun, the proper noun is capitalized. Examples include German shepherd, Cain terrier, and Labrador retriever.

Terms of endearment such as honey, sweetie, and cutie, which are sometimes called pet names—as opposed to pet's names—are not capitalized unless they appear at the beginning of a sentence. Here's an example: "Come here, sweetie, if you want your dinner."

Q: I'm writing a book in which I use the names of board games (like Monopoly and Pictionary) and video games (like Rock Band and Guitar Hero). Do I need to use the TM or R symbol next to the names of those games within the pages of this book?

A: Can you imagine how unwieldy our writing would become if we had to use the trademark and copyright symbols every time we mentioned a registered product name? Although advertisements and packaging may use trademark symbols, authors of books follow Chicago style, and The Chicago Manual of Style recognizes registered names by capitalizing them only.

Ideally owners of trademarks also want us to use the generic description after the branded name, but that too can become cumbersome. For example, they wish we would say Kleenex brand facial tissues, Band-Aid brand bandages, and Jell-O brand gelatin. In most forms of writing, capitalizing games names such as Jell-O, Monopoly, or Guitar Hero is enough to acknowledge that the names are trademarked.

Send your questions to Bobbie Christmas, book editor, author of *Write In Style: Use Your Computer to Improve Your Writing*, and owner of Zebra Communications. [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/>.

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

Free Online Seminar Based on *Write In Style!*

Victoria Kazarian, president of Sisters in Crime, Coastal Cruisers chapter, invited me to speak to her California group, and I invite you to join in. I'll speak about how to edit and revise any manuscript to make it more creative and more marketable. Be sure to join in.

Editing for Creativity  
July 15, 1:30 to 3:00 EDT (10:30 to noon PDT)  
<https://tinyurl.com/bdhv52wm>

Victoria Kazarian is author of the Silicon Valley Murder traditional mystery series and the Laughing Loaf Bakery Mysteries cozy mystery series.

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Editing Tip: Foreword/Forward/Introduction/Prologue/Epilogue/Afterword

Be sure to choose the correct word and spell it correctly. Note that all the items below are optional. Authors may decide to add a foreword, prologue, or preface, but none are required.

Foreword: introduction to a nonfiction book, usually written by someone other than the author of the book

Forward: toward a front position (not to be confused with a foreword in a book)

Introduction: explanation of the material in a nonfiction book

Preface or Prologue: introduction in a novel written by the author. In a novel the preface or prologue is often a scene that takes place before the action in the book begins. It's fine to use a preface or a prologue, but not both.

A foreword may appear in a nonfiction book to speak to the readers before they begin reading the information in the book. Publishers recommend against having both a foreword and an introduction in nonfiction unless the foreword is written by a well-known person who endorses the book.

Fiction sometimes uses a prologue, a scene that takes place before the actual story in the book begins, and it may give backstory or setting.

An epilogue may appear at the end of a novel. An epilogue is a scene that takes place after the main climax of the story. It gives an indication of where the characters' lives will go from that point. In a book series, the epilogue can give a hint that more action, conflict, and tension is going to take place in the next novel in the series.

An afterword (in contrast to the foreword) is the proper term for an added piece following the end of a nonfiction book. As examples only, the afterword may relate events that took place after completion of the initial draft of the nonfiction book or be the personal opinion of the author about the events in the book or what the author projects may take place in the future that are related to the events in the book.

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

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Health Care, Healthcare, or Health-Care?

Which word is correct? When is it one word or two words? When should it be hyphenated? You're not the only person confused, but a professional editor knows the answer.

Where do the commas go? What is the prudent and correct use of exclamation marks? 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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What's Your Opinion on Revising Older Books?

Read the full article here: <https://wapo.st/3NrywSO>

Here's my opinion: I wouldn't want anyone changing my words after they are published, so I lean toward leaving everything alone. Let the reader see exactly how things were written when they were written. I don't like offensive things, of course, but what's offensive today differs from what was common language a century ago. Should we change our Christmas carol from "Don we now our gay apparel" to "Don we now our merry apparel?"

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Bobbie's Blogs

To Split or Not to Split? See <https://www.zebraeditor.com/blog/to-split-or-not-to-split/>

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Reduce Stress; Improve Mental Health: Journal!

[From The Washington Post]

Whatever your approach, journaling has been shown to have positive effects on mental health and stress levels. It can help you process feelings, work through problems and get a different perspective on your relationships or work.

Read the article in full here: <https://wapo.st/3qUA6E5>

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MANUSLIPS

How did you find out about that program?" she inquisitively asked.

What's wrong with the above sentence, you may ask. In one regard nothing is wrong; the sentence is grammatical. On the other hand, the use of the adverb "inquisitively" is redundant, so the issue is a creative one, rather than an outright mistake.

Editors will tell you to avoid using adverbs. In the case of the example, when someone asks a question, the person is automatically being inquisitive, so the adverb "inquisitively" is redundant.

[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 One Writer Found an Agent

<https://gdcramer.com/2023/06/26/pamela-meyer-her-journey-to-finding-an-agent/>

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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 having a difficult time finding a rule that governs afterthoughts. For example: "I told him I would pay my respects another time, if necessary." Comma before "if"? Seems like there should be.

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 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

Dr. Uwe Stender  
Triada US President and Literary Agent

He is interested in all kinds of nonfiction and fiction. In nonfiction, he is completely open to any project, from memoir (writers with huge platform only for memoir), pop culture, and health to how-to, gardening, history, and everything in between, including nonfiction for children.

When querying Uwe, include the query in the body of the email. Uwe is only able to respond to queries that he is interested in and request the manuscript; otherwise you will receive only an out of office message. Please check in your Spam and Promotion folders.

<https://www.triadaus.com/agents.html>  
uwe@triadaus.com

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Book Publisher Sterling Accepts Unsolicited Manuscripts

The Sterling list covers a broad range of subject areas including current events, diet and health, parenting, pop culture, reference, history, art, music, and everything in between. Sterling Epicure focuses on food, wine, and spirits. Sterling Ethos is a rich list encompassing all aspects of body, mind, and spirit. Lark Crafts publishes books on crafting, decorating, creativity, and outdoor living. Puzzle and game books—including crosswords, cryptograms, sudoku, logic puzzles, and I.Q. builders—are published under the Puzzlewright Press imprint.

Read full guidelines here: <https://tinyurl.com/bddtmmh8>

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2024 Minotaur Books/Mystery Writers of America Best First Novel Competition

Please read all of the rules and guidelines before submitting your entry. You can find the complete rules and guidelines at [us.macmillan.com/minotaurbooks/writing-competitions](https://us.macmillan.com/minotaurbooks/writing-competitions).

To enter, you must complete the entry form at <https://us.macmillan.com/minotaurbooks/submit-manuscript/> and upload an electronic file of your manuscript.

Because of the great volume of submissions we receive and the fact that judges are volunteers with full-time responsibilities elsewhere, it is important that you submit your Manuscript as early as possible. Submissions will get a more careful reading if the judge does not have to contend with a flood of last-minute entries.

To be considered for the 2024 competition, all submissions must be received by 11:59 p.m. EST on December 15, 2023.

If you have questions or need further clarification regarding the rules and guidelines of this competition, you may contact us at [MB-MWAFirstCrimeNovelCompetition@StMartins.com](mailto:MB-MWAFirstCrimeNovelCompetition@StMartins.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](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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