

The Writers Network News: January 2024

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The Writers Network News

Editor: Bobbie Christmas

Sponsor: Zebra Communications

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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

"If I see a few pages set entirely in italics I figure they're a protracted dream sequence and skip right past them, usually to no discernible loss."

—Benjamin Dreyer, former executive managing editor and copy chief at Random House and the author of Dreyer's English
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If Your Email Address Changes, You Will Be Unsubscribed

We cannot add you or change your address because of our double-opt-in, no-spam policy. If our email to you bounces, our system automatically unsubscribes you. To ensure you never miss an issue of "The Writers Network News," you must resubscribe with your new address. Please go to <https://www.zebraeditor.com/> and sign up with your new address, and be sure to do it before you stop using your old address.  
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One: From the Editor's Desk: On Being Submissive

Dear Fellow Writers:

Okay, I'm playing with words when I say I'm being submissive. What I mean is that I've submitted my latest manuscript to three agents. Now I have a long wait to hear back or learn that my manuscript has been rejected.

I haven't sold a book to a publisher in more than twenty years. Since then I've been self-publishing, because it was easier, faster, and ensured that I could get my books out to the public. In contrast finding an agent and/or a publisher takes a long time, if you're even successful in doing so, and still it doesn't ensure that a book will get published.

The book I'm trying to sell this time isn't my usual type—books for creative writers. Instead my current book is a memoir that tells dozens of stories about my experiences in trying to establish a long-term relationship with the opposite sex. The stories range from funny to scary to sad, and I hope an agent and then a publisher will like them enough to foot the publishing bill and pay me an advance, as my first publisher did back in 2004 with the first edition of Write In Style.

The submission process is tedious. I had to research agents who 1) handle my genre of book, 2) are open to submissions, and 3) have been successful in selling my genre to traditional publishers. I had to check each agent's website to find how each one wants to receive submissions. Some wanted only an email query. Some accepted submissions only through a specific portal. One wanted the entire manuscript and a cover letter. Several wanted a proposal. Nowadays most want electronic submissions; few accept copies sent by mail. Every agent asked for something different, and I had to comply.

I understand the disparity and desire for a unique approach. In this way if a full proposal arrives, for example, when only a query letter was desired, the agent—or the agent's assistant—can eliminate the submission for not following the guidelines.

Agents get hundreds of submissions a week; they need ways to whittle them down. Decades ago I helped a local agent do the same thing. At that time everything arrived by mail. She first loaded my car with forty large boxes of nine-by-twelve envelopes containing submissions. "Look for any reason to reject these. If you can't find any reason to reject some and they look promising, give those to me to consider."

Those first forty boxes contained hundreds of submissions. After rejecting most, I handed her four submissions worthy of consideration. More boxes followed, and again I rejected and returned most and gave her a low percentage of them.

I know my submission must not give the first reader any reason to reject it, so I do my research and follow every guideline. Today, however, few agents send actual rejections. Most say that if they haven't responded within six weeks to two months, the submission has been rejected. My long wait has begun.

I've dived back into the murky waters of traditional publishing. I hope an agent and publisher rescue me.

What have been your experiences in trying to find an agent or publisher?

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

Sharon Cook sent the following: "As always, I get a lot out of your newsletter: good, practical information.

"I'm responding to your query about sad events that somehow turn into happier episodes. My episode is bittersweet—and joyous!" She attached "My Mother's Coat," a short essay that won an award. She added, "It's appropriate for this season, and always makes me a little tearful when I reflect on it."

Way to go for the win, Sharon, and for turning a sad time into something positive.

Thanks to all my subscribers for writing. Your responses inspire me to keep providing this free newsletter for writers.

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Two: Ask the Book Doctor: So What About So?

By Bobbie Christmas

Q: If I could find this in CMOS, I wouldn't be bothering you. In one of Bobbie's reports (Highlights of Chicago Style) it says: "Chicago style does not use a comma after a brief introductory phrase, except when needed for clarity."

My 16th edition, page 311, says about the comma: "Especially in spoken contexts, it usually denotes a slight pause. Effective use of the comma involves good judgment, with ease of reading the end in view." Page 319, 6.36 says: "An introductory adverbial phrase is often set off by a comma but need not be unless misreading is likely. Shorter adverbial phrases are less likely to merit a comma than longer ones."

From these lines I surmised that really short introductory phrases, such as "So, And, But" would not need the comma unless you hear the comma when reading the sentence.

I have just looked over an article online by ProWritingAid, which says sentences beginning with "So" used as a filler word should be followed by a comma. Here are two examples:

So, do you think you'll be able to meet your deadline for the report?  
So, I told him that I didn't think this was a great time to start a relationship.

I have been leaving commas off in such places unless I would have said it with a significant pause. Is ProWritingAid off base, or is this correct? I think these examples are both clear without the commas, and I think too many commas clutter writing, but I want to be correct and not edit the work of other writers incorrectly.

A: Your question quotes an earlier edition of The Chicago Manual of Style. CMOS 17th edition, 6.33 (page 380) says this about commas with introductory phrases: "Whether to use a comma to set off an introductory phrase can depend on the type of phrase, its relationship to the rest of the sentence, and its length." The book addresses participial phrases and adverbial phrases in another section, but "so" doesn't fall into those categories.

The same page covers an introductory "yes," "no," "okay," "well," and the like, and sets them off with a comma, and it also sets off "Oh" and "Ah," but it doesn't address "so."

Here's my take: Most of the time "so" as an introductory word in dialogue is superfluous and should be deleted. If it's vital in some way, though, I would put a comma after it.

As for starting a sentence with the word "so" in narrative, not dialogue, that's another matter. I often pull sentences together to avoid that usage. As an example the original might go like this: The war ended on a Thursday. So the country celebrated for four days. My recast would go like this: The war ended on a Thursday, so the country celebrated for four

days.

If I'm writing the dialogue and not quoting someone, I'd either pull sentences together, in which case "so" is preceded by a comma, or eliminate "so" at the start of any dialogue. It often becomes repetitive, and as used, it's an expletive. By definition an expletive is "a syllable, word, or phrase inserted to fill a vacancy without adding to the sense."

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

First-time Author Loses Book Deal

What not to do after you finally land a book deal. Read the full article here: <https://wapo.st/3RbTS7u>

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Be Sure to Use the Right Word

Palate/Palette/Pallet

Palate: the roof of the mouth; taste
Palette: tin board to hold paints; the set of colors put on the palette
Pallet: mattress; wooden platform

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

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Bold Journey interviewed me about imposter syndrome. Read the interview here: <https://boldjourney.com/news/meet-bobbie-christmas/>

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Terms Writers Should Know

Style

Style has two meanings.

- 1 The way a writer puts words together, as in word choice and creativity.
2. A publisher's preferred rules for punctuation, capitalization, abbreviation, etc., as in Associated Press, academic, or Chicago style.

Excerpt from *Write In Style: How to Use Your Computer to Improve Your Writing*

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One Writer Who Encourages Others

<http://tinyurl.com/2p9cxswm>

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Do You Know What You Don't Know?

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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Words of the Year

Oxford University Press has been named "rizz" Oxford's 2023 Word of the Year. Slang for "style, charm or attractiveness" or "the ability to attract a romantic or sexual partner," "rizz" is a shortened form of "charisma. According to Oxford it was popularized in videos posted online in 2022 and went viral after the actor Tom Holland said in an interview, "I have no rizz whatsoever. I have limited rizz."

Dictionary.com, however, named "hallucinate" the 2023 Word of the Year, referring to when an artificial intelligence program generates false information and presents it as factual.

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Bobbie's Blogs

Have you ever had a day from hell? I hope mine will make you chuckle, though, as a testament to the fact that even the worst situations can sound funny after the fact.

Read about my latest blog entry here:
<https://www.zebraeditor.com/blog/a-day-from-hell/>

~~~~~ Manuslips and Missed Opportunities for Improvement

You knew what you meant when you wrote it, but only a good editor can spot sentences that don't say what an author intended.

Can you tell what can be improved with the following sentences? [See answers below.]

1. Setting his jaw, his eyes swung toward the wreckage.
2. He took on a serious expression while holding Joe's eyes.
3. About to get up, his eyes settled on his wife.

Answers

1. As written his eyes set his jaw and then picked up a broom and swept away the wreckage. Better: He set his jaw and looked toward the wreckage.
2. As written the character held Joes eyes in his hands. Better: He took on a serious expression while holding Joe's gaze.
3. As written his eyes were about to get up but instead they sat down on his wife. Better: He rose and stared at his wife.

- Manuslip: a slip in grammar, punctuation, or other error in a manuscript that often 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).

~~~~~ 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>.

~~~~~ CMOS Online Q&A

This month someone posed the following question to The Chicago Manual of Style Online:

Q. Would you say "in the artist's more than fifty-year career" or "in the artist's more-than-fifty-year career"?

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.

~~~~~ 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

Katherine Boyle, Literary Agent  
[katherine@veritasliterary.com](mailto:katherine@veritasliterary.com)

Boyle invites you to send queries for the following categories:

- Narrative Nonfiction and Memoir
- Historical Fiction
- Literary Fiction
- History
- Pop Culture and Cultural Studies
- Women's Studies
- Natural History
- Children's including YA, Middle Grade & Picture Books

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 Skyhorse Publishing
<https://www.skyhorsepublishing.com/submissions/>

Before submitting a proposal, we suggest you click around our site and take a look at the kinds of books we've published. This will help you gain an idea of what we're looking for. Send all submissions to [submissions\[at\]skyhorsepublishing\[dot\]com](mailto:submissions@skyhorsepublishing.com). In the subject line of your submission, please include only one of the following categories:

- Outdoor & Sports
- Fiction & Literary Nonfiction
- Children's
- Cooking & Lifestyle
- Politics, History, & General Non-fiction
- Racehorse (highly trending topics, e.g., adult coloring books)

NOTE: We will not review any online submissions that do not include one of the above categories in the subject line.

Please do not mail hard copies or originals unless requested.

If we are interested, we will get back to you within 4-6 weeks. Unfortunately, due to the volume of queries, we will not be able to respond to everyone.

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 The Masters Review's Winter Short Story Award for New Writers  
<https://mastersreview.com/winter-short-story-award-for-new-writers/>

We welcome submissions of previously unpublished fiction or creative nonfiction up to 6,000 words. Our contest runs from December 1, 2023, to January 28, 2024, and is open to any writer who has not published a novel or memoir with a major press. The first-place winner of this contest will receive a \$3,000 grand prize, along with online publication. Second- and third-place winners will receive \$300 and \$200 respectively, along with online publication.

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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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