

The Writers Network News: February 2024

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The Writers Network News

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Sponsor: Zebra Communications

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Zebra Communications

Excellent editing for maximum marketability

Founded in 1992

<https://www.zebraeditor.com/>

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

Napoleon Hill: "A goal is a dream with a deadline."

Oliver Napoleon Hill was an American self-help author best known for his book Think and Grow Rich, a book that was among the best-selling self-help books of all time. Hill's works insisted that fervid expectations are essential to improving one's life.

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One: From the Editor's Desk: Resolution Dissolution

Dear Fellow Writers:

February is here, the month by which most people have given up on their New Year's resolutions. By this time of year the folks who intended to lose weight have formulated at least ten excuses for why they can't get to the gym or stick to a restricted diet. Those of us resolved to write the great American novel still face blank pages or have given up. Why do our resolutions fail?

"I promise to do better" or "I promise to write a book" or "I plan to lose weight" are statements that have open ends, and anything so ephemeral is bound to fail. What has worked for me, instead of weak hopes, is making specific goals. As Napoleon Hill said, "A goal is a dream with a deadline."

Around 2003 I sold the first edition of Write In Style to a publisher based on a proposal and two sample chapters. The publisher gave me three months to submit my full and final manuscript. Although I thought the timeline was impossible to meet, meet it I did, and why? Because I had a goal.

We don't have to wait for a publisher to give us a goal. We are our own pilots. Instead of saying, "I want to write more" or "I want to finish my book," create, say, and write down a date by which you plan to finish that book, essay, or proposal. You then have a goal. A goal! And by that date, your dream can come true.

I use the same method when an author sends me a book to edit. I tell the client the date I will be finished, and then I set out to meet or beat that date. The date may mean nothing to the author, but it's everything to me. It's what drives me to complete each project, and it works. I've been setting goals like those since I started my business in 1992. Sometimes I am a day or two late, but who cares? I have a goal, so the project gets done.

Authors have told me horror stories about editors who never returned a job or didn't return it for as long as six months. One absconded with the only copy the author had, in the days when we used typewriters. When I began Zebra Communications I was determined to be the editor people could trust, and it has worked. In November I celebrated being in business—totally self-supporting—for thirty-two successful years.

What has been your history with goal setting? Send me your stories.

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

Jim Gilbert has exciting news: "I subscribe to *Mother Earth News* magazine, which means I get regular email newsletters from the magazine. I sent an email to the editor about the main feature in the last email, about holiday food. My email contained my recipe for an appetizer, as well as a little story about it. The editor replied, saying that they wanted to publish the recipe and story in their Country Lore column! Of course I said yes!"

Jim says he's still looking for an agent to represent him and his books, but successes like this one give him hope.

After congratulating Jim I couldn't resist reporting a personal experience. I subscribed to *Mother Earth News* for many years. In the 1970s I moved within fifty minutes of its office in North Carolina, so I applied for work there as an editor. I failed the editing test, though. I missed one word that the author had spelled e-v-e-s when referring to the border of a roof. I should have changed it to be spelled e-a-v-e-s. I missed one word out of a two-page test, and it was considered a failure! I had to respect the quality of that magazine, and I've never misspelled that word again. Although at age thirty-two I still had much to learn, I found a job with a newspaper much closer to my home.

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Alan Schmadtke wrote, "I am reaching out to deliver a final thank you for being part of the 2023 speaker roster for our Citrus Crime Writers group. We've received a number of compliments for the education you gave us, so I wanted to start your 2024 by letting you know how valued you are."

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Marlene Clark wrote, "Regarding your submission: Good luck! You really rock! You've had so much going on this year, yet you found time to get your book together. You must be super organized. Me? My life is paved with good intentions, which leads me to admit that good intentions get me no place. There's a difference between committing to doing something and promising to do it. You did it! Congratulations!"

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Dale Bailes, a longtime friend and one of my favorite poets, wrote simply to say, "Happy New Year." It's always an honor to hear from him. We were at the University of South Carolina together in the early 1960s, and I had the honor of typing up his very first book of poetry that he published. Since then he's had many honors and was even among those nominated for poet laureate of South Carolina.

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: About Agents and Publishers

By Bobbie Christmas

Q: I just received an encouraging response from an agent I queried regarding my fiction manuscript. The agent requested a description (approximately one-page summary) and a synopsis (approximately two- to five-page-summary).

What do you think the agent is looking for in the description? Do you think it's supposed to be just a more condensed version of the synopsis?

A: Congratulations on getting an encouraging response from an agent—a rarity!

As I understand the difference, a description describes the book and can include teasers. It talks about the book, rather than just the story in the book. It might start this way:

"What happens when a forty-seven-year-old woman finds herself divorced and destitute in Chicago? In 1962 Mary Devine, rather than become homeless, turns her abode into a house of ill repute. In 80,000 words *The Escapades of Madam Devine*, a quirky contemporary novel, covers Devine's adventures, challenges, setbacks, and triumphs with a few hilarious twists."

The description might go on to compare the book to one by John Irving or some other humorous writer.

A synopsis, on the other hand, has no teasers. It covers the entire plot from beginning to end. The synopsis never talks about the book, only about the story. It never asks questions, compares the book to other books, or teases the reader the way a description can.

Q: I've been submitting my manuscript to several publishers and agents. One publisher gave lots of praise for the submission but said it didn't accept unagented manuscripts. One agent said he "saw the talent," but said he'd had

problems placing similar proposals recently. Do these niceties mean anything, or are they just letting me down gently?

A: Most agents and publishers have little time to let people down gently. While rejections used to be sent by preprinted letters, boilerplate emails, or rubber-stamped rejection notices, today most agents and publishers simply don't respond at all if they aren't interested. Agents and publishers have nothing to gain by taking extra time to write a nice note. A personal comment of any kind is rare, and when a comment is complimentary, frame it! You have the rarest form of rejection, and it means you are getting close.

Keep revising and submitting your work. Keep creating more. Ponder the point that similar proposals have been difficult to place. Think how you might revise your proposal or book to make it more marketable. Look at bestseller lists to see what's selling. Keep going, and take pride in any "good" rejection.

Q: Do you have a suggestion for a book I have produced in Canada? I have sold 4,000 copies in Canada and am considering submitting it to a US publisher, but I haven't a clue as to who publishes history books in America.

A: It's the author's job to perform the research. Go to bookstores or check online for books in your category and see who published it. Buy *Writer's Market* (about \$21 for the Kindle version) and make a list of publishers that publish history and don't require an agent. Also use the book to look for agents who handle books on history.

Some publishers won't take pre-published work, but because yours has a strong sales record and great reviews, if you're willing to speak and promote it, you may be able find a publisher in America.

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

From *The Guardian* [a British publication]

Rebellion at the Royal Society of Literature

Fellows of the Royal Society of Literature, an august body founded in London in 1820, seemed poised to stride into the new year on a bold footing, with an inclusive programme of events and a revitalised membership. Its Booker prize-winning president, Bernardine Evaristo, alongside poet Daljit Nagra, chair of the society's leadership council, were promising further modernisation soon.

"The society should not just be for a group of older, rather entitled, people, however distinguished. These problems had to be sorted quickly," said one new fellow.

Read the whole story here: <http://tinyurl.com/5f2m7y93>

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2024/jan/27/radical-moves-at-royal-society-of-literature-prompt-rebellion>

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Personal Opinion/Abstract Adjectives

Avoid using abstract adjectives or personal opinions, except in dialogue. Here are a few abstract adjectives that when used sound like personal opinions: incredible, amazing, pretty, handsome, wonderful, nice, sexy, special, or beautiful. Such words do not describe; they give a personal opinion of the narrator. Instead of abstract adjectives, use descriptive words to describe the person, place, or thing and let readers form their own opinions.

Instead of I met an amazing woman at the mixer, consider I met an intriguing woman at the mixer, or I met a woman at the mixer that I'd like to see again.

Instead of She was pretty, consider: Her auburn hair fell in ringlets beside her high cheekbones.

Instead of He was handsome, consider: His chiseled features distracted her.

Instead of She was sexy, consider: When she slid one silk-stockings-adorned leg over the other, her skirt raised, revealing a flawless thigh.

Instead of The hotel was surrounded by beautiful scenery, consider: Lush, well-maintained gardens full of vines, bushes, and flowering plants surrounded the hotel.

(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

Purple Prose

Purple prose refers to overwriting that is often combined with far-fetched ideas and is usually a failed attempt to write poetic prose. Here are two real-life examples of purple prose ripped from raw manuscripts:

- 1)The autobiography drips with famous names that roll off the tongue like bacon grease sliding down the slippery sunny-side-up slope of a fried egg.
- 2) His reaction made bare-bones truth a walking, breathing dragon that burned a hole in their friendship.

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

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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](http://www.ZebraEditor.com). Zebra Communications: Excellent Editing for Maximum Marketability

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Another Word of the Year

Last month I reported that Oxford University Press had named "rizz" its 2023 Word of the Year and Dictionary.com had named "hallucinate" the 2023 Word of the Year, referring to when an artificial intelligence program generates false information and presents it as factual.

Today I can report that with AI still on the minds of the world, the Merriam-Webster word of the year for 2023 is "authentic." Merriam-Webster is the dictionary most preferred by book publishers.

The Associated Press article went on to say this: "Authentic cuisine. Authentic voice. Authentic self. Authenticity as artifice. Lookups for the word are routinely heavy on the dictionary company's site but were boosted to new heights throughout the year, editor at large Peter Sokolowski told The Associated Press in an exclusive interview."

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Bobbie's Blogs

In 2016 I wrote about Bruce Bird, my aging parakeet at the time. The story of how he came to me and all that I learned about him is still bound to bring a smile to your lips. Although I had never thought of owning a bird, I now have another parakeet and I bird sit for several friends while they travel. Bruce Bird, however, started it all.

Read about Bruce Bird here:  
<https://www.zebraeditor.com/blog/the-story-of-bruce-bird/>

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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's wrong and what can be improved in the following sentences? [See answers below.]

1. In those years before moving to China, my focus was on competing in triathlons.
2. All the people were happy with joy, and they all surrendered the two boys for big hugs

Answers

1. [missing modifier] Better: In the years I spent before moving to China, my focus was on competing in triathlons.
2. [happy with joy = redundant; surrendered = incorrect word choice; all = repetition and superfluous] Better: The people were happy, and they surrounded the two boys for big hugs.

- 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).

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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://www.facebook.com/ZebraEditor>

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CMOS Online Q&A

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

I'm reviewing an organization's bylaws, which contain several instances of a number spelled out followed by the number as a numeral in parentheses: e.g., "two (2)." I think parenthetical numerals are pointless redundancies. Does CMOS have a rule or preference related to this?

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

Lunch Ticket Offers \$250 for Essays

Creative nonfiction authors are invited to submit an essay of up to 3,500 words on the subject of their choice to be considered for the Diana Woods Memorial Award in creative nonfiction. Winners will receive \$250 and their work will be featured in the next issue of Lunch Ticket. Each award recipient must submit a 100-word biography, current photo, and send a brief note of thanks to the Woods family.

To submit, click on the button called "Submit to Lunch Ticket" on we website listed below, and choose the category called "Diana Woods Memorial Award."

The reading period for the award is the month of February for the issue that publishes in June, and the month of August for the issue that publishes in December. Please note that previously published work will not be accepted. All submissions for the award will be considered for publication in Lunch Ticket.

<https://lunchticket.org/contests/dwm/>

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New York Times  
<http://tinyurl.com/bdz26684>

New York Times Opinion guest essays deliver an argument in the author's voice, based on fact and drawn from expertise or experience. Our goal is to offer readers a robust range of ideas on newsworthy events or issues of broad public concern from people outside The New York Times.

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A Competition with a Twist on Writing Prompts

The subject changes regularly. See <https://www.theprose.com/challenges> to enter.

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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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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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With the exception of Zebra Communications, the information in this newsletter is not to be construed as an

endorsement. Research all information and study every stipulation before you enter a competition, pitch or accept an assignment, spend money, or sell your work.

The Writers Network News: a newsletter for writers everywhere. No Rules; Just Write!

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