

The Writers Network News: April 2024

In This Issue

One: From the Editor's Desk: Closemouthed or Activist?

Two: Ask the Book Doctor—About Formatting a Manuscript

Three: Subjects of Interest to Writers

Four: Contests, Agents, and Markets

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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.

Writer's Quote of the Month

The ladder of success is best climbed by stepping on the rungs of opportunity. -Ayn Rand

Alice O'Connor, better known by her pen name Ayn Rand, was a Russian-born American author and philosopher. She is known for her fiction and for developing a philosophical system she named Objectivism. Born and educated in Russia, she moved to the United States in 1926. Her best-known books include Atlas Shrugged and The Fountainhead.

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One: From the Editor's Desk: Closemouthed or Activist?

Dear Fellow Writers:

Because of the stigma involved, I've withheld personal information from most people. The other day, though, I researched how others handle my situation. I learned that others have attempted to erase the stigma by being more open and therefore becoming an advocate for better health care. I want to do the same.

Here's what I've tried to hide: I am a colorectal cancer survivor. For years I refused to talk about my experience because it was personal and involved butts, poop, and toilets. I don't want to be silent anymore, because being open about it might save someone else's life.

My cancer is in remission, but surgery, chemotherapy, and radiation have forever changed my life and my body. I'm fortunate that I don't have to wear an ostomy bag—my doctor was able to reattach my colon—but my bodily functions will never be the same. Because part of my colon and rectum were surgically removed, my bathroom urges have become unpredictable and often imperative. No longer can I count on taking care of my "morning constitutional" before leaving the house in the morning and then being fine for the remainder of the day.

Everything I'm experiencing could have been avoided if I'd gotten the first colonoscopy my doctor recommended decades ago, when I turned forty. Instead I refused to endure the procedure. Year after year I turned down my doctor's advice to get a colonoscopy. Even when I developed symptoms, I convinced myself I just had hemorrhoids. By the time I acquiesced and underwent a colonoscopy, I had Stage Two colorectal cancer—a fist-size tumor, when most tumors are less than pinky-fingernail size, and it had invaded a bone and almost occluded my rectum. Excruciating pain had me taking opioids, despite the risk of addiction. Before the doctor could schedule surgery, I was rushed to the hospital with a hemorrhage

that I was lucky to survive.

Recovery from extensive surgery took months, after which my oncologist insisted I undergo daily chemotherapy and radiation as preventive measures. First, though, I had to allow technicians to tattoo me where the radiation would focus. Blue spots were burned into my flesh on my spine and on both hips.

Day after day I had to drive to the hospital, undress, and lie face down on a table. Two technicians slid my naked body this way and that until their lights aligned with one tattoo after the other. I had to hold my breath while they left the room, the radiation too dangerous for them to be around. From behind a wall a technician delivered dangerous radiation deep into first one hip and then the other and then my spine. The doctor had said that radiation would kill any remaining cancer cells. He didn't tell me about the damage the radiation would do to the healthy cells it burned through or that the damage would continue to get worse, even after the treatments ended.

I also had to swallow huge pills—oral chemotherapy—because that form was better for colorectal cancer than infused chemotherapy. Cognizant of swallowing pills that were poisoning my body, I developed an aversion to all pills. That repulsion means that to this day, every single time I have to take daily pills that regulate my blood pressure and thyroid, my trauma returns, my body reacts, and I have difficulty swallowing.

During the extended sessions of chemo and radiation, I lived with low-level nausea and almost uncontrollable diarrhea. Eight or ten times a day I had to desperately dart to a bathroom, no matter where I was.

For five years after my surgery I had countless doctor's visits, innumerable painful blood draws, and multiple CAT scans. I've never calculated how much time I lost going to oncologists, radiologists, hospitals, and pharmacies or how many days I lost while recovering from operations, but I know I missed my high school reunion, had to put a hiatus on bowling with my team, and couldn't go to my water aerobics classes for a long time either.

Only one year after completing my surgery, radiation, and chemotherapy, I felt like I'd aged ten years. Radiation damaged my body in ways I'll never fully know, but the CAT scans revealed that my hips and spine visibly deteriorated. No longer can I walk or stand without pain in my hips and back. The circulation in my extremities has been compromised too, since the cancer surgery also removed many lymph nodes. My feet stay swollen and painful.

If I'd only had that first colonoscopy at age forty and had been monitored from then on, none of these things would have happened. At that first colonoscopy the doctor would have seen the polyp and clipped it. It never would have developed into cancer.

I hope everyone who reads this confession will take my advice and get screened for colon cancer early and often. Oh, how I wish I had.

What I can do now, though, is tell my story. I have stopped being silent. I need to be an advocate for cancer screening and prevent others from going through what I continue to endure.

Do you also have a story that can help others? I hope you write it.

Yours in writing,  
Bobbie Christmas [Bobbie@zebraeditor.com](mailto:Bobbie@zebraeditor.com) or [bzebra@aol.com](mailto:bzebra@aol.com)  
Book doctor, author of award-winning *Write In Style*, owner of Zebra Communications, editor of "The Writers Network News," and senior editor of *Enjoy Cherokee Magazine*

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Two: Ask the Book Doctor: About Formatting a Manuscript

Q: How important is the format of my manuscript? If I don't follow standard manuscript format, can my book get rejected?

A: I can't speak for every agent and publisher in the world. I can, however, address some of the things that are standard in the industry. If you have any hope of landing an agent or selling your book to a traditional publisher, the format of your manuscript could possibly stand in the way if it doesn't follow standard manuscript format—SMF. It's hard enough to land an agent or find a publisher willing to buy your manuscript, so it's important to show your professionalism by following the standards in the book publishing industry.

When you go for a job interview, the person who interviews you will make a few snap decisions based on how you present yourself. Are you dressed and groomed in a professional manner, or is your hair in disarray and your clothes raggedy? Agents and publishers are likely to make the same snap decisions about a manuscript. In SMF a manuscript looks professional and reflects well on the author, as it should.

If you plan to self-publish, perhaps your manuscript format won't matter, but I'll address that issue in a minute. First let's discuss the settings in SMF.

Microsoft Word is the standard word-processing program for manuscripts, although Pages in Mac is often accepted. Don't bother with Google Docs or other programs that are set up to design the book layout while you write. While you write your draft you need only to write, not design.

Before you start typing, go to Home in Word and choose twelve-point Times New Roman for the font. Next ensure the document is aligned flush left, not justified. Next check 2.0 for the spacing and check Remove Space After Paragraph. There are several ways to set up an automatic indent for new paragraphs. I select all and then move the top triangle on

the ruler at the top of the page so that new paragraphs always automatically indent five spaces. You will have to click on the top of the page to add a header with your name, your manuscript title, and automatic page numbering, and that's it. You can then click back on the body of the page and type your story, and Microsoft Word will format your manuscript correctly.

Don't get confused. Manuscript format and book layout are separate operations. After a manuscript is written, revised, and professionally edited, and after a publisher buys a manuscript, the publisher will layout and design the book.

On the other hand, if you plan to self-publish you may not need to concern yourself with double-spacing or font type or size, because you or your layout person may be able to work with any format your original document uses. Nevertheless, the book layout is done after the manuscript is complete and not while the manuscript is being written.

Finding an agent or a publisher is tough. Following SMF tells those folks that you are knowledgeable about publishing industry standards. It makes you look professional, so it's worth a little trouble to set up before you ever start writing.

Q: I keep having formatting issues when I'm writing my book in Word. What software do you recommend? Google Docs?

A: If the manuscript is set up correctly in Word, there should be no formatting issues. Perhaps you are trying to layout the manuscript like a book while you are still writing. Layout should be managed only after the writing and editing are complete. Use Word, the standard in the industry. Later you can learn a good layout program or let a professional person layout the book if you intend to self-publish, but don't let format get in the way of the first writing. Doing so will thwart your creativity.

Q: I have seen books where long quotes were indented on both sides instead of using quotation marks. How can I do this in Word?

A: First, the quote must be at least five lines long once indented. Don't use the Tab key or the space bar to perform this operation. If the quote is long, highlight it. Go up to the ruler and put your cursor on the triangle for the left margin. Move it five spaces to the right. Put your cursor on the triangle on the right and move it to the left five spaces. Your long quote will then be indented. You may have to return the triangles to their previous positions to return to the original formatting.

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 *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

May 13: Zoom Seminar with Bobbie Christmas

Are you ready to make your writing sparkle, sizzle, and pop? Take my one-hour seminar, "Rev Up Your Writing" on Zoom May 13. Contact Kathy Hamby-Swink for more details. [feathertales@bellsouth.net](mailto:feathertales@bellsouth.net)

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Sports Illustrated to Continue

As we writers have watched more and more magazines fold, at least one will continue. *The Washington Post* announced that *Sports Illustrated* has found a new publisher, ending months of uncertainty over who would operate the storied sports publication. The new publisher is Minute Media, a London-based digital media company that publishes websites.

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Be Sure to Use the Right Format

How do you depict thoughts? In "the olden days" we used italics, but today Chicago style doesn't advocate using italics for thoughts. Here's more information on the subject from *Purge Your Prose of Problems*:

Thoughts/Unspoken Discourse

A writer's job is to train the reader to understand when characters speak and when they merely think.

Sticklers remind us that thoughts always tell, rather than show, because in reality we cannot read someone's thoughts. Strong writers therefore avoid revealing characters' thoughts. Instead they show what characters are thinking through their self-talk or dialogue.

If adding thoughts to a novel, however, here are some important things to know:

Format: While Chicago style no longer advocates using quotation marks or italics for thoughts, many readers are accustomed to seeing thoughts printed in italics, and though not recommended, that format is acceptable, as long as it is consistent.

Direct thoughts: Direct thoughts are always in first person and are usually in present tense. Mike pondered, Should I go to

the meeting or stay home with Brenda?

Indirect thoughts: Indirect thoughts often include “that,” even though the word may be understood and not stated. Bill thought the rain would never stop. (“That” is understood.) Indirect thoughts never call for quotation marks or italics.

Creative Writing Tip: Instead of complicating a manuscript with italics or repetitions of he thought/she thought, strong writing uses characters’ body language to show, rather than tell, that the characters are thinking. Here are some examples:

Ray blinked. She is the sexiest woman ever to walk through my door. Is she married?  
Is four dollars a fair price for the bag of flour? Sam rubbed his chin. He never had to buy cooking supplies before.  
Mary pushed her hair behind one ear. Did the interviewer have any idea she lied on her résumé?

Bonus Information: Avoid redundancies. Never use “thought to himself” or “thought to herself.”

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

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Want to Write a Book This Year? These Tips Can Help

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Wired spoke to two award-winning authors for their tips. See <https://tinyurl.com/bp5pk7rw>

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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 <https://www.zebraeditor.com/>. Zebra Communications: Excellent Editing for Maximum Marketability

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Bobbie’s Blogs

Hard-copy Editing: Why Request It? Is it better than getting an electronic file edited?

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Read my latest blog entry here: <http://tinyurl.com/59a95w93>

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Dated Words

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What is a skeuomorph? What are some other outdated words that we might still be using? Read Benjamin Dreyer’s delightful piece titled “If you’re still using these dated words, you’re not alone” here: <https://wapo.st/4a9x0NH>

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Manuslips and Missed Opportunities for Improvement

Can you tell what can be improved in the following sentence?

All those plans suddenly derailed like a freight train falling in slow motion from a trestle bridge.

Answer

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Similes and metaphors can add poetic touches to writing, but they are best when short and realistic. First, a train can’t fall in slow motion, and worse, things don’t suddenly fall slowly. Which is it? Here’s a potential rewrite that’s tighter and clearer:

All those plans derailed like a freight train.

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Manuslip: a slip in grammar, punctuation, or other error in a manuscript that often results in humor; a manuscript blooper

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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

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Follow my adventures, opinions, and observations: <http://www.facebook.com/bobbie.christmas>

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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 pretty certain CMOS said to omit the “of” in month-year references (“he graduated in May 1999,” not “he

graduated in May of 1999”), but I can’t for the life of me find this in the 17th edition. Is there a reason it is no longer covered? And do you have guidance?

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

Dear Booze

Dear Booze is looking for work that screams drinks, drinking, and drunk. Please, no work from the anti-saloon league; we are not looking for pieces which herald sobriety, the process of getting sober, or the sober lifestyle. Basically, no sober stuff. There are other publications for that.

We would also appreciate it if you don’t try to pull a fast one by submitting something that has nothing to do with drinking except for the protagonist holding a drink as he goes about his non-drinking business. If the drink doesn’t play a major role, we don’t want it.

It doesn't matter if you are established or this is your first time submitting. We are just looking for good, entertaining work.

We are not a paying publication.

Submissions must be between 300 to 3,000 words, except for novellas, novels, and other larger bodies of work. If your work is too short, bundle it with other work. If it’s too long, consider splitting it up into a serialized format.

We use Microsoft Word to read and edit submissions. Do not send PDFs or any other format. Also, please don’t copy and paste your submission into your email; send it as attachment only.

Complete submissions information here: <https://tinyurl.com/bkm83yvs>

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Oh Reader

We’re looking for stories about your experiences as a reader, insight into the effect of reading on humans, humorous takes on the world of words, and anything else you as a reader or writer might be interested in sharing. In other words: we’re open to any ideas you may have (as long as they relate to reading). Pays \$200 for published articles.

You can pitch any of the below, but make sure that your work has reading as its focus. Please note that Oh Reader is no longer accepting or publishing fiction.

- Nonfiction/essay
- Humor
- Poetry

We will accept nonfiction and humor based solely on a pitch; if you are submitting poetry, please send the entire piece to [media@ohreader.com](mailto:media@ohreader.com).

Don’t be afraid to get inventive. We’re excited to see what you have up your sleeve! Please note that we don’t publish book reviews or author interviews at this stage. For complete information and to make a submission go to <https://www.ohreader.com/submissions>.

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Creation Magazine  
<https://tinyurl.com/y8nmdf2f>

This online literary magazine accepts romance, Thriller, Horror, Adventure, Essays, Action, Political, Comedies, LGBTQ+, Narrative Poetry, Surrealism, Nautical Fiction, Satire, Personal, Epic Poetry, Eco-Feminism, Critique, Lost World, Future,

Psychological, Abstract, Realism, Inspirational, Visionary, Libertarian, Parable, Monster Literature, Feminism, Suspense, Urban Legend, Fable, Legend, Myth, Survival, Historical Fiction, Drama, Magical Realism, Body Horror, Weird Fiction, Military, Western Poetry, Soft, Free Form, Philosophical, Noir, Political, Experimental, Metaparody, Tragic Comedy, Greek Tragedy, Dark Romanticism, Cultural, Memoir, Religious, Burlesque, Ghostlore, Action, Utopian, Space Western, Whodunit, Animal Tale, Medieval Fantasy, Detective, Fantasy, Gothic, Crime Fiction, Ghost Story, Thesis, Scientific, Analysis, Reviews, Creative Nonfiction, Nonsense, Anthropological, Sexuality, Found Art, Metaphysics, Research Article, Paranormal Romance, Medical, Saga, Family Saga, Form Poetry, Mysticism, Spiritual, Cult Literature, Social Science Fiction, Transgressive, Fiction in Verse, Mythology, and Autobiography.

Submit up to 5,000 words in prose.

Submit up to 5 poems.

Simultaneous submissions are allowed. Previously published work is not allowed.

SUBMISSION PERIOD OPEN UNTIL MAY 5.

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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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