

The Writers Network News: June 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

"You cannot write for children. They're much too complicated. You can only write books that are of interest to them." - Maurice Sendak

Maurice Sendak is the author of Where the Wild Things Are (1963) and In the Night Kitchen (1970).  
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If Your Email Address Changes, You Will Be Unsubscribed

Our double-opt-in, no-spam policy does not allow me to change your address. 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. 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: Submissions to Literary Agents

Dear Fellow Writers:

Before we could attach files to emails, writers submitted their queries, proposals, and even full manuscripts to literary agents by snail mail, along with a self-addressed, stamped envelope—we called it an SASE. In that long-ago era I performed some work for an agent who found herself overwhelmed and far behind on reading and evaluating the hundreds of submissions she received weekly. The agent told me, "Read and evaluate these submissions. Look for any reason—any reason at all—to reject them. Give me only the few that are worthy of my consideration."

My sister had a van. She and I rode to the agent's office and filled that huge vehicle with more than fifty long boxes, each containing about sixty to one hundred submissions. We unloaded the boxes into my garage, basement, and office; I had boxes everywhere.

After completing each day's editing work, I spent time opening, reading, and evaluating five or ten of those thousands of submissions. It took me more than two years to complete the task, even though I also had interns who helped. I understood how the agent fell so far behind on her work. I also noted that only a few submissions were worthy of the agent's attention. I found more than a dozen reasons to reject submissions, and it taught me countless lessons. It became clear to me why agents use assistants and first readers to evaluate submissions. Who has time to read and evaluate hundreds of submissions every week? It explained why agents today often don't even respond at all and say, "If you haven't heard from me in six weeks, it means I'm not interested."

I created a check list of reasons why a manuscript could be rejected, and in an effort to help the writers who sent in submissions, I checked the boxes that pertained to that person's submission. For the manuscripts that needed editing, I included my information without any pressure to use my services. I obtained a few new clients that way, writers learned a little more about how to improve their manuscripts, and the agent got her backlog cleared. It was a win-win-win setup.

In that era Literary Marketplace was a book published annually that listed agents, publishers, and editors and was the primary resource for writers. In that book the agent I worked with had listed her requirements for fiction: "Include a short cover letter giving the title, genre, word count, and one-paragraph summary. Mention any publishing credits you have. On a separate page give a full synopsis, including the ending."

Because of the agent's clear requirements, sometimes the manuscript itself wasn't the reason I rejected the submission. The cover letter and synopsis—or a missing synopsis—had almost as much influence on my decision as the manuscript itself.

I recently found a cover letter I had kept in my archives, because it was an outstanding example of how NOT to impress a literary agent. At one and a half pages, it was not the short letter the agent preferred, and it ended with the following, which I quote verbatim: "Why should I bore you with an outline or summary? Do I need an outline or summary before reading that novel at the bookstore? No. I only read two or three pages of that novel, and then I put it down. Only one in one hundred novels are [sic—should be "is"]worth reading, in my opinion. But only one in one thousand turn out to be great classics and never to be forgotten. What you are about to read is the one-thousandth.

"All I ask is that you read the first three pages of my novel [sic—comma missing] and if you are not satisfied just put it in the SASE and drop it in the mail. But at least read the first three pages. You owe me at least a read of those three pages because it is the writers out there who keep the agenting and publishing business turning."

In short the writer was saying, "I don't edit my work and I refuse to follow your guidelines, but you owe me." Owe me? I found the letter grandiose, obnoxious, and offensive. It told me all I needed to know. A person who refuses to follow required guidelines is a difficult person to work with and not worth the time or effort. Writers who want to sell their manuscripts must also sell themselves as worthy clients. I didn't bother to read the first three pages of his manuscript and I don't think any agent would have done so either. His cover letter led to an instant rejection of his manuscript, and that's a shame. Maybe his manuscript was the one in a thousand, but he was not a client the agent would have wanted to work with.

If you're looking for an agent, find out what and how that agent wants to receive submissions and follow those guidelines to a T. Don't send unedited material. Don't tell agents what you want them to do, and don't say anything that could offend an agent. I mean duh, right?

How would you feel if you received a letter like that one, refusing to follow guidelines, demanding that you do something, and then ending with an insult?

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 Titles

By Bobbie Christmas

Q: I've written five short stories for children compiled in one book. Each short story has a title and subtitle. The book has a title and subtitle. Are the story title and subtitles italicized? Is the book title and subtitle italicized? On the book cover do the book title and subtitle have to be italicized?

A: The answer depends on how and where the titles and subtitles are used. Titles and subtitles when standing alone at the start of a story, on the book cover, or in the table of contents are not italicized. In other words, titles used as titles are not italicized. When narrative or dialogue refers to a title or subtitle of a book, however, it is set in italics. When narrative or dialogue refers to a short-story title, with or without the subtitle, it is surrounded by quotation marks and not italicized.

Q: What's the best way to find a title for my novel?

A: Have you written the novel yet? If not, don't worry about the title. Use a label for the file name that identifies the file, such as Book, and then write the book. While you are embroiled in writing the book, a title may come to you based on things that happen to a character or something someone says. If not, the title may pop out to you while you are poring over the second or third draft. Trust that the title will organically come to you, even though it may not happen until you write the entire book. Don't let the absence of a title stop you from writing.

Q: Aside from the fact that sentences should not begin with a numeral, is there any grammatical or artistic difference in a book title reading One Hundred Houses or 100 Houses?

A: Book titles can go against all guidelines. Feel free to follow your own instincts when it comes to creativity. Consider the following book titles: The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People by Stephen Covey, 100 Bike Rides of a Lifetime by Roff Smith and Kate Courtney, and 100 Books You Must Read Before You Die [Volume 2] by Oscar Wilde, but One Hundred Years of Solitude by Gabriel García Márquez.

Q: I wonder whether this title of a church report is correct in its possessive: St. Mary's 2021 Treasury Report. The name of the congregation is St. Mary's Lutheran Church. Since I am using that name in a possessive statement, should it read: St. Mary's' 2021 Treasury Report?" I have never seen a double possessive. Is the first version correct? My preference would

be St. Mary's Lutheran 2021 Treasury Report, but I wonder about that first version and the reasoning for the correct choice.

A: While Chicago style does call for creating possessives by adding an apostrophe and an s, even when a name ends in s or x, as in Jesus's, when something is already in the possessive, things can get sticky. When a name is already possessive, adding another apostrophe and s creates an awkward word. If it were in running copy, I would recast it like this: The St. Mary's Lutheran 2021 treasury report is now available. In a title I would use St. Mary's Lutheran 2021 Treasury Report.

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

Members Write

Fellow editor Sandy Murphy had me giggling when she responded to my "Ask the Book Doctor" column on expletives that appeared in this newsletter last month. She wrote, "So, what gave you the idea about the expletive words? I guess once you had the idea, then you had to write about it! Well, I liked it! But then I'm guilty of it myself. Sometimes!"

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Terry Wynne wrote, "I had to reply to the cat 'joke.' I like humor but saw no humor in the joke at all, particularly since you are an animal lover and because a veterinarian doesn't have extra time to waste on tasteless jokes. I support your anger and hope you find a way to forgive in time."

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I heard this from Sharon Cook: "Yeah, I gotta admit: your relative has a pretty sick sense of humor. I'm glad you blasted them. I too love animals and have been VP of Friends of Beverly Animals (FOBA) for fifteen years. I'm a lifetime 'cat lady.'" Sharon added, "Who would think of such a sick scenario? At least they won't be calling you in the future with any more of their 'humor.'"

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Mags Gaulden wrote from Canada about two items covered in last month's newsletter: "I received your newsletter. Not a very fun story. Not on any day of the year. And also? Well, sheeeeeet."

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Marlene Clark responded to both my information on expletives as well as my story about the not-funny belated April Fool's Day "joke." She started with this: "Well, like, you know, so your relative sent a tasteless, thoughtless, joke" and ended with "Seriously, I've received joke stories, but they always have a 'gotcha' line. Yours had blood and gore. In your shoes I would have done the same thing, especially if my son were a veterinarian. There was no punch line to that joke."

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Janet Hogan Chapman reported, "First, I agree with you. That so-called April Fool's joke was definitely NOT funny. It was cruel.

"Second, the part about expletives was informative. My question about it regards using words/phrases like well, so, you know, in dialogue. My writing often includes rural, southern characters that use many such words in their conversations. I know it can be overdone, but I feel using colloquialisms and dialect can add to the richness of the characters. I find it seems to be part of my natural style of writing. I have also written professional material and certainly would NOT use that time of language there. Is there a time or place where such expletives could be considered appropriate?"

Janet added, "I get so much out of your newsletters and appreciate you sharing your wisdom and knowledge. Looking forward to the memoir [seminar] on Zoom!"

I responded, "Well, of course, you know we all add lots of unnecessary words when we talk, so, you kinda gotta use some in dialogue, right? In all seriousness, you nailed it when you said it can be overdone. In the editing phase you can use your Find function to see how many times you used some of the superfluous words I mentioned in my last month's column and reduce the number of uses if necessary."

The memoir Zoom Janet referred to is June 20 at 6 p.m. and titled "Crafting Compelling Memoirs." Here's the Zoom link: <https://us06web.zoom.us/j/88296859190?pwd=2z30eYmkEbE5Mra2HXwwUmkl6TfbOK.1>

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Terry G. Dodd wrote, "Bobbie, relative to the many encouraging comments you received concerning colorectal cancer, I am a five-year victor, with a permanent colostomy. I included that long story in a short chapter of my seventeenth and final book, *Before I Fall Off the Perch.*"

I responded, "I'm comforted in an odd way to hear from so many friends who say they too are survivors of colorectal cancer. I had no idea of the volume of people who are out there, and now we can support each other and encourage others to be proactive in their health care."

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I heard the following great news from Scott Kingdon of Punta Gorda, Florida: "Your references to magazines or other publications that are looking for submissions work. I sent an essay to the online publication *Dear Booze* that will be published on May 29.

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Helena Leslie thanked me for sharing my cancer experience and said, "I'm sure it was helpful to your readers."

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Elmore Leonard's Ten Rules for Good Writing

1. Never open a book with weather.
2. Avoid prologues.
3. Never use a verb other than "said" to carry dialogue.
4. Never use an adverb to modify the verb "said"...he admonished gravely.
5. Keep your exclamation points under control. You are allowed no more than two or three per 100,000 words of prose.
6. Never use the words "suddenly" or "all hell broke loose."
7. Use regional dialect sparingly.
8. Avoid detailed descriptions of characters.
9. Don't go into great detail describing places and things.
10. Try to leave out the part that readers tend to skip.

He added, "My most important rule is one that sums up the 10: If it sounds like writing, I rewrite it."  
Excerpted from the New York Times article, "Easy on the Adverbs, Exclamation Points and Especially Hoopedoodle."

One of the most popular and prolific writers of our time, Elmore Leonard (1925-2013) wrote short stories and about two dozen novels, most of them bestsellers, such as *Glitz*, *Get Shorty*, *Maximum Bob*, and *Rum Punch*.

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Crafting Compelling Memoirs—a free one-hour virtual seminar

The Colorful Crow Writing Community says, "Please join us on June 20 at 6 p.m. EDT for an engaging workshop led by Bobbie Christmas titled *Crafting Compelling Memoirs*. Bobbie Christmas, renowned as The Book Doctor and editor at Zebra Communications, will share invaluable insights on the art of creating memoirs that captivate audiences. Don't miss this opportunity to delve into the secrets of crafting unforgettable personal narratives. Here's the Zoom link: link: <https://us06web.zoom.us/j/88296859190?pwd=2z30eYmkEbE5Mra2HXwwUmkI6TfbOK.1>

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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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Make a Living as a Writer

I didn't write the article, but I did make a living by doing many of the eleven things listed in the following article: <https://makealivingwriting.com/best-ways-to-earn-money-writing/>

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Searching for An Agent?

Try using the Manuscript Wish List here: <https://www.manuscriptwishlist.com/find-agentseditors/search/>

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Manuslips and Missed Opportunities for Improvement

Can you tell what is wrong in the following sentences?

1. The body was that of a fortyish white female dressed in a light blue pants suit with a salmon blouse and black pumps on her feet.
2. These stories are like wild strawberries found walking in the woods on a hot day.

Hints

1. First, pants suit should be one word: pantsuit. Next, as written she was wearing a blouse and pumps on her feet. How would you revise that sentence?
2. As written the strawberries were walking in the woods. How would you revise that sentence?

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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://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, and it's an issue I address often, both in the magazine I edit as well as books I edit.

Q. Are menu items such as "Bananas Foster" capitalized?

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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### Bobbie Christmas on Overcoming Imposter Syndrome

<https://boldjourney.com/news/meet-bobbie-christmas/>

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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

#### Aram Fox of Massie & McQuilkin Literary Agents

What he is seeking: He's crazy about commercial and literary fiction that put immersive storytelling front and center, and a wide range of nonfiction including memoir, narrative nonfiction, natural history and perspective-changing explainers, and advice-givers.

How to submit: Please send your query letter and 30 pages to [aram@mmqlit.com](mailto:aram@mmqlit.com). The letter should include a synopsis, a brief bio, and your contact information. Aram asks that you put "Query" in the subject line and paste the letter and sample pages into the body of the email. If he would like to hear more about your writing, he will be in touch within 2-3 weeks.

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### Pulp Literature

We are looking for any genre or between-genre work of literature, up to 50 pages in length. Short stories, novellas, poetry, comics, illustrations — bring it on. We do not publish nonfiction, memoir, or young adult and children's stories. Aside from that, we want anything entertaining and well written. We accept simultaneous submissions. Previously printed pieces may be considered.

We pay \$0.05 – \$0.08 per word for short stories (to 5,000 words), \$0.03 – \$0.06 per word between 5,000 and 10,000 words, and \$0.02 – \$0.04 per word for works over 10,000 words.

Poetry pays between \$25 – \$50.

We purchase exclusive first world rights, print and digital, for a period of 120 days from the publishing date, after which all rights revert to the author.

For extensive guidelines and how to submit your work, go to <https://pulpliterature.com/submissions/submission-guidelines/>

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### Chicken Soup Wants Dog Stories

The deadline for submissions is September 30, 2024.

We are thrilled to announce that we are now accepting stories for our dog topic that is to be released in 2025. Because of the popularity of this topic, we do a new dog book approximately every eighteen months so here is another chance for you to share a story or two about the member of your family who just happens to walk on four feet.

Dogs have always been considered companions and playmates that brighten our days and enrich our lives. What would we do without them? They are also wonderful and amazing teachers. The lessons we learn from our canine friends come in all shapes and sizes, just like they do. Tell us the new thing your canine friend has taught you. How smart she is or how she outsmarted you! How he made you smile. How she "rescued" you after you "rescued" her. How he brought your family closer together, helped you find love, inspired you to change something in your human life. Stories can be serious or humorous, or both. We can't wait to read all the heartwarming, inspirational, and hysterical stories you have about your dogs.

A\_Chicken Soup for the Soul\_story is an inspirational, true story about ordinary people having extraordinary experiences. It is a story that opens the heart and rekindles the spirit. It is a simple piece that touches our readers and helps them discover basic principles they can use in their own lives. These stories are personal and often filled with emotion and drama. They are filled with vivid images created by using the five senses. In some stories, the readers feel that they are actually in the scene with the people.

Submit here: <https://www.chickensoup.com/story-submissions/submit-your-story/>

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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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