

The Writers Network News: July 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

Benjamin Dreyer is the 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

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: Rejection

Dear Fellow Writers:

Let's talk about rejection. Serious writers like us face rejection often, and we must remember it's not personal—it's not about us. It's about our manuscript.

Way back before the turn of the century (circa 1998) I plugged away at my computer until I had completed a proposal for a book I titled Rev Up Your Writing and Win. I felt determined that Writers Digest Books (now defunct, although some of its books are still available) would snap up my book as soon as its editor read my proposal regarding ways to make creative writing simpler, faster, and unique. I focused on Writers Digest Books as the perfect buyer for the book.

WD Books accepted only agented submissions, so after a few rejections from agents, one finally agreed to represent my book. Hooray! She then submitted my proposal to WD Books, and we waited. I recall exactly where I was standing when my agent called and said the publisher had rejected my proposal. She said, "The acquisition editor told me WD Books already has a book on grammar."

My book wasn't about grammar, though. It was about ways to find what I called "missed opportunities for improvement." It explained ways to make writing more powerful. In fact the opening line of the introduction clearly said, "Many books have been written about grammar. This ain't one of 'em." I knew that the editors hadn't even read the very first line of my book or even glanced at my book proposal.

As if receiving a rejection from WD Books wasn't bad enough, my agent went on to say, "I don't have any other connections with publishers that handle your genre, so I'm going to have to drop you as a client."

In one fell swoop (excuse the cliché), I felt rejected twice. Demoralized, I thanked the agent and ended the call.

Years passed.

At lunch one day my friend Deb asked me, “What’s the latest news about your book?”

“It got rejected by Writers Digest Books a few years ago, so that was that.”

“That was that?” She tilted her head and asked, “Was that the only publisher in the whole world?”

Her comment brought my negative thinking to a screeching halt. It gave me the motivation I needed.

I did more research and found imprints that specialized in books for writers and accepted unagented submissions. I submitted my proposal and sample chapters to several of those publishers, and within weeks I received an offer.

The publisher changed the title of the book, but otherwise changed little of the content. The publisher paid me an advance against royalties, designed the cover, secured an ISBN for the book, printed thousands of copies, sent me dozens of free copies, distributed the book to bookstores across the country, and even got my book into libraries. That, fellow writers, is how the first edition of Write In Style came to be published in 2004.

Getting past that first rejection took me quite some time, but rejections are part of the publishing business. Expect rejections, but unlike me, don’t let them stymie you for years. A rejection means only that your book, story, poem, or essay has not yet reached the right hands. In the interim keep improving your work in progress until it reaches the right person who loves it as much as you do.

For many years I cherished all my rejection letters, seeing them as a sign that I was submitting my works to publishers. I plastered a wall in my office with them, until another wise friend said, “Do you really want to see all your rejections every day?” I took them all down, and soon I was putting up only my acceptance notices.

What do you do with your rejections? How do you manage them? Do you have any advice for your fellow writers? Share it with me, so I can share it with others.

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 Style Issues

By Bobbie Christmas

Q: What does it mean when a magazine says, “No serial commas, except to avoid confusion.” What are serial commas?

A: Also called the Oxford comma, a serial comma is one that appears before the last item in a list. In the following example, the comma before “blue” is a serial comma: The American flag is red, white, and blue. In some styles other than Chicago style, the punctuation would be without the second comma, like this: The American flag is red, white and blue.

Q: When one writes a creative nonfiction essay targeted to be published in an e-zine, should it be written in AP style or Chicago style?

A: It depends on the style the e-zine follows. If you can’t ask the editor or find guidelines as to the publication’s style, read some of its published essays. Look for clues that tell you the style it follows. You’ll find clues in the way it handles numerals, commas, and capitalization. Those are the three things that differ the most from style to style. For example, does it use numerals or words for numbers above ten? Does it use the serial comma or not? Notice what words it capitalizes. If you know both AP and CMOS, you’ll be able to tell what style the e-zine follows.

Q: I have been perusing your Purge Your Prose of Problems manual, and I see in the “To/too” section that you did not place a comma before “too” in the example: “He’s coming along too.” Are writers no longer required to place a comma before “too” when it implies inclusion? It is hard to keep up with all these changes, and I am extremely grateful to have your manual.

A: The Chicago Manual of Style, which dictates the style preferred by book publishers, says that the adverbs “too” and “either” used in the sense of “also” generally do not need to be preceded by a comma.

Q: I like semicolons, but when you edited my latest manuscript you changed some of them. What’s up with that? Did I use them incorrectly?

A: Rather than go over your manuscript again, I’ll answer in generic terms. Sometimes I find semicolons overused in manuscripts. Overuse of semicolons can indicate that too many sentences are too long. Long sentences—sentences of more than ten words—can get confusing, and certainly sentences of more than fifteen or twenty words beg for a break. Because a semicolon in regular prose is most often used between two independent clauses not joined by a conjunction, those two clauses can often be separated into two sentences. Yes, semicolons are beautiful things, but it’s best to use them sparingly.

Q: In school I was taught to capitalize the word “president” whenever it referred to the elected leader of the United States. The editor of my book sometimes lowercased the word in my manuscript and sometimes left it capitalized. Why the inconsistencies? Is the editor incompetent, or is there something I don’t know?

A: Issues like yours often arise because of the differences in style guidelines. Some schools may teach a style called MLA, which stands for Modern Language Association. That style is often used in the humanities, writing on language and literature. As an example, an essay that analyzes the metaphors used in a poem would probably follow MLA style. Book publishers, however, usually follow Chicago style. The two differ in several important ways. For example, Chicago style capitalizes the word “president” only when it is followed by the name of the president, as in President Ford. If no name follows, such as in a phrase such as “the president gave a speech,” the word is not capitalized. Your editor correctly followed Chicago style for your book manuscript.

Book Doctor Bobbie Christmas, author of Write In Style: Use Your Computer to Improve Your Writing, is the owner of Zebra Communications. Send your questions to [Bobbie@zebraeditor.com](mailto:Bobbie@zebraeditor.com) or [BZebra@aol.com](mailto:BZebra@aol.com). Read Bobbie’s 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 five-time 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

CMOS to Publish New Edition

Book publishers follow the style of punctuation, capitalization, abbreviation, and more as detailed in The Chicago Manual of Style, often simply called CMOS. The book is updated every few years, and the eighteenth edition is scheduled for publication this September. Editors say this edition will be the most extensive revision in twenty years and says some chapters are being reexamined, coverage of pronoun use and inclusive language will be expanded and updated, guidelines on capitalization will be revised, and new coverage of Indigenous languages will be included.

The seventeenth edition was more than a thousand pages long and cost a pretty penny. The eighteenth will be even bigger and probably pricier. You don’t have to buy a copy or learn all the updates if you use an editor who stays up-to-date with Chicago style.

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New Editor at The Washington Post

Matt Murray, named as a new top editor of The Washington Post, vowed to uphold journalism standards during a staff meeting that turned contentious when employees peppered publisher and CEO William Lewis with questions about a company reorganization and the abrupt replacement of executive editor Sally Buzbee.

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Free Downloads for Writers

Here you’ll find a wide variety of articles of interest to writers, from crafting articles to submitting to agents and more.

<https://www.writersdigest.com/resources/free-downloads-for-writers>

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Invoke or Evoke? Lede, Lead, or Led? Lay or Lie? Luxuriant or Luxurious?

Which word choice is correct based on how it’s used? A professional editor knows the answer.

Bobbie Christmas, owner of Zebra Communications, offers three levels of editing service. See our services, pricing, reviews, and more at <https://www.zebraeditor.com/>

Zebra Communications: Excellent Editing for Maximum Marketability

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One Conference I Highly Recommend

In years past the Florida Writers Association booked me to speak at many of its conferences, both mini and major. Every one of its conferences was well organized and filled with a variety of events. I gave presentations and keynote speeches to many organizations over the years, yet the Florida Writers Association conferences always impressed me. Today I speak only on Zoom, so I’ll miss the FWA annual conference, but I highly recommend that you go. It’s worth your money and time. Even though I had decades of experience in the publishing industry, I still always learned something new at each FWA conference. Plan to go this October. For more information see <https://www.floridawriters.org/florida-writerscon>

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Andrew Motion: 10 Techniques to Spark Writing

1. Decide when in the day (or night) it best suits you to write, and organize your life accordingly.
2. Think with your senses as well as your brain.
3. Honor the miraculousness of the ordinary.
4. Lock different characters/elements in a room and tell them to get on.

5. Remember there is no such thing as nonsense.
6. Bear in mind Wilde's dictum that "only mediocrities develop"— and challenge it.
7. Let your work stand before deciding whether or not to serve.
8. Think big and stay particular.
9. Write for tomorrow, not for today.
10. Work hard.

Andrew Motion has garnered the highest acclaim as a poet, including a knighthood and the post of poet laureate of the UK. In addition to his many books of poetry, Motion has published seminal biographies of poets and been a leading champion of poetry in the contemporary world.

From an article in The Guardian

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Manuslips and Missed Opportunities for Improvement

What would you improve in the following sentence that I addressed in a manuscript I edited?

She allowed all her hope for the future to wither away like dead, fallen, brown autumn leaves skittering forlornly in the wind.

My reasoning and suggestions:

Similes and metaphors can add a literary boost to writing, but they are best when short and tight. The simile as written would benefit from being tighter. Although adjective strings are ill-advised in strong writing, the simile has a long adjective string: dead, fallen, brown, and autumn. I'd pick one adjective and drop the others. Next, anthropomorphizing leaves by saying they felt forlorn is a missed opportunity for improvement, especially since most adverbs are superfluous. The word hope already implies the future, as well. With all those creative-writing tenets in mind, my suggested recast might go like this: All her hope withered like autumn leaves.

What are your thoughts and suggestions?

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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:

Q. Would it be "the Color Purple musical" or "The Color Purple musical"?

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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Be Sensitive to Word Choices

Just as the Chicago Manual of Style advises not to use words such as blond or redhead as a noun to refer to a person, the new edition of the Associated Press Stylebook states, "Do not use felon, convict, or ex-con as nouns." Instead the stylebook advises journalists "when possible, use person-first language to describe someone who is incarcerated or someone in prison." Example: John was convicted of a felony. (Wrong: The convict spent time in jail. Wrong: John was a convict.) In the same vein, describe people as having blond or red hair. Example: John had a full head of red hair. (Wrong: John was a redhead. Wrong: The redhead raised her hand.)

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What do you call the current time period—when we humans are warming the atmosphere, acidifying the oceans, altering the land, and leaving a literal mark on the planet? Not the Anthropocene, according to geologists who rejected the idea of adding a new epoch to Earth's official geological timeline. Yet for many activists, artists, and academics outside of geology, the Anthropocene, or "Age of Humans," is here to stay, regardless of what rock specialists have to say. [Read the full article here: <https://wapo.st/3KEGHR> ]

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Ex-St. Martin's Press Executive Dies

Thomas J. McCormack, chief executive and editor of St. Martin's Press, publishers of best-selling books like The Silence of the Lambs and All Creatures Great and Small, died June 17 of heart failure at his home in Manhattan. He was 92. After

helping negotiate the company's sale to Holtzbrinck Publishing Group of Germany, McCormack retired from St. Martin's in the late 1990s to write plays.

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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.

To order: <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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New Word?

The Washington Post recently ran an article about a person who created a squirrel spa. In that article I saw the following sentence: "Next thing she knew, a squirrel was splooting on its belly in front of the fan, savoring the breeze."

Splooting? The photo showed a squirrel spread out on its belly in front of the fan, so the meaning of the word became clear to me because of the image. The word, though, was one I'd never heard. I looked in Merriam-Webster online. "Sploot" and "splooting" did not show up there. If I hadn't seen the photo, I might think the squirrel was doing something other than lying on its tummy.

Upon further research I learned the following: "Sploot is slang for the pose an animal, especially dogs, cats, and other four-legged pets, makes when it lies on its stomach with its hind legs stretched out back and flat. The term is especially associated with Welsh corgis and is used affectionately in the internet slang of DoggoLingo."

Have you ever heard the word "splooting" before?

Did you notice the redundancy in the sentence I quoted? "Splooting on its belly" is redundant because the word "sploot" means to lie flat on one's belly. The correct usage would have been this: "Next thing she knew, a squirrel was splooting in front of the fan, savoring the breeze."

Would you have described the squirrel's action a different way? How would you have written that sentence?

For the whole story see <https://wapo.st/3XiHV4C>

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Do You Believe in Astrology?

Some people believe that astrology has an effect on writers. According to astrologists, the planet Mercury has a connection with words—communication. For that reason, when the planet appears to be moving backward in the sky—when it is retrograde—it affects writers in negative ways.

Mercury will be considered retrograde this August 4 to August 27. Should we writers be alarmed?

A lightning droplets article on the internet claims, "It's no wonder that when [Mercury] goes retrograde we feel writer's block or the story doesn't flow or we lose our last draft or whatever. It's a time when we accidentally hit Send on that unfinished email to our publisher, drop our notebooks in puddles, or send out messages that we haven't actually thought through."

It goes on to say, "This is not the time to send things out in the world. It's the time to look within."

See How to Make the Most of Mercury Retrograde for Writers:  
<https://tinyurl.com/5f88jvma>

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Four: Contests

NAIWE Annual Book Awards Contest

If you have written a book that was published in the last five years, you are eligible to enter it in the NAIWE Annual Book Awards contest. Books can be self-published or published traditionally (or anything in between). Entries will be capped at 100 per category.

Winning books will be reviewed on the NAIWE blog, promoted on the NAIWE social media pages, and mentioned in NAIWE's newsletter The Edge. To boost our winning authors and their books even further, we will invite the authors to be interviewed on the NAIWE podcast. In addition, all NAIWE books that were entered in the contest will also be reviewed on the NAIWE blog.

Read full guidelines and enter online here: <https://naiwe.com/book-awards/>

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Women on Writing! Nonfiction Essay Contest

WOW! is proud to introduce our newest essay contest. The mission of this contest is to inspire creative nonfiction and

provide well-rewarded recognition to contestants. The contest is open globally; age is of no matter; and entries must be in English. Your story must be true, but the way you tell it is your chance to get creative. We are open to all styles of essay—from personal essay to lyric essay to hybrid essay and beyond. Please make sure you download our Contest Terms & Conditions PDF for complete guidelines.

<https://wow-womenonwriting.com/contest.php#EssayContest>

You can write about any subject you want to explore, as long as it's within the word count and nonfiction.

We are limiting the number of entries to a maximum of 300 essays. Please enter early to ensure inclusion.

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### Poets Take Notice! Purple Ink Press Chapbook Contest

We don't believe in only one winner. The contest will have one to three winners. The prize is \$500 plus publication and ten copies of the chapbook. If there is more than one winner, the monetary reward will be increased and distributed among the winners. All winners will receive ten copies of their chapbook. Prizes are awarded at publication.

Full details here: <https://purpleinkpress.com/chapbook-contest-2024/>

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

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