

The Writers Network News, May 2017

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The Writers Network News

No Rules; Just Write!

Editor: Bobbie Christmas

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Meet Fellow Writers

Do you live in or visit metro Atlanta? Sign up for notices of local (but sporadic) meetings today! Send your name and e-mail address to [Bobbie@zebraeditor.com](mailto:Bobbie@zebraeditor.com).

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CHANGING YOUR E-MAIL ADDRESS? HOW TO REMAIN A SUBSCRIBER

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Some links in this newsletter are shortened with help from [www.tinyurl.com](http://www.tinyurl.com), a free service that converts long links to short ones.

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Writer's Quote of the Month

"If you would not be forgotten as soon as you are gone, either write things worth reading or do things worth writing." --Benjamin Franklin, 1706 - 1790

Ben Franklin helped draft the Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution. He moved the world's knowledge forward in electricity, mathematics, and mapmaking. A Renaissance man, Franklin was also a printer and writer who published Poor Richard's Almanack, invented bifocal glasses, and organized the first successful American lending library.

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One: From the editor's desk: Bad Query Letters

Dear Fellow Writers:

Many websites and resources list me as being in the publishing industry, because there is no industry strictly for editing books. I am in the publishing industry, in other words, but I am not a publisher.

Because my company often appears listed as being in the publishing industry, I get all sorts of queries from people who have not completed their research and think they are contacting a publisher in hopes of selling me a manuscript or story idea. As a result I am shocked and appalled at the quality of the queries I receive. No wonder people have trouble selling their books to publishers!

First and foremost, people should not assume I am a publisher; they should complete their research by going to my website and learning I am a book editor, not a book publisher. By going to a publisher's website, researchers can also find out publishers' preferences for receiving queries as well as the genres they handle. Yes, it costs nothing to send out hundreds of e-mail queries, but it's a waste of time if you haven't done the research.

Nevertheless, almost every week I get another query from someone who has not performed any research. The fact that they think I'm a publisher is the first clue. Even if I were a publisher, the e-mail may start out with a salutations such as Dear Sir or Madam, another clue that no research was done.

Here are a few excerpts from the query that arrived today. I have deleted the character names and a little other information to keep the author's ideas confidential, but I have not changed anything else.

"I have more romance screen stories and a novel so let me know. My goal is for someone who can read my story and give me reviews and feedback and what it needs next. And if that's work then published my stories.

"Plot:  
A new female Detective (name deleted) Moves to a new town where she team up with a other Detective (name deleted) to solve cases together."

Okay, horrible English and capitalization aside, the writer labeled the last statement a plot. How does it constitute a plot? What is a plot? It is the sequence of events that constitute the conflict and suspense of a novel. How does one detective teaming with another result in conflict and suspense?

Now let's tackle the English and punctuation. On what planet does the writer think a publisher would buy a book that obviously must also be filled with bad capitalization and even worse grammar? "And if that's work then published my stories." "She team up with a other Detective?" Really?

Serious writers know they must get their books edited before self-publishing or looking for a publisher, but wannabe writers who have no interest in improving their craft don't realize that a query letter must also be professionally edited, especially if the writer doesn't have a full grasp of the most basic details of good grammar, punctuation, and capitalization. I'm not saying that a person who didn't "get" grammar in school can't be a good storyteller, but being a good storyteller is not enough.

I could go on all day about the horribly written queries I've received, but I'm writing about this one today, because it arrived today and I've deleted all the others. I'm sure all the legitimate publishers have done the same.

Getting queries like this one makes me sad. When people take the time to write a complete novel and hope to sell it to a publisher, they should follow through with good editing as well as a well-researched, well-written, and well-edited query letter.

Yours in writing,  
Bobbie Christmas [Bobbie@zebraeditor.com](mailto:Bobbie@zebraeditor.com) or [bzebra@aol.com](mailto:bzebra@aol.com)  
Author of two editions of *WRITE IN STYLE*, owner of Zebra Communications, director of The Writers Network, and coordinator of the Florida Writers Association Editors Helping Writers service

If someone forwarded this newsletter to you, please sign up to get your own copy. Simply go to [www.zebraeditor.com](http://www.zebraeditor.com), click on Free Newsletter, and follow the prompts. I never share your address or send out spam.  
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Two: Ask the Book Doctor about Adverbs, Italics, and Underlines

By Bobbie Christmas

Q: I'm having a problem with adverbs in short stories. (He said, shyly.) I want to enter some of my stories in contests, but they are usually limited to a specific word length. In longer stories, I try to use adverbs only when I want to make the attributive statement contradictory.

Example: "That was fun," he said, angrily.

Otherwise, I will write something like this: "I like that." He had a sarcastic tone in his voice, as if it were a challenge.

In short stories, though, I might be forced to write "I like that," he said, sarcastically.

Do I go for the brevity and take the chance that I am losing something, or do I temper the prose in a short story with a mixture of adverbs?

What about novels? I read about five books a month and I've seen some books heavy in adverbs and others not; however, some of these are not recent publications. Is the current trend toward more adverbs, less, or a blend of both writing styles?

A: Before I answer, I have to address the incorrect commas in the examples. The correct punctuation would be this: "I like that," he said sarcastically.

Okay, now let's look at the issue of adverbs. As you figured, contemporary writers shun adverbs and write much tighter than writers of old. Brevity is in; wordiness is out.

How can you get your point across without using adverbs? Every time you have an urge to use an adverb, stop and ponder the verb it was going to modify. Choose a more descriptive or action-filled verb, and the adverb becomes superfluous. Consider this sentence, for example: Tom walked hurriedly to the door. Take out the adverb and choose a more descriptive verb, and the sentence has more punch: Tom raced to the door. Tom hurried to the door. Tom dashed to the door. Look at all your options and pick a strong verb, and the adverb won't be missed.

The problem is that adverbs tell, rather than show, and skilled writers of today show a story, rather than tell it.

As for adverbs in attributions, also called tags, devise other ways of showing what the speakers mean. I don't like leaning on the old "in a (whatever) tone," because it not only tells, but it is also wordy and can grow repetitive. For stronger writing, use the character's actions—body language—to show (rather than tell) what the character means.

Instead of this: "I like that," he said sarcastically, the rewrite might go something like this: He rolled his eyes. "Well, I like that." An alternative might be this: He jammed his fists into his hips. "Imagine how much I like that."

Q: I have written a short story in which the two characters alternate, i.e. one is listening to the other tell a story, and her comments and thoughts are interspersed. In my original, I indicate the change between characters with a paragraph change and the thoughts of the listener in italics. I read that italics are a no-no in standard formatting for manuscripts being submitted for publication. How can I present my concept without using italics or a change in font?

A: First you are correct that it is necessary to indicate a change in point of view, but a paragraph change is not enough. One character may go

on for more than a paragraph, so how can readers tell the difference between a continuance with one character or a shift to another's point of view? To indicate a point of view change, we must add space between the paragraphs.

Warning: some default formatting adds space between every paragraph, which is correct in documents set flush left with no indents. In standard manuscript formatting, however, each new paragraph is indented five spaces, with no extra space between paragraphs except to indicate a change in scene or point of view. You may have to change the document's default settings to indicate no space before or after a new paragraph. Once the document is set up correctly, hit the Enter tab twice to indicate a scene shift or a shift in point of view.

Next think seriously about the wisdom of using thoughts at all, because thoughts always tell, rather than show, whereas the best stories show, rather than tell. Consider putting the thoughts into dialogue and resolving the issue that way.

If the thoughts are truly ones the characters must keep to themselves, though, do not distress. While italics are not recommended, they are not a no-no. Because we are able to create italics on our computers, underlines (which used to mean italics on our old typewriters) are the no-no now. Yes, underlines and italics are the same thing, which is why nothing in a fiction manuscript should ever be underlined.

The underline exception applies to nonfiction e-books that list active links to URLs. Underlines indicate active links in online-accessible documents.

For much more information on these subjects and hundreds of others of vital importance to writers, order PURGE YOUR PROSE OF PROBLEMS, a Book Doctor's Desk Reference Book at <http://tinyurl.com/4ptjnr>.

Send your questions to [Bobbie@zebraeditor.com](mailto:Bobbie@zebraeditor.com). Bobbie Christmas, book editor, owner of Zebra Communications, and quadruple-award-winning author of Write In Style: How to Use Your Computer to Improve Your Writing, will answer your questions quickly. Read more "Ask the Book Doctor" questions and answers at [www.zebraeditor.com](http://www.zebraeditor.com).

Bobbie Christmas's award-winning second edition of WRITE IN STYLE: How to Use Your Computer to Improve Your Writing is available at <http://tinyurl.com/pnq5y5s>.

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### Three: This Month's Easy Editing Tip from Bobbie Christmas: Acknowledgments

I can often tell if a book is self-published simply by turning to the acknowledgements page to see whether the author spelled the word acknowledgments or acknowledgements, because even if authors hire editors to edit their manuscripts, they often fail to send the acknowledgments page(s) for editing. Many writers add acknowledgments after editing and before going to press and fail to send the acknowledgments file to the editor to edit. I get embarrassed when self-published authors acknowledge my editorial help in the acknowledgements pages and then mistakenly use the British spelling of the word acknowledgment, because they didn't send me the acknowledgment page to edit.

Do you want your self-published book to look less than professional? Of course not.

Although both spellings—acknowledgments and acknowledgements—are correct, the first spelling, acknowledgment, is correct in the United States, and the second one, acknowledgement, with three e's, is correct in Great Britain, Canada, Australia, and perhaps a few other countries.

The same word—acknowledgment—can appear elsewhere in a manuscript, as well, so before sending your manuscript to an editor, publisher, or even a beta reader, be sure to use my Find and Refine™ method to ensure your manuscript uses the American spelling for books published in America and the British spelling for books published in the other countries mentioned above. To do so, use the Find function in our computer, which is usually CTRL F or the equivalent, and type in the spelling you do not want. If it shows up, replace it with the correct spelling.

Subscribers to this newsletter live all around the world, but most live in the United States and should use the American spelling, without the extra E.

This lesson teaches you how to use the Find and Replace function to catch opportunities to write stronger, more stylish prose. For almost a thousand more editing and creative writing tips, order PURGE YOUR PROSE OF PROBLEMS here: <http://tinyurl.com/4ptjnr>.

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### Four: Subjects of interest to writers

#### NEWS FROM MEMBERS

Robert Gilbert's success keeps going. He writes, "I just received word that my next western, HARLEY SLATER'S RUNAWAY, will appear in the April 2017 issue of Frontier Tales." He asks that readers vote for the Best Western in the April 2017 Frontier Tales issue.

#### NOW ACCEPTING PAGES FILES FROM MAC COMPUTERS

When I began my editing business in 1992, I accepted only printed manuscripts and edited them with a red pen. Once the Internet became widely used, I could accept Word files and edit them using Track Changes. I am now able to accept files created in the Mac program called Pages, which also has Track Changes. As always, clients have three choices: electronic-file editing (line editing of the file using Track Changes), hybrid editing (line editing of the file using Track Changes plus a detailed report on all suggested changes, creative writing tips, and more), or hard-copy editing (line editing of the printed manuscript plus a detailed report on all suggested changes, creative writing tips, and more).

I'm in the process of changing my website to indicate that I can accept files in Pages, too, but if you see a message that says I accept only Word files, ignore it, and let's get your Mac-based or PC-based manuscript edited and ready for publication together. ([www.zebraeditor.com](http://www.zebraeditor.com))

#### HOW TO FIND WRITERS CONFERENCES

One of the best ways to find an agent is to go to a writers conference where agents are interviewing authors and seeking potential clients. One of the best ways to learn about the business of writing is to go to a writers conference where seminars and workshops will fill you with knowledge in a short period of time. One of the best ways to get inspired to write is to go to a writers conference. I think you get my drift. How can you find a conference that fits your needs? The Association of Writers & Writing Programs may help. See [https://www.awpwriter.org/wcc/directory\\_conferences\\_centers](https://www.awpwriter.org/wcc/directory_conferences_centers)

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SAVE THOUSANDS ON EDITING

Let's face it: editing is costly, because editors must charge for their time and expertise. What if an editor put all her time and expertise into a book that allowed you to edit your own book? You could save thousands of dollars using such a book. PURGE YOUR PROSE OF PROBLEMS, A Book Doctor's Desk Reference, is that book. In fact it's the resource that many book editors use.

PURGE YOUR PROSE OF PROBLEMS covers all you need to revise and edit fiction and nonfiction. Get information on grammar, punctuation, word choices, creative writing, plot, pace, characterization, point of view, dialogue, Chicago style, format, and hundreds of other subjects.

Order PURGE YOUR PROSE OF PROBLEMS today at <http://tinyurl.com/4ptjnr>.

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A DAY FOR WRITERS

NCWN-West Writing Conference, Saturday May 6, 2017  
[www.ncwriters.blogspot.com](http://www.ncwriters.blogspot.com)

Saturday, May 6, 2017, 9:00 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.

This one day-conference is sponsored by the North Carolina Writers' Network-West and the Jackson County Public Library, 310 Keener St. Sylva, NC 28779. The venue is the library.

Terry Kay will discuss fiction, Catherine Carter will talk about free-verse poetry, Deanna Klingel is our presenter for children's writing, and Tara Lynne Groth will tell us how authors can sell their books by writing for magazines. Gary Carden, fabulous storyteller and folk drama playwright, will also speak.

There's much more. Read all the details and register at [www.ncwriters.blogspot.com](http://www.ncwriters.blogspot.com)

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BOBBIE'S BLOGS

Neurotica: Stories of Love, Lust, and Letting Go—If you like relationship stories, I've got a ton of them. Some are funny, some a little sexy, and all true. I reveal some of my stories at <http://neuroticastories.blogspot.com/>.

In my Write In Style blog, you'll find more tips on creative writing and other subjects. For my latest blog on people who inspired me to become a writer, see <http://bobbiechristmas.blogspot.com/>

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HOW TO PRICE AN E-BOOK

Setting a price for your e-book often confuses authors. Mill City Press has a good explanation of why and what you should charge for an e-book: See <https://www.millcitypress.net/author-learning-center/how-to-price-your-ebook>.

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BECOME MY FRIEND ON FACEBOOK

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

FOLLOW ZEBRA COMMUNICATIONS ON FACEBOOK

Get news, writing-related cartoons, immediate updates, and other good stuff for writers. Like and follow Zebra Communications at <http://tinyurl.com/7vcxaxu>.

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CMOS ONLINE Q & A

THE CHICAGO MANUAL OF STYLE dictates such things and where commas go, when and what to capitalize, when and how to abbreviate words, when to spell out numbers and when to use numerals, and much more. If you write books, you will want to know more about Chicago style or be sure to use an editor intimately familiar with Chicago style. This month's Chicago Manual of Style Online addresses the following question:

"I recognize all writing formats today say there is to be one space between the period of a sentence and the first letter of the next sentence. I believe this fails to take into account studies that refer to visual cues that assist the reading process. So I start here with you to request this be fully discussed and reviewed with the hope that we may at minimum note that two spaces are acceptable between sentences. Thank you for your consideration of this matter."

Read the response to this question as well as many more questions and answers at <http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/qanda/latest.html>

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WRITE IN STYLE: How to Use Your Computer to Improve Your Writing

My book on creative writing titled WRITE IN STYLE has won seven big awards. Copies are selling fast on Amazon, but please order it here, directly from the publisher: <http://tinyurl.com/zeq6z5g>. Please note that this book is not about grammar. It teaches writers how to find their fresh voice. If you want a book on grammar, order PURGE YOUR PROSE OF PROBLEMS, mentioned elsewhere in this newsletter.

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Five: Contests, Agents, and Markets

The BLR seeks high-caliber, unpublished work, broadly and creatively related to our themes of health, healing, illness, the mind, and the body. We welcome submissions of fiction, creative nonfiction, and poetry. We encourage you to read BLR before you submit. Samples from each issue are available in our online archive.

**Fiction:** The Bellevue Literary Review seeks character-driven fiction with original voices and strong settings. We do not publish genre fiction (romance, sci-fi, horror). Our word max is 5,000, though most of our published stories tend to be in the range of 2,000-4,000 words. We have only occasionally published flash fiction. While we are always interested in creative explorations in style, we do lean toward classic short stories.

**Creative Nonfiction:** We are looking for essays that reach beyond the standard "illness narrative" to develop a topic in an engaging and original manner. Incorporate anecdotes that feel alive, and dazzle us with thoughtful and creative analysis that allows these anecdotes to serve a larger purpose. Please, no academic discourses or works with footnotes. Maximum 5,000 words.

Poetry submissions should have no more than three poems. Please include all poems in one document.

The BLR is closed to submissions in July and August.

Published authors will receive two copies of the issue in which their work appears, an additional one-year subscription to the BLR, as well as a gift subscription for a friend. There is an author discount for purchasing extra copies. Thanks to grant funding, we have been able to pay our authors an honorarium for their work and will continue to do so when funds are available.

We strive to provide several reviewers for each manuscript and kindly ask your patience in this necessarily slow process. But if you have not heard from us within five months, feel free to inquire about your manuscript.

There is a \$5 fee per general submission (fee waived for subscribers). Although the Bellevue Literary Review is published by NYU Langone Medical Center, we function independently and work to cover our production costs. Our staff is largely volunteer, but unfortunately our costs are not. The BLR remains committed to publishing superb writing on themes of health, healing, illness, body and mind.

Please read submissions page and follow all directions.

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OYSTER RIVER PAGES

<https://www.oysterriverpages.com/submit/>

Oyster River Pages publishes fine fiction, creative nonfiction, poetry, and visual arts online. We are currently open to submissions for our inaugural, un-themed issue, due in August 2017. Please see the guidelines for each genre. (Work that is unfinished, unproofed, or noncompliant with the guidelines gives our editors existential angst.)

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GAMUT MAGAZINE

P.O. Box 964  
Mundelein, IL 60060  
Editor-in-Chief Richard Thomas  
[richardgamut@gmail.com](mailto:richardgamut@gmail.com)  
<http://gamut.online/about>

Gamut is an online magazine of neo-noir, speculative fiction with a literary bent. I want to support the voices that aren't getting enough recognition, and pay a great rate (at ten cents a word we are twice the going professional rate). I want to surround myself with talented authors and artists that inspire me. We need more markets like this, publishing edgy fiction that straddles the line between genre and literary fiction.... Gamut will include mostly fiction (some original, some reprints) but also columns, non-fiction, art, flash fiction, poetry, and maybe even a serial memoir or novella. We are looking for fantasy, science fiction, horror, neo-noir, crime, mystery, thrillers, magical realism, transgressive, Southern gothic, weird, bizarro—all with a literary bent. Our word range is about 500 - 5,000 with the sweet spot being 3,000. We will pay ten cents a word for original fiction and three cents a word for reprints (which cannot be online anywhere). For full submission guidelines see <http://gamut.online/about>.

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Do YOU have news for The Writers Network News? Please send it in the body copy, not an attachment, to [Bobbie@zebraeditor.com](mailto:Bobbie@zebraeditor.com).

Deadline: The 15th 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 [www.zebraeditor.com](http://www.zebraeditor.com) and clicking on Free Newsletter.

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With the exception of Zebra Communications, information in this newsletter is not to be construed as an endorsement. Be sure to research all information and study every stipulation before you enter a competition, pitch or accept an assignment, spend money, or sell your work.

To access past issues of The Writers Network News, click here: [http://live.ezine.com/feeds/ezine/886\\_2](http://live.ezine.com/feeds/ezine/886_2).

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

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