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The Writers Network News

No Rules; Just Write!

Editor: Bobbie Christmas

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Writer's Quote of the Month

"I think the most important part of storytelling is tension. It's the constant tension of suspense that in a sense mirrors life, because nobody knows what's going to happen three hours from now." —Richard Condon, author of THE MANCHURIAN CANDIDATE, PRIZZI'S HONOR, and other successful novels

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One: From the Editor's Desk: Passion versus Pennies

Dear Fellow Writers:

I just finished writing a travelogue article for the magazine I also edit. I spend most of my time editing, these days, so it was a joy to write again. I loved choosing the right words that worked best in each situation, picking descriptive words, rather than personal opinions such as "amazing" or "incredible." I sneaked (not snuck, which is not the formally accepted past tense of "sneak.") in a little alliteration here and there and added details I hoped would make readers feel that they too had been to the places in the article. I wrote a first draft, printed it, found ways to improve it, and created a second draft. I printed it and found more words to delete or change, and after what was probably the eighth draft, I turned the article in, confident I could not have done more to improve it. The process thrilled and entertained me much more than the payment will. The joy was in the writing.

While I basked in the joy of having written something that thousands of people might read, an ancient memory came to me. Some fifty years ago I was in my twenties and flirting with a fellow who said he too was a writer. When I told him I worked for a newspaper, he jerked back and said, "You sold out!"

"Sold out?" I asked.

He shuddered in disgust and declared, "You're working for the man." [Today he might have said I was working for the suits.]

"Do you work?" I asked.

"Yes."

"Where?"

"At a gas station."

While he was pumping gasoline, I was working with words, paragraphs, syntax, and subjects. I was honing my skills and learning more each day. I loved what I was doing. Did he? If I wanted to write fiction I could do it in my spare time and rely on all I learned through journalism about how to write powerful prose.

I hadn't thought about that memory in a long time. Since that incident I have written not only for newspapers but also for magazines, nonprofits, and for-profit corporations. I've written articles for newspapers, magazines, and newsletters. I've written radio commercials, printed ads, brochure copy, speeches, advertorials, proposals, business profiles, and more. I've made a living as a writer. Was I fortunate to make a living as a writer, or did I sell out by making a living as a writer?

Did that young man make a living as a gasoline-station attendant? Did he find joy in pumping gasoline, wiping windshields, and adding oil to engines? Never mind the fact that jobs as gas-station attendants no longer exist.

The question comes down to joy. Passion. Writers write because we feel passionate about putting our words on paper in hopes that people will want to read them. Most writers follow their passion, rather than the money. I've had folks ask me how much money they can make by writing a book. I tell them to follow their passion. If it's writing, it doesn't matter if they make money. If their passion is making money, they can find easier ways to make money. Learning how to write marketable prose takes years of study and practice.

What motivates you to write? I trust it is passion, not payment. Money comes in and goes out; it isn't real. Passion, however, is buried in our soul. It lives in our hearts. It is a constant.

Perhaps passion is the reason I love writers so much. We share a feeling that drives us, an interest that makes us explore, ever learning, ever striving for greater heights.

Do you write for money or because you simply must write? If you make money writing, do you feel that you've "sold out?" I'd love to hear your stories.

A Personal Note

On a rare outing, I saw a doctor this week for a routine follow-up. When I walked toward the exit I spotted a huge Christmas tree in the lobby with wrapped boxes underneath all featuring flawless bows. The tree stood two stories high and featured all-white ornaments placed perfectly on the branches. I stopped and stared in awe. Thanksgiving was still a few days away, and never before had I appreciated Christmas-related things before Thanksgiving. My chest swelled with emotion, though. Tears came to my eyes. I took time to commit the striking sight to memory, even though it was still November. The pandemic has changed everything, mostly for the worst, but it gave me a new appreciation for the time and talent required to create an alluring Christmas decoration, regardless of the time of year.

I hope you had a good Thanksgiving, even if it was not like prior Thanksgivings, and I wish you as merry a holiday season as possible. Let's look forward to a new year, a new vaccine, a new way of socializing safely, and a new administration that may be inclusive, truthful, and fruitful.

Happy holidays, however, whenever, and whatever you celebrate.

Yours in writing,

Bobbie Christmas Bobbie@zebraeditor.com or bzebra@aol.com

Author of two editions of *WRITE IN STYLE*, owner of Zebra Communications, director of The Writers Network, coordinator of the Florida Writers Association Editors Helping Writers service, and senior editor of *Enjoy Cherokee Magazine*

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Two: Ask the Book Doctor: About Word Choices

Q: Is cell phone one word or two?

A: Merriam-Webster, the standard reference for book publishers, lists it as two words, cell phone, with an acceptable variant as one word, cellphone. While I don't recommend using variants, writers can choose, as long as they are consistent throughout a manuscript.

Q: I have trouble writing about phone calls. We no longer dial Susie's number, sometimes don't hear a ring tone, there is no dial tone, and it's darned hard to hang up on someone in a fit of anger. Do we instead punch in a number, hit speed dial (still dial), tell Alexa or Siri to call Susie, or what?

A: I agree with you that describing how we use phones today can be confusing, and sometimes it depends on the phone we use. On most landlines and cell phones we punch in numbers, rather than dial them. We can hang up a landline phone, but we don't hang up a cell phone; we punch the red End symbol or wait for the other person to disconnect.

As for speed dial, my cell does not have such a function. It has a contact list. I touch a number that connects me or I tell Siri who to call; no "dialing" involved. If someone isn't in my contact list, I do have to punch in the digits and then hit the green icon to connect. My landline phone differs. It has a directory, but no speed dial. Do today's landline phones still have speed dial? It probably depends on the model. My advice? Forget trying to find the right words that apply to all telephone use. Simply say the character called Susie. Skip the details.

Q: Several times in books I've seen a character who "weaved her way through the crowd," which sounds wrong to me. I thought "wove" was correct. Am I right?

A: The past tense of "weave" is "weaved." "Wove" is an acceptable alternate, though. Either is okay. It's like shine/shined/shone and dive/dived/dove. Sometimes writers have choices between or among words that mean the same thing.

Q: In order not to sound common or simple in my writing, I often use big words. For example I wrote this: Her ordeal was so grievous that she not only felt apprehensive but also melancholy and lachrymose on a daily basis.

I think writing something simple is better, like this: Her ordeal was so grievous that she not only felt worried but also sad and weepy on a daily basis.

What do you have to say? Should I leave the first or change it to the second?

A: Writing that tries to "show off" by using words that the common reader won't comprehend can result in books that the common reader won't buy.

Instead of displaying intelligence, short stories and novels should present a strong plot that makes readers turn the pages and keep reading. Version two (Her ordeal was so grievous that she not only felt worried but also sad and weepy on a daily basis.) is therefore stronger than version one, but it is still wordy. Consider a third version: Her serious ordeal made her worried and sad.

Let me offer a fourth option too. Instead of telling that a character is worried and sad, show her feelings through her action and dialogue. Dialogue shows, whereas narrative tells, and strong writing shows more than it tells.

Q: How do you feel about swearing in a book? I am writing a nonfiction book, and obviously a lot of that takes place. What are your thoughts about adding some of it to my book?

A: First of all, swear words and scatological terms should not appear in narrative unless the book is narrated by a specific character. Next, such words—even in dialogue—are considered inappropriate in some genres but acceptable in others. It depends on the genre of the book as well as the age of the intended market. In nonfiction when we quote others we don't have to quote every word, as long as we don't change the intent of the person's message. A writer can delete swear words with no harm done. Lastly, all obscenities are expletives, and expletives by their nature are extraneous words with no purpose. Expletives don't add strength; they weaken writing and therefore are good words to avoid or delete to make prose more powerful. All that said, if I smash my finger, I'm likely to say a few words that would best be deleted. Cuss words do an excellent job of indicating anger or pain. In mainstream novels and nonfiction books intended for adults, therefore, dialogue may indeed include a curse here and there. The less often such words appear, though, the more power they will have.

Bobbie Christmas, book editor, author of *Write In Style: Use Your Computer to Improve Your Writing*, and owner of Zebra Communications, will answer your questions, too. Send them to Bobbie@zebraeditor.com or BZebra@aol.com. Read Bobbie's Zebra Communications blog at <https://www.zebraeditor.com/blog/>.

Do you have a question about writing or editing? Get a quick and personal answer by contacting Bobbie at Bobbie@zebraeditor.com or BZebra@aol.com.

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>.

Bobbie Christmas's award-winning second edition of *WRITE IN STYLE: How to Use Your Computer to Improve Your Writing* is available from Amazon at <https://tinyurl.com/y7ppcdkd> or buy it directly at <https://tinyurl.com/y7p9xkbb>.

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Three: Subjects of interest to writers

Members Write

I've been saving this one. Almost a year ago, Cyn MacGregor sent the following caption she spotted in a *NEW YORK TIMES* article on her iPhone:

President Trump spoke on Friday about the airstrike that killed Mr. Suleimani at the Mar-a-Lago resort in Palm Beach, Fla. [The juxtaposition error makes it appear that being at Mar-a-Lago can be deadly.]

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Editing Tip: Aggravate/Irritate

Be sure not to confuse "aggravate" and "irritate."

Aggravate: To make worse or more troublesome. Scratching aggravates a rash.

Irritate: To rouse to impatience or anger; annoy. Loud sounds irritate Grandpa.

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MANUSLIP

Meaning:
A slip in grammar, punctuation, or other error in a manuscript that 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).

Here's this month's manuslip:

Crocheted hats covered men's heads made from tree fibers.

[Did you spot why this manuslip is funny? Good for you. Yes, the juxtaposition is incorrect and instead of saying the hats are made of tree fibers, it says the men's heads were the ones made of tree fibers. To correct this error, I recast the sentence this way: Crocheted hats made from tree fibers covered men's heads.]

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Hobbies Are Good For You

Here's the good news: You do not have to feel guilty for having hobbies. Your hobby may be writing, or writing may be a more serious endeavor for you, and your hobbies include painting and quilting. No longer should we have any qualms about having hobbies. Hobbies can boost your performance, according to a study published in *Journal of Vocational Behaviors*. The study found that people who spend considerable time on leisure activities different from their work have an increased belief in their ability to perform their regular jobs. Write on!

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Be My Friend on Facebook

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

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CMOS Online Q&A

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

Q. How do you show emphasis (and not with capital letters) in "thought" that's already in italics?

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. You can also get the basics of Chicago style as well as hundreds of tips on grammar, punctuation, and creative writing by ordering *PURGE YOUR PROSE OF PROBLEMS* at <http://tinyurl.com/4ptjnr>.

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Caution Regarding Self-Publishing Providers

ALLi's Watchdog Desk rates hundreds of self-publishing service providers. With disappointing frequency, we'll get an inquiry about a new service provider targeting writers. It's always a relatively new business, which somehow has dozens of glowing testimonials and reviews despite their short time in business. The website appears reasonably slick, but on closer inspection, has odd language choices and sloppy paint-by-numbers template mistakes. The services offered are usually ghostwriting, content writing, website design, and graphic design, but with increasing regularity, editing, book cover design, and publishing services aimed at indie authors. <https://selfpublishingadvice.org/octalogo-writing-crew-watchdog-advisory/>

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Got Muse?

Bobbie's Creative Writing Exercise for December

Rapid Heartbeat

Alfred Hitchcock, often called The Master of Suspense, directed fifty-three chilling movies, including *Notorious*, *Strangers on a Train*, *Rear Window*, *The Man Who Knew Too Much*, *Vertigo*, *North by Northwest*, *Psycho*, and *The Birds*. He knew how to maintain suspense and make people's adrenaline flow. He once said, "There is no terror in the bang, only in the anticipation of it."

Born in London in 1899, he experienced many traumatic events throughout his lifetime that may have fueled his fascination with the macabre, but let's hope you don't have to experience traumatic events to learn how to create suspense and tension. Even the most ordinary lives include moments when our blood pressure rises, our heart beats rapidly, and we feel dizzy with anticipation, fear, or concern.

What's the scariest moment of your life? Did you almost fall off a mountain? (My son almost did, right before my eyes.) Have a car accident that could have been fatal? (I did.) Eat something and find out it was poisoned or spoiled? (I thought I

did.)

Think about a time when your adrenaline flowed and your heart raced. Write about it in the Alfred Hitchcock way, drawing out the suspense and tension as long as possible before the resolution. You can write a scene, a book, a poem, or an essay using tension and suspense as the main ingredient.

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

At around \$15, this book is the perfect gift for your writer friends or for yourself. WRITE IN STYLE uses humor, wisdom, and expertise to show writers how to strengthen their writing style and create a fresh voice. Available as an e-book or printed.

Order your copy today at <https://tinyurl.com/y8fp5nym>.

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Google Results

Do you ever Google yourself? It's a good thing to check now and then. When I did, I found this article, where I'm listed as number one! <https://writingtipsoasis.com/book-editors-in-georgia/>. Interestingly, though, the bulk of my clients come from all over the world, and only a few come from Georgia.

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Life of a Writer

Smile and enjoy what this Australian writer has to say about the life of a writer.

<https://www.smh.com.au/lifestyle/life-and-relationships/a-life-and-death-struggle-talk-about-buzz-kill-20201105-p56brm.html?btis>

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Read My Blog

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

My blog offers tips for writers, personal pet peeves, observations, memories, and all sorts of things. For example, read what I say about my most memorable children's book: <https://www.zebraeditor.com/blog/my-most-memorable-childhood-book/>

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Triple Apostrophe

View a graphic that shows Richard Ayoade's correct use of a triple apostrophe:

<https://imgur.com/iuCMigU>  
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Four: Contests, Agents, and Markets

SHONDALAND

Shondaland.com  
1905 N. Wilcox Avenue, #307  
Los Angeles, CA 90068

Shondaland is the pioneering storytelling company founded by Shonda Rhimes. Shondaland, under the leadership of Rhimes and producing partner Betsy Beers, is behind award-winning series "Grey's Anatomy," "Scandal," "How to Get Away with Murder," "For The People" and "Station 19." Shondaland made the unprecedented move to Netflix where the company will produce content exclusively for the internet entertainment service.

Shondaland operates as a part of the Hearst Digital Media Network and is an inclusive destination which features in-depth interviews, emotional and relatable essays, and smart unexpected culture coverage.

We tell stories. All day long.  
Dark or light, we use our stories for good.

We invite you to join us.

Our table is for anyone who wants a seat.

For questions regarding editorial content on Shondaland, please contact [info@shondaland.com](mailto:info@shondaland.com)

Think you have engaging content to share on Shondaland? Please contact [pitches@shondaland.com](mailto:pitches@shondaland.com)

Please remember that these email addresses are only to contact Shondaland.com about website-related inquiries. We cannot accept your unsolicited submissions and materials for television programming.

To keep up with everything happening on Shondaland.com: follow us on social media: Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook.

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34 ORCHARD
34orchardjournal@gmail.com

Full submission guidelines here: <https://34orchard.com/guidelines/>

We like dark, intense pieces that speak to a deeper truth. We're not genre-specific; we just like scary, disturbing, unsettling, and sad. We like things we can't put down and things that make us go "wow" when we've finished. But our main goal here at 34 Orchard is to publish the stuff we like to read. You're not in our heads, so don't overthink it. Just submit. We are an international journal and welcome submissions from everyone, all over the world.

Payment is \$50 on signing of the contract, usually shortly after acceptance. You will need to have a PayPal address to receive payment.

Short fiction from 1,000 to 7,500 words
Poetry any style or length

We publish two issues per year, one in the spring (April) and one in the fall (November). Issues are hosted on our website site as PDFs.

Our reading period for the spring issue is January 1-January 31.
Our reading period for the fall issue is July 1-July 31.
Anything submitted to us outside those months will be deleted unread, and no response will be sent.

We consider only one piece of fiction per writer at a time. Poetry: you may send up to three at once as three separate documents attached to one email.

Format the usual: Times New Roman 12-point font/Double spaced

Send as a .doc only (no docx, rtf, pdf) attachment to 34orchardjournal@gmail.com. Please note that if you send us anything but a .doc, your story will be automatically rejected unread.

Cover Letter: Your name and contact info, the story/poem title, word count, if it's a simultaneous submission, third person, 100-word or fewer bio.

Email Subject Line should read: Submission: "Story Title," Last Name or Submission: "Poem Title," Last Name

Writers will hear back from us no later than February 28 for the spring issue and August 31 for the fall issue. We do not provide feedback on rejected pieces.

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SFK PRESS

SFK Press seeks book-length fiction by fearless authors. We especially encourage submissions from indigenous, LGBTQIA+, disabled, currently or previously incarcerated, and non-binary people, people of color, and women. Please submit your work via email to SFKBooks@gmail.com. Manuscripts sent elsewhere will be deleted unread. For full submission guidelines see <https://sfkpress.com/submissions/>

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Do YOU have news for The Writers Network News? Send it in the body of an email to Bobbie@zebraeditor.com or bzebra@aol.com. Deadline: 18th of each month.

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Send a copy of this newsletter to all your writing friends. Tell them to join The Writers Network F-R-E-E by visiting <https://www.zebraeditor.com/> and signing up for The Writers Network News.

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