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Solid Information and a Sense of Humor

Stylin'

"The most durable thing in writing is style, and style is the most valuable investment a writer can make with his time. It pays off slowly, your agent will sneer at it, your publisher will misunderstand it, and it will take people you have never heard of to convince them by slow degrees that the writer who puts his individual mark on the way he writes will always payoff." (Raymond Chandler)

I've always wondered how you actually define or recognize "style" in writing. It seems like such an abstract concept. Is it mechanics? Is it the writer's personality coming through? Is it an artificial quirkiness used to make one's work stand out? Developing your own style is important, "they" say, but what does that really mean?

After reading through a list of famous quotes on the subject, it became clear that when it comes to style, nothing is clear. How do you create your own style? Can you learn it in a classroom?

"People think that I can teach them style. What stuff it all is! Have something to say, and say

it as clearly as you can. That is the only secret of style." (Matthew Arnold)

OK, it can't easily be taught but we still don't have a simple understanding of what it IS.

"Style is the perfection of a point of view." (Richard Eberhart)

"Style is the hallmark of a temperament stamped upon the material at hand." (Andre Maurois)

So style is one's "take," one's personality communicated in the writing. How do you create that on paper?

"You do not create a style. You work, and develop yourself; your style is an emanation from your own being." (Katherine Anne Porter)

"The essence of a sound style is that it cannot be reduced to rules—that it is a living and breathing thing with something of the devilish in it . . ." (H. L. Mencken)

Well, here we are— full circle — and maybe we have a little more understanding of "style"? Maybe?

Start Spreading the Word

How Your Newsletter Can Get You More Readers, Visibility, and Sales

by Penny Sansevieri

Newsletters seem very 1990s, don't they? They don't have the flash of "new media" or the shimmer of a shiny new social media site just waiting to be discovered. What they do have, however, is visibility. In some cases, more visibility than you're getting on all of your social media sites combined.

I speak at a lot of writer events and, in the last year, the buzz has really increased around the need for a newsletter. Why? Well, Facebook has declined in reach; in some cases only 1% of your posts reach your fans. If you're not paying for placement on Facebook, it's likely your stuff isn't being seen. With everyone on sites like Pinterest, LinkedIn, and Twitter, it's really hard to get your audiences' attention.

If used correctly, newsletters can be a great way to get your message out there, offer helpful advice, keep people in your marketing funnel, or simply remind them of who you are. We've had our newsletter for fourteen years, and it's been a solid way to stay in front of our audience; educate them about their market; and show them what we do as a company.

Candidly, I would consider getting rid of a lot of things, but never our newsletter. It's often the single biggest business driver to our

company. It's not easy, it requires work, but the rewards are tremendous. Here's how you can make a newsletter work for you.

Good newsletters:

- **Don't have to be long.** Some authors use their newsletter to check-in with their audience with a brief (500 word) update. Your market will dictate how long or short your newsletter should be.

- **Are consistent, professional, and on point.** If I see sloppy copy or a publication that hasn't been edited, am I really going to buy from someone who doesn't have time to edit their newsletter or make it look nice? I also see newsletters that veer off topic so much that I instantly unsubscribe.

- **Know your audience.** Whether it's a newsletter, a blog post, or a tweet, ask yourself: "Who cares?" If you can identify the person as your reader and the content as important enough to get them to care, then you have a good topic. Remember, it's not about you. In fact when it comes to creating great content and newsletters that rock, you don't matter at all. Speak to your readers' pain, their needs, and their hot buttons and most importantly, know exactly who they are before you start cranking out newsletter copy.

- **Address one person.** I don't know about you, but writing "hello everyone" seems impersonal and kind of spammy. Personalize your email, but remember, not everyone enters their name into

your email list when they sign up. If they don't, you want to try and avoid emails addressed to a specific person, because they look a bit odd to the recipient.

- **Give them someone to write to.** When it comes to the "from" line in your email, make sure it has your name, not your company name or book title. Make sure that your readers know who to contact, and invite them to share their opinions, feedback, or ideas for future newsletters.

- **Appeal to the "skimmers."** Most people skim email these days, so appeal to that. Use short paragraphs, bullet points, and strong headlines. That way your readers can glance through the newsletter without sifting through endless copy and can get to the heart of what they are looking for.

- **Have a great subject line.** This is probably the most important part of any newsletter. They need to grab the reader's attention, and if you know what your audience wants, the subject lines shouldn't be hard. Again, they must speak to the needs of your reader. Of all the things going on in their lives, as it relates to whatever you are selling, what's their biggest need right now? Answer that and you've got a perfect subject line.

Don't have a newsletter? Here are some quick ways to start one, and gain followers.

- **Make sure the sign-up is on the home page and every page**

of your website. Typically the left hand side is preferred since it's considered the "power side" of your website.

- **Give a great offer to get folks to sign up.** Keep your readers in mind, and offer something they'll want. If you're a fiction author, you can give exclusive content from your book, a gift card (hold a monthly drawing for one gift card), or some other valuable content your readers will want.

- **Have a mail system to manage it.** Mail Chimp or Constant Contact are both free up to 1,000 subscribers so you can test this before you launch it.

- **Create an auto-responder.** An auto-responder is a great way to stay in touch with your readers/consumers, and remind them of who you are. An auto-responder might go out weekly, or monthly, or it might just be a one-time "gift" you send readers for signing up. Our auto-responder is our *52 Ways to Sell More Books* which is separated into 52 segments and delivered twice monthly into our readers' inboxes.

- **Check out other newsletters.** It's important to know what other folks are doing with their newsletters. This will help you learn what you like, what you don't like, and what might work for your market. Also, you want to really understand your space and other experts who share your arena.

- **Colors vs. text.** I'm still a big

fan of text-based newsletters. I know that folks will say color works best, but I still think that color newsletters can be harder to read on your phone and often wind up in spam filters. A lot of people will read your newsletter on their iPad or phone so keep it simple.

- **Frequency & Consistency.** How often you deliver your newsletter will generally depend on your consumer, but a good rule of thumb is once a month at a minimum and once a week at a maximum. I would not recommend sending your end-user too many announcements and newsletters. Also, it's a lot of content to create, so keep that in mind.

If you build a loyal following you can often create special blasts with more frequency and not lose readers. But remember that we're all inundated with emails so, many times, less is more. Be consistent. Pick a day and time that works for you and deliver on that promise.

- **Promote or not?** I'm not a fan of a newsletter that's all heavy promotion. You know the ones I mean. They scream "Look how fabulous I am" and then contain a lot of sales copy and special offers. Ideally you want to strike a balance. Clearly you are doing this to promote yourself, and you want your readers to know what you do, what your message, book, or product is, and how they can get it. You can and should talk about this in every issue, but a healthy balance is 95% information and 5% sales. You'll build

customer loyalty much faster this way.

Having a solid base and a consistent way to communicate with your audience can really help to optimize and increase your bottom line. A newsletter might seem like a lot of work, but in the end, if it's done right, it will pay off in some pretty amazing ways.

Penny Sansevieri is the CEO and founder of Author Marketing Experts, Inc. (AME). She's a best-selling author, and internationally recognized book social media marketing, book marketing, and media relations expert. Her company develops leading-edge book marketing campaigns. See <http://www.amarketingexpert.com> for more information.

[I empathize with readers' pain just reading this rag. -- Ed.]

F E E D B A C K

"I love 'Big Picture, Big Revision' [Jan/Feb 23]. Good reminder. Also, could you tell Maggie Grinnell that her story on Grief helped me very much, especially the part where she reported her brothers had wanted to put her mother in a home and she and her sister had not. I felt quite relieved that I was not the only one to have experienced that situation. All the best for 2023 to you and the magazine/newsletter."

-- Margaret McCaffrey, Australia

The End Is Near**Knowing When to Stop**

by Rebecca Tope

I am currently approaching the end of the twenty-first title in my Cotswolds crime series. The first was published in 2004, so there has been slightly more than one a year since then.

The central character is Thea, who started out aged forty-two as a recent widow. She is now not much over forty-five and has a new husband (who was a character in some of my early books before this series). Along the way she has had a police detective boyfriend and has helped to solve twenty murders as an incidental sideline to her work as a house-sitter.

Almost every book is set in a different real Cotswold village or small town—and there are still plenty more available. I have come to love Winchcombe especially. I've given a number of talks and book signings in the area.

The question is: When Do I Stop?? Inventing original plots becomes increasingly difficult. The same handful of characters keep showing up, even though I have started to bring in minor personalities from earlier books. This is tricky, because if they do reappear it means they can't have been the murderer (or victim!) in those earlier titles. I am finding it harder

to come up with credible names as well.

Reviews on Amazon increasingly speak of me "running out of steam" and similar phrases. Sales figures are more or less steady, but discounts are getting bigger all the time and my real income never goes up. On the other hand I get a good number of emails from readers who express genuine enjoyment of my books. Once in a while someone will describe how the stories save them from depression, despair, or anxiety.

I am not proposing to give it up entirely. There is another crime series set in the Lake District, which is only up to Title Number 12. I think there's some life left in that one. It would be sheer folly to completely abandon the income which does enable me to travel as much as I like, and buy a lot of books!

But what to do about the Cotswolds? My editor will probably go along with whatever I decide, and might be quietly relieved that the decision comes from me, rather than her having to confront me with a hatchet. A writer friend suggests that I slaughter Thea herself, in a final gesture from which there could be no going back. I suspect there are readers who might applaud that—she's a character that some people love to hate. But I think the publisher might draw the line at that.

If I'm honest, I think I would be glad to stop, once the initial panic abated. At this point in the current story, there are clues flying all over the place, along with suspects, connections, coincidences, and conundrums. I know who did it (often I don't until even closer to the end), and I think I know why—but the red herrings need to be sustained a while longer. I have to concentrate hard to keep in mind who knew what when, and that makes me feel tired. I have to force myself to open the file each morning and write another 1000 words or more. The self-imposed deadline for finishing is only two or three weeks away. Perhaps I always feel like this at this stage of a book?

So . . . how do I know when to stop? Have I answered my own question in the above exercise? Or am I too much of a coward to take such a step?

Rebecca Tope has forty crime novels under her belt, published since 1999. Her two series are set in English villages in the Cotswolds and the Lake District. She lives on the border between England and Wales, where life is quiet and people make their own amusements. Rebecca travels and dabbles in crafts, watercolors, gardening, photography. Her maternal relatives were all great letter-writers, and Rebecca is now custodian of almost everything that they've written since 1911.

[Total transparency: Becky and I have been penpals since we were kids—I was in the U. S. and she in the U.K. A long friendship, indeed!-- Ed.]

*--Abecedarian Corner--**Inspiration and advice
for aspiring scribes***A Writing Framework
by Barry Lee Thompson**

I visit my writing several times throughout the day. Sessions vary from five-minute bursts to extended periods. This way, I can put in a minimum of a couple of hours a day, and often more like four or five. This is a framework. I have a home workspace, a place for my computer, but can work anywhere.

Writing isn't just a physical process of working with words on a page. It's the creative and percolative activity that goes on in the spaces. In other words, the work also happens while walking, reading, daydreaming, riding the bike, poking around, or what-have-you.

I'm never without a paper notebook. I keep the old ones stored in a cabinet. Captured moments — of conversations, song lyrics, glances, peripheral observations — the unorthodox, discordant, and mundane. Here, an obsessive mind might be a fortunate trait.

Short fiction suits my temperament and way of working. A new story can begin from a blank page, or a paragraph or phrase within an existing piece of writing, or from a new or recorded observation. I rarely delete. I circle round until I land on an idea or fragment of material that captures my interest, and then begin to shape it into

a new piece.

Experimentation is thrilling, and I love the idea of development through failure. It's a playful process, and instinct plays a part. Sentences are the building blocks of a story, and proficiency in them gives a reader confidence that they're in capable hands, so allowing greater experimentation within the work.

Reading aloud, and listening to playbacks, I imagine stories as radio performances. Listening enables an objective edit, and a chance to gauge the pace, texture, mood, rhythms, and poetry of the prose.

Writing helps to make life navigable. Anxieties, uncertainties, and ambiguities can be contained and explored on the page through the endless possibilities of fictional forms.

Barry Lee Thompson is the author of Broken Rules and Other Stories, published in 2020 by Transit Lounge. His award-winning short fiction appears in literary journals and anthologies in Australia, the UK, and the USA. He holds a fellowship from Varuna, the National Writers' House of Australia. He is working on his second collection of fiction. For more, visit his website and blog: barryleethompson.com.

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workingwriters@aol.com.*

MORE FEEDBACK

"Another helpful issue, but I especially liked 'Fundamentals of Fiction: Learning the Lingo' by Marg Gilks. It's a good primer and reminder."

-- Joy V. Smith, Lakeland, FL

[You're in luck. Here's Part 2!

-- Ed.]

**Fundamentals of Fiction:
Learning the Lingo Part 2
by Marg Gilks**
Other Mysterious Terms

What other words might leave you mystified when you start to market your fiction?

- **Advance:** When publishers offer you an advance, they are paying you a portion of your share of projected sales up-front. This is more common in book publishing, but you will occasionally see a publication offering an advance in conjunction with later royalties or a share in profits as payment for your short story. Keep in mind that, if the issue or publication containing your story does not sell well, the advance may be the only payment you receive.

- **Biannual/bimonthly/monthly/quarterly:** If a publication is described as "biannual," it comes out

twice a year; if bimonthly, it's published twice a month. Monthly and quarterly publications put out twelve and four issues a year, respectively.

- **Byline given:** The author's name or biographical information will be printed with the story.

- **Contributor copies:** Many publications provide authors with one or two free copies of the issue containing their story, either as the sole payment for a story or as a bonus along with payment.

- **Disposable MSS preferred:** When you see this phrase in writers' guidelines, it means that the publication prefers that the author allow them to throw away the manuscript, rather than returning it to the author with a rejection. If you want your manuscript returned, be sure to include a SASE that is both large enough to hold the manuscript and that has sufficient postage affixed to it. Even if you direct the publication to dispose of your manuscript, you still need to include a SASE for a response.

- **Include publication credits in cover letter:** This means that the magazine wants to know if you've had stories published before, and what publications your stories have appeared in. Mentioning three or four of your best publication credits in one paragraph of your cover letter is usually sufficient. If you have no publication credits yet, don't despair. Just ignore this detail in your cover letter

and send the story for consideration anyway. After all, the only way you will acquire credits is if you submit your stories.

- **Kill fee:** If a publication accepts one of your stories for publication but is then unable to publish the piece, they may offer you a percentage of the payment you were to receive or a flat fee in lieu of publication. This is not a standard practice with fiction markets, so don't expect a kill fee; you're more likely to receive an apologetic letter.

- **Market list:** There are a number of writers' resource websites that collect and display writers' guidelines as lists or searchable databases, allowing writers to find guidelines and market information about many different publications in one place, rather than accessing each magazine's website separately. These sites are called market lists. An Internet search on "market list" or "writers' guidelines" will turn up several lists.

- **Masthead:** This is the column of information that you'll find one or two pages inside a magazine's cover, often on the same page as the Table of Contents. Here you'll find the names of publishers and editors, subscription and advertising information, and contact information.

- **MS/MSS:** The abbreviation for "manuscript" and the plural "manuscripts."

- **Novel excerpts:** A few publica-

tions accept excerpts from novels for publication. Such submissions usually have to seem like a stand-alone story, with some kind of beginning, middle, and end—even though they are part of a larger work. Publications are more open to novel excerpts from established writers than those from beginning writers.

- **No unsolicited submissions:** This means that the publication doesn't want to receive a submission from you unless they ask for it. How do you get them to ask for it? You send them a query letter describing the story and asking them if you can send it for their consideration. If they say yes, voila, it's been solicited.

- **On spec:** This is short for "on speculation" and means that you write the story and then send the finished story to a publication and ask them to consider publishing it. This is the normal procedure for fiction, and you may never come across the term "on spec" in fiction guidelines. Nonfiction is just the opposite: you often propose an idea for an article to a publication and ask them if they would be interested in publishing it before you even write it.

- **Outline:** This is a chapter by chapter summary of your story, with about a paragraph devoted to each chapter. An outline is often requested by agents or publishers when considering a novel.

- **POV:** The abbreviation of "point of view." POV refers to the

character from whose perspective the story is told.

- **Premise:** A one sentence summary of what your story is about.
- **Protagonist:** The main character in a story.
- **Reading fee/entry fee:** Many writing contests charge a reading fee to entrants to cover the cost of operating the contest. You should treat any agent or publisher that charges a reading fee with caution, however. Agents and publishers should not be making money from authors, but from the sale of their books.
- **Royalties:** The author's percentage of the profits from sales of a book or (less commonly) a short story.

- **Sample copy:** It's a good practice to familiarize yourself with a publication before submitting a story. Many magazines sell sample copies to authors for this purpose. Many now also post samples from their print publications on the Internet, so you can get an idea of the type of stories the publication seeks without paying for a sample copy.

- **Serial:** A long story or novel published in sections over several issues of a magazine.

- **Slushpile/over-the-transom:** When an unsolicited manuscript is sent to a publisher, it is known as an over-the-transom submission. Unsolicited manuscripts sent to

publishers and magazines become part of the slushpile—the backlog of submissions waiting to be read and assessed, usually by first readers, who screen out inappropriate submissions and pass only the most promising manuscripts on for the editor to read. If you don't receive a response to a submission within a magazine's or publisher's stated return time, it's probably because the backlog is greater than usual or because your story has been passed along for serious consideration.

- **Sub:** Short for "submission."

- **Synopsis:** A condensation of a novel or story into one or two pages. A synopsis is very similar to what you read on the back cover or dust jacket flap of a published book.

Now that you know the lingo, what are you waiting for? It's time to start perusing those market listings, looking for a home for that story you've written!

Marg Gilks is a writer and professional editor specializing in fiction. She works one-on-one with authors to help them prepare their work for publication Visit <http://www.scripta-word-services.com> to learn about her editing services, manuscript evaluations, and 8-week fiction writing course. For more of Marg's "Fundamentals of Fiction" articles, go to writing-world.com.

[WW: A surefire market for articles on writing. Just send 'em in, and Instant Writing Credits! -- Ed.]

Phrases That Need to Be Retired Permanently

"slippery slope"

I have seen this phrase too much lately. Any change seems to be a slippery slope, especially if it goes against one's own bias. In fact, the phrase is also the name of a fallacy: most often, questionable changes do not result in catastrophe. Although there are legitimate slippery slopes, where bad results are almost certain to occur, let's steer away from this tired cliché for now.

Immovable Objects

Working Writer Resistance

by Louise Parente

"Paralyze resistance with persistence." —Woody Hayes

Today I sat down with the goal to write. My desire to write another book waxes and wanes. I did the same thing two of the previous three days. I eventually break through my resistance, but:

Why do I resist, and what is resistance? What do you think about it?

I have written about imagery, procrastination, fear, self-sabotage. Where does resistance fit in?

Resistance prevents the creation of the image. It is negative, internally; and externally, it is deceptive, it corrupts and is fueled by self-sabotage and isolation. Recently I read that procrastination is manifested in resistance, perhaps because we sometimes rationalize it. Resistance is a self-abusive behavior.

I see it as an umbrella that is kept open by negativity, self-deception, self-sabotage, procrastination, and more: it prevents growth. It may feel like a protection, which it is at times, but one that has multiple limitations.

I am quite aware of how I feel about it. It makes me unhappy and negative; it is toxic and can elicit fear. Resistance feeds on fear and the biggest fear is that it will succeed. Primarily, resistance has the potential to rob me of a piece of life. It has been described as something we cannot touch or hear; it leads to distraction.

OK, my understanding of resistance is much clearer, but what can I do about it?

1. I can acknowledge its existence and its impact on me. For me this step is the main one in the process of making change.

2. I must clarify what my goal is. *Do I and what do I want to write?* I need to “brainstorm” what the possibilities are to achieve that.

3. I need to put things in order,

internally and externally. For me, I need my writing materials, notebooks, computer, pens and pencils, reference books and articles, and location clearly defined.

4. I have learned that I must be patient, recognize my limitations and learn from criticism.

5. I need to make peace with my resistance, to follow my life journey and create what I can. I must acknowledge this and give myself credit for it.

The above points will hopefully serve as a reminder of the impact of resistance and the need to believe in your creativity and wisdom. Good Luck!

Louise Parente, PhD, LCSW, is a certified eating disorder specialist, psychotherapist, supervisor & coach. She is the author of Parting Is Such Sweet Sorrow, Saying Goodbye to an Eating Problem: How to change your relationship with food.

[Every two months I become resistant to sitting down and cranking out another front page editorial. -- Ed.]

Do NOT Resist!!

You KNOW you want to see your name in this publication. So go ahead! Send in an article today and revel in the glory of your very own byline next issue!

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Online Evolution

Writing in the Online World: Changes in Audiences and Their Reading Habits by Norma J. Hill

Whether you're already a published author, or you're just getting started writing, you can't afford to ignore the realities of the writer's online world.

You may have always read “real” (paper) books, magazines, newspapers, and other reading materials, and feel that ebooks and online written material lack the texture, scent, and comfort you associate with paper books and other reading. You may already be an author of traditionally published or self-published books and have successfully sold copies to enthusiastic family, friends, and broader audiences. Possibly, in decades past, you hand-wrote or typed your manuscript, while it's likely you now use computer word processing software with its greater ease of producing a manuscript. You likely have expanded your research beyond the library to the Internet.

But why, you wonder, is there such a fuss, indeed a demand in the publishing world for authors to embrace the “online” world of the Internet beyond manuscript typing and some research? Is it really necessary? What's the big commotion about, anyway? Why

should authors write on their own blogs/websites and social media, sell their books as ebooks as well as traditional books, and write for online ezines, writers' communities, and so on?

Changes in Audiences and Their Reading Habits

• **It's a busy, electronically connected world:** In our busy world — with many different media vying for the attention that books, magazines, and newspapers used to hold — readers are in a hurry, looking for material that is entertaining and quick to read. With the use of laptops, cell phones, tablets, and other mobile devices, readers are looking for the convenience of having a majority of their reading needs met in one or two simple, easy-to-carry formats. We communicate with both friends and business contacts through emails, texting, and on social media on a single device; why not read in the same way?

• **Online bookstores:** As more and more reading and all kinds of other life activities are done online, readers' shopping habits have changed, with a growing preference for giant one-stop online bookstores such as Amazon or Chapters-Indigo (Canada). It is becoming ever easier for authors to publish and sell their books at online stores. Even before the development of these online giants, there was the growth of "big box" brick-and-mortar bookstores, stepping into the market space previously held by independent book-

stores. Readers got used to shopping big box, and it was an easy step to start using mega online bookstores.

• **Niche-market independent bookstores:** The growth of big box bookstores seemed destined to destroy the mom-and-pop independent bookstores. But surprisingly, there has been a rebound of niche-market indie bookstores, many of which are quite willing to sell self-published books, especially from local writers or writers in their niche, as well as selling books from small publishers. In fact, a number of the big box stores have been losing significant market share to the online bookstores and to the indies. Now indie authors can sell their books in e-format online while still supporting, and being even more strongly supported by, independent bookstores.

• **Online book searches and marketing:** With the growth of online bookstores, it is increasingly obvious to authors that they need to market online as well, as that is where an ever-increasing portion of readers are searching for reading material. A large majority of readers go first to the Internet to find new titles, even if they may end up doing some of their actual purchases at a local bookstore.

Along with websites that specialize in reviewing new titles, the big online bookstores put a great deal of focus on reviews and on determining what books are the new

best-sellers in every imaginable genre. Online bookstores also have unlimited "shelf space" and they offer not only reader reviews but also multiple choices in format (e.g., hardcover, softcover, audio, ebooks, video, mixed media, video games).

• **Libraries:** Libraries, too, have become strong proponents of online writing and reading. Almost all libraries provide access to thousands of titles which members can "borrow" just as they do traditional books and other materials. And they can borrow those materials by downloading them on their computers, tablets, ereaders, or smart phones from wherever they are.

• **New technologies:** Younger readers have grown up in a world where seemingly endless new forms of media and technology are being introduced. These young readers are tuned into these forms, and while they still enjoy reading paper books from time to time, they love having the convenience of ebooks and other online formats. They spend a lot of time on social media, where they discover mention of new book titles, authors, interesting websites, and so on. They also tend to get most of their "news" from online news sites and social media rather than traditional TV, newspapers, and radio. That "news" can include the writing you want to share.

• **Authors need a "tribe"—an audience.** Without an audience that looks forward to your writing,

your words, wonderful as they may be, will most likely fall on deaf ears—or almost no ears.

Marketing and promotion are becoming essential activities for writers. You are in charge of getting the attention your work needs and deserves. There is literally a worldwide audience out there, and no matter how small your writing “niche” may be, there are bound to be potential readers in many places around the globe. You are the one who needs to find this audience and give them reasons to stick with you and to spread their enthusiasm about you by word of mouth—and online is the way to find most of them.

Norma J. Hill (<https://normajhill.com>) is a writer, blogger, freelance editor, and workshop leader with experience in print and broadcast media, stories and articles for magazines and anthologies, and novel editing.

Furthermore...

"I'm closing down my old email address and switching to a new one. I don't want to lose you. Please make the change in your records. You've been brightening my day on a regular basis for years! Keep up the good work!"
-- Mark L. Redmond, online

[Now that's some great feedback AND a timely reminder! -- Ed.

Where Did THAT Come From?

"red herring"

In the writing biz, a red herring is a plot clue or information meant to be misleading. When used properly, they can be devilishly clever, as in a good mystery. Sometimes they are just a result of sloppy writing, and those should be ferreted out and deleted. So where did this fishy term come from? In 19th Century England, hunters might draw a smelly fish across the trail to confuse and distract the hunting dogs. Now THAT's a red herring!

Now you know!

Proceed With Caution

Be Careful Out There by Dawn Copeman

I know I'm showing my age here, but I always used to enjoy the part at the beginning of "Hill Street Blues" when the sergeant used to give the cops their patrols and then say "Be careful out there."

I'm not sure experienced cops needing reminding of how dangerous their job is, but I do think that as writers, we need to make sure we are aware of the many dangers

lurking out there.

In the old days, before the Internet, it took longer to get jobs. You had to write and post your queries, then wait for a reply, then post your article, wait, and eventually you would receive a check in the post.

This took ages, but most of us always got paid. True, there were editors and magazines that wouldn't pay, but they were, gladly, few and far between. Now we have the Internet and getting writing work has never been easier, or more risky.

As a copywriter I have seen demand for copy grow enormously over the past few years as everyone suddenly needs a website or a blog, or articles to fill their site. Whilst a large majority of these jobs are legitimate paying jobs, there are, sadly, far too many scams out there lying in wait for the unwary writer.

Almost every week I hear of writers who have written articles, copy, or blog posts and then not been paid. There are lots of unscrupulous types out there who are out for all they can get and who will, gladly, take advantage of unwary writers.

Once you know the signs, however, you can protect yourself from these people and only apply for and do paid-for writing work. These then, are my top tips for avoiding writing scams and ensuring you actually earn money

from your writing.

- Never apply for a job that says: "This would be easy for someone who knows what they're doing." This means the "employer" doesn't actually think much of writers and is not going to pay a going rate for the work. They generally want lots of work for not a lot of cash, if any cash at all. Steer clear of these postings.

- Likewise, avoid any job that says payment will be royalties or pay per click, or a job that won't pay a fee until the site has earned money. The site will never earn money; you will end up writing for free. These sites will often also say that they will provide you with valuable clips. Really? How valuable to an editor do you think a clip on that particular site will be? Unless it is a well-known magazine or site, the clip is practically worthless.

Even as a beginner, I never wrote for free. I don't believe it is necessary.

- Avoid all job listings that are packed full of spelling errors. These jobs don't tend to pay.
- Avoid all jobs seeking "lots of writers." Again, these jobs hardly ever pay and if they do, they pay peanuts.
- Never, ever provide unique specific writing samples to apply for a job. The "employer" will simply take your samples and use them. You won't hear from them again

and you won't get paid.

If you bear these tips in mind when looking at Writers Wanted ads, you will save yourself a lot of heartache and trouble.

You can make a living as a writer on the Internet; you just need to be careful out there.

Dawn Copeman is a UK-based freelance writer / educator who has published over 300 articles on travel, cookery, history, health, and writing. An experienced commercial freelancer, Dawn contributed several chapters on commercial writing to Moira Allen's Starting Your Career as a Freelance Writer (2nd Edition).

[What do they say? Work for monkeys, get paid peanuts. -- Ed.]

The Gallery of Language Pitfalls

by Ulla de Stricker

"pore" or "pour"?

Question: Are we reading or dispensing tea?

WRONG: "I'm pouring over the report."

CORRECT: "I'm poring over the report."

*More on request from
ulla@destricker.com*

"There is one way to find out if a man is honest: ask him.

If he says yes, you know he is crooked."

~~Groucho Marx~~

While looking for something funny or just interesting to put on the back page, I found an article I wrote nearly 30 years ago, when I was trying to get published in the "real" writing mags. Hey, it's not bad! So I decided to use it here, with a personal note of irony at the end. At least I finally got published!

A Cautionary Tale

**Vanity Unfair
by Maggie Frisch**

Never trust a publisher with an 800 number.

That should have been a red flag but, being new to the publishing game, I took the bait. The four-page letter from XYZ Publishers asking to see my manuscript looked professional and impressive. The brochure detailed everything from submission guidelines to preparing your manuscript for computerized typesetting (such submissions would receive "favorable treatment" if a publishing decision hung in the balance).

Not trusting such good fortune, I called the toll free number to ask if this was a vanity press. The

cordial receptionist on the other end told me it was not, and gave me a brief history of the company. She explained that XYZ was not listed in *Writer's Market* because of the huge crush of manuscripts which would result. The thoughtful young woman passed along helpful submission tips as well as the name of the acquisitions editor. And so I sent off a manuscript to this kinder, gentler publisher. Hope is a terrible thing to waste.

Two weeks later, I received the phone call. My mind raced as I heard these words from the editor: "Your manuscript has potential . . . I will overnight a contract . . ." Was this really how a book deal happens? Everything felt so simple, so worthwhile, so inevitable after the months of rejection, frustration, and humiliation. How could I have ever doubted myself?

"Please excuse me, I can barely speak. Is this for real?" I asked, breathless. The caller assured me this was a genuine contract offer on my book. Then he asked about my background. I quickly described my years in business and other writing projects. When I got to the part about the books I've self-published, he seemed suddenly hesitant. I wondered if my words had botched the deal. Or perhaps I just sounded less naive than the breathless rookie who answered the phone.

To my relief, he began to talk. "10,000 copies to start . . . subsidiary rights (Disney?) . . . first-

time author . . . joint venture contract . . . your cost \$8,000 . . ." That's when my fantasy crashed and burned; my breath returned as I realized I was being dealt a sales pitch. I felt embarrassed by the puppyish excitement I had displayed.

The next day, as promised, I received a package which included a seven-page contract, a bio sheet, a lavishly illustrated children's book (my genre), a "blockbuster" best seller, and the publisher's catalog listing hundreds of books. All so professional, all so believable. I decided to do some detective work by calling on Crown Books and B. Dalton. Both stores had trouble locating any of the titles I gave them, even the blockbuster. But perhaps this publisher didn't sell through the big chains?

Back home and in need of feedback, I clicked on the computer and signed on to my writers' chat line for some instant input. The unanimous opinion of the authors online: you're being scammed.

Not one to give up easily, I placed one last anonymous call to XYZ. "Is this or is this *not* a vanity press?" "No, it's not." "So you do offer contracts that aren't joint ventures?" "Yes." That settled it. I would call the publisher the next day and boldly request a real contract.

But he called me first. Sort of like a phone salesman, I thought. Another red flag: publishers don't make follow-up calls to close the

deal. I told him that I would have to turn down his proposal unless he could offer me a non-subsidy contract. His friendly demeanor cracked and the hard sell took over. He replied: "I could offer you a non-subsidy contract if you went out and killed someone and got lots of media publicity and then wrote a book. Or if you'd previously sold 50,000 books. But listen, no publisher works with a first-time author without sharing the costs." And with that blatant lie, he lost his sucker.

Disillusioned but wiser, I have returned to the grind of mailing out manuscripts. Good writing and perseverance should eventually pay off. The moral of my story? Better to receive an authentic rejection slip than a contract offer from a publisher with a toll-free number.

[OK, here's the kicker that made me laugh out loud. Stapled to the back of the copy of this article I found a form rejection letter from—wait for it!—Writer's Digest. Included was a list of reasons for "Our Regrets," and the one ticked was: "We rarely publish material on your proposed topic." I guess I was ahead of my time, writing about publishing scams in the '90s. And who knew that nearly 30 years later I'd be the editor of my own writer's rag! Some sort of symmetry there. -- Ed.]

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