



The Beacon

Your guiding light for writing and publishing

Number 30, Spring 2007

Get a Life! Does It Really Matter? A Brief Rant on the Importance of Punctuation

by Joyce Gram

I have two groups of friends: those who work and play with the printed word as I do, and those who use the printed word much as they use their car – to get from here to there. Both groups know my reputation: I care about minutia in writing, those details that make writing flow, that smooth the reader’s way, that spare the reader the irritation of interruption and confusion.

Yes, I care about punctuation.

Many writers I have worked with, after I have covered their copy with corrections, tell me with a dismissive wave of the hand, “I know, I just can’t figure out commas.” Ah, but they can, and they should. After all, they want to see their name in lights, don’t they?

There are many resources out there – cheap and easy to use. The best are Strunk and White’s *The Elements of Style* (4th edition) and Lynne Truss’s *Eats, Shoots & Leaves*. (Truss is like me, but she has made millions.)

Resources or not, it comes down to this: as a writer hoping to publish the breakout novel or the self-help guide that will change us all or the poem that will rise to everyone’s lips, you have to care. You have to care enough to think about what you are doing and pay attention to the few conventions that pedants like me have formulated to make the world of words a better place.

It’s all about practice – and here you will learn just how weird I am. Every time I write, whether I’m editing an historical novel or a press release, whipping off a reply to an email, or composing a message to hubby on a Valentine, I pay attention to the punctuation. And whenever I’m not sure about something, I check. This helps me commit the rules to memory. When I’m facing 5,000 words to be edited and sent off to a client before supertime, I can’t be wondering whether a comma is correct. I need to know.

Do your friends and future readers a favour: pay attention to punctuation. They’ll love you for it.

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Contact Joyce for all your editing needs at gramkend@shaw.ca

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From the editor’s desk

Good news! My favourite editor has agreed to contribute to *The Beacon* on a regular basis, closing a gap I have long wanted to fill for readers. Paying close attention to the conventions publishers expect is a way to demonstrate our professionalism and her words of wisdom will help us all.

Joyce Gram is the best editor I have worked with in thirty-seven years of writing. She outshines all the magazine and publishers’ editors I have been assigned. Not only a brilliant copy-editor, Joyce is a talented substantive editor who takes pleasure in improving writers’ fiction and non-fiction manuscripts in a more global sense. I guarantee you will learn something important that will enhance your written work from every one of Joyce’s articles. Readers can enjoy her inaugural piece in pride of place as the lead in this issue. Welcome, Joyce!

A spirited discussion about creativity a month ago prompted me to think more about the topic. What is creativity? What is the profile of a creative person? Can we learn it? What can we do to enhance it for writing? I’ve become so intrigued that I am delving into creativity and I am sure my findings will amount to a useful article or two for *The Beacon*. The first is below.

The June electronic issue of *The Beacon* will see a new format – more professional and up-to-date.

Julie H. Ferguson

Creativity (1)

Many have tried to define creativity, which has resulted in almost as many definitions as there are definers. But everyone agrees that we recognize it when we see it.

One way of looking at creativity is that it is the human ability to generate new ideas. But it is more complex than that, as my early research is showing, and includes layers of cognitive ability, environment and culture, and personality traits that predispose towards creativity.

The process itself includes knowing, perceiving, and conceiving (the cognitive ideation phase); then comes preparation; followed by incubation and illumination; lastly the translation phase transforms the idea into reality. This process is familiar to writers – it is a sequence we tend to follow, consciously or sub-consciously, when we write. However, creativity is easily stifled. Adults tend to judge what they are doing while they do it. This tendency destroys creative writing. We should reserve our judgment for the editing phase.

So can we “learn” creativity? Psychologists and other experts say we can. We are at our most creative when we are relaxed, away from our usual work environment. The best time is during the drowsy state when we wake naturally without an alarm clock and before we get out of bed. Other opportunities to practice the process arise during quiet activities, like taking a bath or wallowing in a hot tub, meditating, or having a massage. Music, not heavy metal but Baroque, and the sound of trickling water encourage our creativity too. Moderate aerobic activity releases endorphins and increases blood flow to the brain, which explains why many writers go for a walk/run when in a “dry” patch. Having fun and being happy (playfulness) have also been linked to enhanced creativity.

Experts also say we have to practise our creativity or we will lose the edge. Back we go – “Use it or lose it.”

Next live workshops for writers

(for details, see www.beaconlit.com)

Mar 3 - *Writing with Power!!* for writers who want to revitalize their work. Creative Writing Diploma Program, Johnston Heights Secondary School, Surrey, 9am-noon. Register www.ce.sd36.bc.ca/

Mar 31 - Writers Express - a day of essential workshops for writers from Surrey's renowned Creative Writing Diploma Program. Johnston Heights Secondary School, Surrey. Details at www3.telus.net/345/WEbrochure.pdf

Apr 12 - *Book Magic: Turning Writers into Published Authors* for fiction and non-fiction writers who want to learn more about getting published. Creative Writing Diploma Program, Guildford Park Secondary School, Surrey, 6:30-9:30pm. Register www.ce.sd36.bc.ca/

May 3 - *Writing with Power!!* for writers who want to revitalize their work. Creative Writing Diploma Program, Guildford Park Secondary School, Surrey, 6:30-9:30pm. Register www.ce.sd36.bc.ca/

Master Class Time Again!

Take one or two master classes with the highly acclaimed **Jessica Morrell!** She will be in Vancouver again to lead two intensive, day-long sessions for writers on the weekend of **March 24 and 25, 2007, from 10am-5pm.**

1. Show, don't tell (Saturday)

Show, don't tell makes our writing vivid, convincing, life-like, and compelling. How do you apply this rule to fiction, literary non-fiction, and journalism?

2. Story People: the good, the bad, and the ugly (Sunday)

Long after the intricacies of a fictional plot fade from a reader's memory, the characters linger with an almost physical presence, a twinkle of personality, and unforgettable actions.

WHERE: 11231 Granville Avenue, Richmond, B.C. Limited space.

INVESTMENT: US\$100 for one day or US\$190 for both days (includes beverages and snacks; participants, bring your own picnic lunch).

HOW: send a check or money order (U.S. funds only) to Jessica Morrell, P.O. Box 820141, Portland, OR, USA, 97282-1141.

MORE INFO: call Jessica at 503-287-2150; or in Vancouver, call Margaret Stuart at 604.270.4515



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