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Wonderful Winters

WINTER IS THE TIME FOR COMFORT, FOR GOOD FOOD AND WARMTH, FOR THE TOUCH OF A FRIENDLY HAND AND FOR A TALK BESIDE THE FIRE: IT IS THE TIME FOR HOME.
—Edith Sitwell

Sometimes it feels like there are two types of people when it comes to winter: those who adore it and those who just want to hibernate through it, enjoying the warmth of a cozy den in slumber, only to be awakened by the fragrance of flowers months (or in the case of Vermont, *many, many months*) later. If there is a middle ground—enjoying the crispness of cold, sunny days while trekking through inches of powder; sipping a hot beverage while watching a new snowfall; and snuggling up with loved ones, including beloved furry family members—then that’s what we’re aiming to do this winter.

While winter is often thought of as a season for resolutions, maybe it should be more of a shift in mind-set. So, what can we do this time of year that we don’t normally do?

When indoors, maybe it’s time to soak in a hot bath, feeling the warmth in your palms from a mug of fragrant herbal tea, or putting your warm, slippers feet up and grabbing a pen to write a note to someone you haven’t spoken to for a while, journal, or get started (or restarted) on that writing project. It might be listening to the song that always imbues your soul with the colors of the seasons behind you but that will also return.

And outdoors? It might be sitting quietly in a midnight snowfall or listening to a crackling evening campfire while its brilliance invokes shadows alongside the long night. Perhaps it’s watching the sunrise on the first day of winter or snowshoeing along a path whose meanderings you know intimately in summer but not at this time of year.

Or do many of these in the same day! Why not take a snowy walk, return home and enjoy a steaming mug of chai by a campfire, and curl up in a pile of blankets with your beloved while watching that movie that makes you laugh *every single time* or talk about the great day you’ve had and ones you’re looking forward to having, yes, even in the brief, chilly, cozy, wonderful days of winter?

What are you doing to enjoy the season?

—S&C—

In This Issue . . .

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The hyphen is a powerful punctuation mark. Find out some of the many ways it can be used. [PAGE 4](#)

Octopuses or Octopi?

Is the plural of the word *octopus* **octopuses** or **octopi**? While both are used in the English lexicon, that does not mean they are both equally correct.

Because the English word *octopus* is derived from Greek, the plural form **octopuses** is preferred over **octopi** (which uses a Latin-style plural, akin to the word *radii*, the preferred plural of *radius*). Note that while *Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate* and *Unabridged* consider both of these uses acceptable, **octopuses** is still preferred!

Many thanks to our friend Sydney Wulf in Garmisch-Partenkirchen, Germany, for this tip!

Quill & Ink

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Behind the Name

- The quill represents creativity and self-expression, in the written word and also beyond it. Because the inky octopus utilizes a wide variety of tools in the course of its day and is associated with such attributes as adaptability, flexibility, diversity, focus, intuition, and transformation—among others—it thus seemed a fitting symbol for ScriptAcuity Studio.
- A little disclaimer: all thoughts, opinions, expressions, and comments are simply our perspectives.



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Why We Read Bad Book Reviews

Many moons ago, we began looking up and reading online reviews of books we'd edited, mostly for curiosity's sake; having spent considerable time with the manuscripts in their prepublication stage, we were interested in what readers thought and whether we concurred or disagreed with their assessments of the finished product. Writing is, like music or painting, a form of artistic expression, and as such, the criteria for its being regaled or derided are entirely subjective.

It soon became apparent that a great deal could be learned about the various manners in which readers approach books from reading their book reviews, and as such, we began studying them in earnest as a path toward becoming better editors.

So how might that work?

Once we've donned our editors' superhero capes and have really dug into a manuscript, we watch for a great many things and work to

smooth out and strengthen the text on many simultaneous fronts. One of these fronts requires keeping a vigilant eye out for anything the future readers—who are, after all, the critics and the ones who ultimately drive book sales!—might find implausible or even downright absurd or, worse, offensive. We also watch for details savvy readers might catch and criticize. *Would the sun come from that direction at that time of day? Is that real-life company name truly stylized that way? Would someone have used the word infusorian in the first part of the nineteenth century?* (Answer: No; the term was not coined until 1859.)

Readers are often sticklers for details, and thus it behooves writers and editors to cautiously bear that in mind as they work. In the case of nonfiction or in cases of fiction dealing with actual places, we examine maps and verify relevant details provided within the manuscript to

ensure their accuracy. Would, for example, someone truly drive north in that particular city to arrive at that destination if she had originated from that specific address? In fiction, we sometimes sketch maps based upon details provided within the text to ensure that the narrative comes together in a plausible, convincing manner. If it doesn't, many readers will pick up on it and will point it out in unflattering and unfavorable online reviews to be read by the masses. This, in turn, can impact a writer's perceived legitimacy and cast a gloomy shadow on the work over which he or she so painstakingly labored and poured much of his or her soul.

This is the reason we read book reviews, and particularly bad book reviews. Why such a focus on the latter? Because—and of course there are exceptions to this—those critical of a book are generally more likely to point out specific elements in it that they did not like and are more likely to back up those elements with direct passages from the text and/or other points supporting their assertions. There is often a great deal to be learned from criticism, whether or not the criticism seems legitimate or fair. In the end, many critics—whether they intend to or not—provide valuable insight, and by actively seeking to engage with and learn from this insight, we can become better editors and further help our writers in the process.

Is this to say that all book reviews—positive or negative—should

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Sound Tracks for the Season

Music and mood often go hand in hand. Sometimes it's the music enhancing our moods; other times, it's our emotions that color our interpretations of the music. Still, some of us have songs that nearly always quell heartaches, inspire our creativity, or energize our limbs to move a little faster and work a little harder, despite our fatigue. Musical taste is indeed personal, affected somewhere, somehow by our biology, modifying our chemistry; it could be the hum of an oboe, the heartbeat of percussion, or the timbre or sumptuousness of a voice that electrifies our senses, soothes our fraying nerves, or spurs our actions.

The following are not our musical recommendations, only our observations of some of the pieces that evoke in us those changes in mind and body.

SELECTIONS FROM CHRIS'S PLAYLIST

- "African Journey" from *Baraka: Original Motion Picture Soundtrack* (1992) by **Anugama and Sebastiano**
- "Spring Arrives" from *Elysium for the Brave* (2006) by **Azam Ali**
- "Goodnight Kiss" from *The Facts of Life* (2000) by **Black Box Recorder**
- "Mothers of the Sun" from *IV* (2016) by

Black Mountain

- "Straight Up and Down" from *Take It from the Man!* (1996) and "Here It Comes" from ... *And This Is Our Music* (2003) by the **Brian Jonestown Massacre**
- Nocturne no. 2 in E-flat Major by **Chopin**
- "Hearts Are Open Graves" from *Queen of the Meadow* (2000) by **Elysian Fields**
- "On Melancholy Hill" from *Plastic Beach* (2010) by **Gorillaz**
- "Ombra mai fu" from *Xerxes* by **Handel**
- "Invisible" from **The Golden Sun of the Great East** (2013) by *Juno Reactor*
- "60 Cycles Numb" from *Royal Subjects* (1997) by **King Black Acid**
- "The Mercy Seat" from the *Live from KCRW* (2013) by **Nick Cave & the Bad Seeds**
- "You Wish" from *N.O.W. Is the Time* (2014) by **Nightmares on Wax**
- "Water" from *Welt* (2006) by **ohGr**
- "Loser = Weed / Picnic in the Jungle (Mash-up)" from *Marching to the Sea* (2014) by the **Residents**
- "Spring" from *Foxbase Alpha* (1991) and "Wood Cabin" from *Good Humor* (1998) by **Saint Etienne**
- "Ready or Not" from *Lipslide* (2000) by **Sarah Cracknell**
- "Die Forelle," op. 32, D. 550 by **Schubert**
- "Souvlaki Space Station" from *Souvlaki*

(1993) by **Slowdive**

- "Frozen" from *An Acoustic Night at the Theatre* (2009) by **Within Temptation**

SELECTIONS FROM SARA'S PLAYLIST

- "Respect" (1967) by **Aretha Franklin**
- Theme from *Ripper Street* (2013) by **Dominik Scherrer**
- "Gabriel's Oboe" (1985) and "Brothers" (1985) by **Ennio Morricone**
- "Va, Pensiero" (1842) by **Giuseppe Verdi**
- "Concerto for Oboe d'amore, Strings, and Continuo in A" (1717) by **J. S. Bach**
- "Time in a Bottle" (1972) by **Jim Croce**
- "What a Wonderful World" (1967) as sung by **Louis Armstrong**
- "What's Going On" (1971) and "Mercy, Mercy Me" (1971) by **Marvin Gaye**
- "The Ship Song" (1990), "Wonderful Life" (2003), and "Right Out of Your Hand" (2003) by **Nick Cave & the Bad Seeds**
- "The Lark Ascending" (1942) by **Ralph Vaughan Williams**
- "Outpost 31" (2009) by **Simon Wilkinson**
- "Runnin' Down a Dream" (1989) by **Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers**
- "Calling All Angels" (2003) by **Train**

What are some songs you always turn to and tune in to for a guaranteed lift? ▀

REVIEWS FROM PAGE 2

be taken seriously or even at face value? Absolutely not. Sadly, there are those who amuse themselves with writing deliberately caustic reviews and those who intentionally write blatant falsehoods about the book just for the sheer satisfaction of doing so. If, for example, a review states, "Cover so ugly I didn't even read the book—one star," it is advisable to not give said one-star review much credence. And clearly, there

isn't a lot of constructive knowledge that can be gained from negative reviews like "Book was stupid." But if a reviewer remarks about poor character development, plot holes, anachronisms, pacing problems, unrealistic-sounding dialogue, repetition and redundancy, clichés, poor transitions, or other concrete issues of a similar nature and provides specific examples to support his or her position, it can provide invaluable insight to writers and editors alike.

What initially started as an exercise in curiosity and amusement became a full-scale and in-depth study as a means of learning what readers truly notice in the interest of sharpening our own focus as we care for the manuscripts with which we've been entrusted.

Sometimes, valuable knowledge and insight come from unexpected places. Try never to miss an opportunity to learn something! ▀

The Mighty Hyphen

Our little friend the hyphen (not to be confused with either the en dash [–] or the em dash [—]) is a fantastic, hardworking piece of punctuation that is often underappreciated in our language for its ability to provide important clarification.

What does this great little buddy really do? Well, lots of things—separating syllables, dividing numbers in a telephone sequence, assisting with end-of-line breaks on a page, providing clarity with certain prefixes and suffixes, and so on—though it primarily serves to connect elements together in ways that further facilitate readers’ understanding of the writer’s intent. Similarly, its deliberate absence can also help to facilitate this understanding.

Consider, for example, *The Chicago Manual of Style’s* (CMS) great example of how the hyphen—or lack of one—can affect the meaning of a phrase:

- the most skilled workers (most in number)
- the most-skilled workers (most in skill)

Similarly:

- small state senators (the senators are small)
- small-state senators (the states are small)

The use of hyphens confuses many people, especially given that there are many rules governing their use. A compound adjective’s position within a sentence, for instance,

determines whether or not it is hyphenated. Checking a dictionary will not necessarily help writers, either, since many compound adjectives won’t be found there.

When compound modifiers (also called *phrasal adjectives*) precede a noun, hyphenation usually lends clarity, and it is never incorrect to hyphenate adjectival compounds before a noun. When such compounds *follow* the noun they modify, hyphenation is usually unnecessary, even for adjectival compounds that are hyphenated in *Webster’s*. This is often a source of confusion for writers, even more so when they receive their copyedited work back and identify what they perceive to be inconsistent revisions. (“It says *well-known author* here but *author is well known* later! The editor made a mistake with my book!”)

So, too, with a variety of compounds (CMS 7.85 provides a great deal of information around this topic).

Here is but a subset of those guidelines and some examples of each.

Compounds formed with **ever** are usually—though not always—hyphenated *before but not after* a noun.

- ever-present need (hyphenated; compound precedes the noun)
- the need is ever present (not hyphenated; compound follows the noun)

Compounds with **like** are closed if

listed as such in *Webster’s* and are otherwise hyphenated, both before and after a noun.

- zombielike behavior
- behavior was zombielike

Many—though not all—adjective forms of **half** compounds are hyphenated *before and after* the noun, while the noun forms are open.

- a half-gallon jug of water (in this case, *half-gallon* is an adjective modifying the noun *jug*)
- a half gallon of water (in this case, *half gallon* is the noun)

Adjectival compounds with **century** are hyphenated *before, but not after*, the noun.

- nineteenth-century writings (hyphenated; compound precedes the noun)
- writings from the nineteenth century (not hyphenated; compound follows the noun)

Noun + adjective compounds are hyphenated *before* a noun and are *usually open after* a noun.

- energy-efficient appliances (hyphenated; compound precedes the noun)
- appliances are energy efficient (not hyphenated; compound follows the noun)

Adjective + participle compounds are hyphenated *before but not after* the noun.

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- hot-tempered coach (hyphenated; compound precedes the noun)
- coach had a hot temper (not hyphenated; compound follows the noun)

Color compounds are hyphenated *before but not after* a noun.

- lime-green sweater (hyphenated; compound precedes the noun)
- sweater is lime green (not hyphenated; compound follows the noun)

Adjective forms of number, ordinal, and superlative compounds are hyphenated *before* a noun or verb and are otherwise open.

- second-best place they ever lived (hyphenated; compound precedes the noun)
- third-smallest child in the class (hyphenated; compound precedes the noun)
- fourth-to-last house on the left (hyphenated; compound precedes the noun)
- he ranked fifth to last (not hyphenated; compound follows the verb)

Number + noun compounds are hyphenated before a noun and are otherwise open.

- five-inch gap in the ice (hyphenated; compound precedes the noun)
- twenty-year span (hyphenated; compound precedes the noun)
- it weighs fifteen pounds (not hyphenated; compound follows the verb)

Number + percentage compounds

are *open in both* noun and adjective forms.

- a 20 percent increase
- 30 percent

Note: Percentages are always presented in numerals rather than spelled out, except at the beginning of a sentence.

Compounds formed with **free** as the second element are hyphenated *both before and after* the noun.

- a duty-free shop
- the shop is duty-free

Adjective and adverb compounds formed with **style** are hyphenated; noun compounds are usually open.

- 1950s-style fashion (hyphenated; compound is adjective)
- fashion 1950s-style (hyphenated; compound is adjective)
- house-style revisions (hyphenated; compound is adjective)
- use the house style (not hyphenated; the compound is a noun)

Proper nouns and adjectives relating to geography or nationality are open in noun and adjective forms.

- Japanese American (not hyphenated; noun form)
- Japanese American tradition (not hyphenated; adjective form)
- Spanish American (referring to a person)
but
- Spanish-American War (hyphenated in this case because the hyphen implies *between*)

This is not even a comprehensive list of the mighty hyphen's many uses and talents! In fact, it is only a reasonable sampling.

For more information about our friend the hyphen, contact us at **editors@scriptacuity.com**, or spend some time cozying up with *CMS* ... you know, for a little light reading before bed. ▀





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