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Writers'

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LAST DRAFT

PRIZE LETTER I thought I'd have a go at creating a 'First Draft' so I photocopied a paragraph out of a

bestseller and set about the task. However, I didn't get very far – in fact, the exercise did little more than highlight what I didn't know.

My excuse is that, being a child of the '70s, I was taught to write as you speak, and that spelling, grammar and punctuation were secondary to the message you wanted to convey. By the time this was labelled 'hippy nonsense' I was a stropky teenager who didn't listen. Hence when my history teacher read out an essay I'd written all in one breath, as I had neglected to put in any punctuation, I didn't bat an eyelid or try to remedy my mistakes.

I have now taken it upon myself to try and remedy this by doing an exercise a day on various aspects of grammar. When I'm feeling a bit more accomplished I will have another go at the 'First Draft'. Until then I will endeavour to correct the ones that are published in your magazine.

Sharon Grigg, Poole, Dorset

Ed: I was at school in the 1970s too, Sharon, and on balance it was better than the dispiriting rote-learning of spellings, punctuation and tenses the Government imposes on my children today. No one ever changed the world because they could use a semi-colon. And, in my experience, people who brand others as hippies are just joyless and jealous.

You wrote an interesting and well-formed letter, Sharon, and that's what's important. A computer can spot grammatical mistakes but it can't write Wuthering Heights.



The bad old days

NOT SERIOUS

Having recently published my second indie novel, *The Cronus Equation*, my thoughts naturally turned to advertising. After looking around at various options I eventually settled on seriousreading.com, who say on their website: 'On Serious Reading, we do one thing: read, review and recommend books for tens of thousands of reading enthusiasts...'

I paid the fee and they duly reviewed both of my books, giving each one a very positive 90 per cent rating.

What a pity they never actually read either one.

I know they didn't read them because they never bought them, and I know they never bought them because I am the sole publisher and copyright holder... whoops, busted!

Not only that, but the reviews were of such poor quality that I insisted they were pulled from their website, 90 per cent or no

90 per cent. In fairness, they fell over themselves to return my fee, but steadfastly refused to acknowledge the poor quality of their service. Apparently they could find nothing wrong with the following sentence, which I could see they had lifted straight from my very own website and then murdered horribly:

'Brought up in Kubrick Clockwork Orange, he had the perfect surrounding of Gothic tales, rumors of a secret intelligence world and leafy facades were the imaginations he needed to start writing.'

In my opinion seriousreading.com are not serious people and you should steer clear.

Charles Naton
www.charlesnaton.com

CAUGHT IN NET

I'm retired, aged 64 and educated to a high standard, but suffer from stress following a trauma. I struggle with IT and write longhand, which is what I prefer anyway. But where

does this leave me, as writing competitions and publishers ask for work by email only?

It seems very unfair that I should be getting left out of so many opportunities due to this handicap. I would love to start writing but feel held back by the restrictions of the internet. Is there another way?

Sent by letter

Ed: When we've been left behind by technological changes it can be frustrating. Having worked in print magazines all my life, I felt the same when titles started moving online. Writing and story-telling is a skill that can be transferred to any medium, but it can be a struggle to adapt.

When it comes to IT skills I'd suggest asking at your local library about free courses. You will usually find free access to computers, too, which is one reason libraries remain a vital part of a community.

You can also ask about local writing groups. It may be a big step to meet other people, but there will be