

ON THE LIBERATION OF

LANCE WRITER . . .

by James M. Weil

I am currently researching information for a novel, and I thought it would be a good idea to have some business cards made to give me credibility in the eyes of my interviewees.

Not really sure of what I wanted, I went to my local office supply store and inquired about them. The young lady at the counter was most helpful; between the two of us we picked out the color, format, and print I wanted--a beige card with brown ink. Very simple, very handsome:

James M. Weil III
Freelance Writer

Anytime, Anywhere, U.S.A

Two weeks later, the young lady telephoned. My cards were in. Excited, I went down to pick them up. She handed me the box and I opened it like a child unwrapping a Christmas gift.

I immediately noticed something wrong. The word "freelance" had been separated into two words: *Free Lance*. I brought her attention to the mistake.

"Oh, that's no mistake," she said, beaming with pride. "I looked it up in the dictionary. That's the way it's spelled."

I had my doubts, so she brought out the dictionary. A spelling mistake on my business card certainly didn't do much for my credibility.

Just as I thought, there were two spellings for "freelance." The first is divided into two words and is used as a noun, meaning a writer or artist who is not under contract for regular work but sells his work to individual buyers.

It was an accurate description of what I was, but it was not the word I wanted.

The second spelling has a hyphen between the two words: "free-lance," and it's used as an adjective, which was the word I wanted.

She protested. "It can be used as either."

"No," I argued. "You are either a *free lancer* or a *free-lance* whatever."

But now I was confused. I had never seen free-lance with a hyphen before. The poor girl started to get upset and a loud grammar debate ensued. The owner of the shop heard the commotion and came downstairs.

"What's going on?" he wanted to know.

We explained the situation, and he settled it by

informing us that in this case "free-lance" was used as an adjective.

"I appreciate your editorial effort but you could have at least informed me before you made any changes."

"Welcome to the world of *free lance*," she said.

If ever I had any trepidations about writing as a career, now was a good time to reconsider.

They finally decided to reprint the cards free of charge and I left.

But later, doubts again were beginning to creep over me. I still wasn't sure about that hyphen. I took my cards to a knowledgeable friend and showed him one. He handed it back to me.

"Who the hell is Lance Writer?" he asked. "Some sort of literary pimp being held without bail?"

"That doesn't answer my question."

"Let's look through some periodicals."

We started thumbing through magazines and to our dismay found the word spelled both ways. We decided to call the editorial desk of our local newspaper.

"According to the *Associated Press Stylebook*, said the editor, 'free-lance' is to be used with a hyphen. But you can spell it any way you want."

I was exasperated. "That doesn't help me much!"

"You can always claim writer's prerogative."

It wasn't until I looked in *Writer's Digest* and saw "freelance" used without a hyphen--in both cases--that I

decided to exercise my writer's prerogative.

I called the office supply store. The girl answered the phone.

"Stop the presses!" I yelled.

"What do you want changed now? 'Free-lance Writer' to 'Editorial Consultant'?"

"Very funny. I want the hyphen dropped. 'Freelance' is going to be one word."

"It's your prerogative."

I wish she had realized that in the first place.

James Weil is a retired college student and has recently relocated to Philadelphia after living and writing in southern California.

(619) 223-4782

James M. Weil III
Free Lance Writer

4928 CORONADO AVE. APT. 6
SAN DIEGO, CA 92107