



What Time Is It *There*?

By Sue Fagalde Lick

The telephone rang at 6 a.m. Half asleep, I cleared my throat a couple times and fumbled for the phone. “H’lo?”

It was an East Coast source I had been trying to reach for weeks. I wanted to scream, “Do you know what time it is?” But I didn’t. I thanked him for calling me back and grabbed my notebook. It might be sleepy time in Oregon, but in Virginia, it was time to work.

If I had waited until I reported to my office, usually around 9 a.m. Pacific Time, he would have been out to lunch. And then I’d be going to lunch and he’d be on his way home, and this could go on forever. If I’m the one who wants the information, I’m the one who has to wake up and do business.

Before the arrival of the Internet and direct-dial long distance telephone calling, writers and editors communicated by mail. Those manila envelopes could wait until everybody was awake, but in this multi-time-zone world, when we’re sleeping, other people are working, going to lunch, slogging through the evening commute, or watching prime-time TV. In fact, in some places, it’s already tomorrow.

What does this mean for writers?

Before you make that phone call, think about what time zone the recipient is in. It’s not an issue if you’re writing local stories for a local publication, but if you live in San Jose and need to call New Hampshire, you’ve got to call in the morning. Likewise, if you’re calling Honolulu, you might have to extend your workday into the evening.

When scheduling appointments for interviews or business conversations, make sure everyone knows what time it will be where they are. Is that 2 p.m. Pacific Time or Central Time? Be very clear. Tell them, “I will call you at 2 p.m. **your** time.” If you get confused

as to what time it is in other places, there’s a handy chart at www.worldtimezone.com.

If you don’t want to be “on call” 24/7, record a message on your voicemail or answering machine explaining what hours you are available. People might not call back, but they won’t wake you up either.

Personally, I’m never off duty. Too often, I have received the call when I least expected it. In fact, an editor once called while I was cooking Christmas dinner to tell me she wanted my opinion piece. I was happy to negotiate terms as I stirred the gravy.

Living in a multi-time zone world can be inconvenient. God knows we don’t want to receive business calls when we’re sleeping, eating, or having sex, but it’s not all bad. You can send e-mail any time, and you have a never-fail conversation starter: “How’s the weather there?” Plus there’s always someone working somewhere. You could start with East Coast calls and work your way west, finishing with the Pacific Islands. In fact, why stop with North America? What time is it in Australia?

Even if you write only fiction, consider how time zones relate to your stories. For example, what if your character has to make a critical telephone call to another country and everything there is closed? Or, what if your hero has just spent his last dime to fly to Paris, then is so jet-lagged he falls sleep and misses the most important meeting of his life?

As in real life, whatever you’re writing, ask yourself, what time is it there? Maybe your story begins with the phone ringing at 5 a.m. Who might be calling so early? 🐼

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