

THE BUSINESS OWNER'S GUIDE TO BECOMING A BETTER WRITER

7 TIPS TO CRAFTING CLEAR, COMPELLING WRITING

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In one way or another, we are all writers. We write emails, social media captions, website updates. If you're a business owner, being able to write well is perhaps one of your most important assets, as your writing reflects on you as a business owner.

This isn't a guide to writing compelling copy... you'll need more than a 7 page freebie to master that craft. It's also not a guide on how to write a book, or a article, or a social media post. The tips and tricks in this guide are broad enough that can be used for any form of writing - from professional pieces of content through to an informal email to a friend.

Being a good writer is less about a natural talent, and more about understanding what makes writing effective. In my 10 years experience across media and communications, I've become obsessed with crafting compelling content. I've now put my key learning into a super short, simple guide to help anybody become a better writer. By implementing these simple strategies, you can write pieces that are clear, easy to understand, and most importantly of all, interesting to read.

*"I only write
when I'm
inspired, so I
see to it that
I'm inspired
every morning
at nine
o'clock."*

- PETER DE VRIES
*reminding us all that writing
is more habit, than art.*

1/ START STRONG

LEAD WITH THE MOST COMPELLING PIECE OF INFORMATION.

We often fill our introduction with context, set up and background, making it harder for the reader to understand what the piece is all about. This might be the heading, the top line of your Instagram caption, the opening line to your novel or even just the first line in an email to a colleague.

Cut straight to the chase. Work out what the key piece of information is and begin with that. The aim is for people to understand almost immediately what you are trying to say.

The rule to 'start strong' applies not just to the beginning of your piece overall, but also each individual sentence. Simply, put the most important sentences at the beginning of your piece and the most important words at the beginning of your sentence.

TIP:

Give special love to the first sentence. Remember, the point of your first sentence, and first paragraph, is to keep people reading.

WHEN YOU FINISH:

Take another look at your intro... can you trim it down or lop it off completely?

As journalists say...

"Don't bury the lead!"



2/ WRITE FOR YOUR AUDIENCE

REMEMBER WHO YOU ARE TALKING TO & SPEAK TO THEM.

The KEY to keeping people engaged is to deliver the information in a way that is useful and engaging to your audience.

Picture your target audience as one person. Imagine that person sitting across from you, and write to them directly. What language would they use? What tone would they respond well to?

By writing to 'one person', rather than a whole audience, your writing will come across as more conversational, engaging and authentic.

Another way to make sure your writing is audience focused is to ask yourself... 'why should your audience care?' This is also known as the 'so what?' exercise. How does this really impact them?

TIP:

Enter the reader's mindset by developing empathy. Your goal is to create useful content that solves their problems and makes their lives easier or more enjoyable. Understand their situation, their needs, their goals and their desires, and you'll already be one big step ahead.

"Make sure that your project is both functional and creative. Think outside the box and impress everyone!"



3/ KEEP IT SHORT

WE ARE ALL TIME POOR. BREVITY IS KEY.

The key to tight writing is just telling the important information in as few words as possible. It's not about removing key information, but rather cutting the fat... that's anything that doesn't respect the reader's time.

TIP:

As a general rule of thumb, sentences should be between 15 - 20 words (25 words max). Paragraphs should be between 1 and 3 sentences (6 lines max).

*Although remember - some rules are made to be broken (strategically).



Don't use several words, where one will do.

REPLACE 'in order to' WITH 'to'

REPLACE 'in conjunction with' WITH 'with'

REPLACE 'In the event that' WITH 'if'

REPLACE 'for the purpose of' WITH 'for'

REPLACE 'In accordance with' WITH 'under'

REPLACE 'The majority of' WITH 'most'

REPLACE 'On a regular basis' WITH 'regularly'

WHEN YOU FINISH:

Edit ruthlessly. First with a chainsaw by removing whole sentences or paragraphs, then with surgical tools... line by line, word by word. Re-read your work and ask if there is anything you can cut back on or shorten.

4/ KEEP IT SIMPLE

WRITE LIKE YOU TALK IN PLAIN, UPBEAT LANGUAGE

Be personal and direct. Don't use words or sentences in writing that you would not use in a real life conversation. This means steering clear of jargon, official terminology and policy words where a regular word will do. For example, would you say, 'I don't have the bandwidth?' or simply 'I don't have the time.'

TIP:

Keep your writing easy to read by avoiding sentence clutter which weighs your writing down and makes it more complex to understand. Ask yourself: 'is this the most simple way to say this?'

5/ CLARITY IS KEY

GOOD, CLEAR THINKING LENDS ITSELF TO GOOD, CLEAR WRITING.

Before you begin writing, ask yourself ‘What is the goal of this piece?’ Put simply... what key message are you trying to get across? Keep focused on that idea and avoid anything that distracts from that.

TIP:

Write a single line at the top of the page that sums up the main point of the piece while drafting. You can remove this at the end.

A quick note... when we talk about clarity, we are talking about the piece as a whole, as well as individual sentences. Look carefully at both.

A few extra points for creating clear writing:

- *Have just one idea per sentence.*
- *Remove any sentences that are ambiguous.*
- *Make sure the order makes logical sense.*
- *Choose the active voice, not the passive voice.*
- *Avoid wordy verbs and over using adjectives.*
- *Recognise ‘fuzzy’ ideas or sentences that blur your main message.*

WHEN YOU FINISH:

1. Read your piece as a whole and make sure that every point supports your main message at the top of the page. If it doesn't, get rid of it.
2. Read each individual sentence out loud and ask yourself... 'is this sentence written as clearly and succinctly as possible?'



"Have something to say, and say it as clearly as you can. That is the only secret of style."

MATTHEW ARNOLD

6/ BE INTERESTING

A FEW TIPS & TRICKS

KEEP PEOPLE READING FROM ONE SENTENCE TO THE NEXT.

How do you do this? By making what you say engaging. You don't need to be void of emotion – even in professional writing.

As a copywriting mentor of mine so wisely wrote:

'You can say all the right things about a product or you can create a feeling about it. Would you care to sit through a concert where the musician just played all the right notes?'

- Nicolas Di Tempora.

- Give life to your content by infusing your personality (only where appropriate. Again – know your audience.)
- Share a story, not just stats. Incorporate case studies, stories and anecdotes, which have more impact on human emotion.
- Change your sentence length and bring variety to sentence structures. One sentence in a stand-alone paragraph is a great way to make an important point clear.
- Make your text interesting to look at by breaking up paragraphs and avoiding long chunks of text. Also include headings and subheadings, bulleted/numbered lists, lots of white space and other visual elements.

7/ FINISH WITH A BANG

LEAVE A LASTING IMPACT BY GIVING EXTRA LOVE TO THE END OF YOUR PIECE

What do you want your audience to do? This should be abundantly clear with a compelling Call to Action.

Like we give a little extra attention to the first sentence, it's a good idea to do the same with the last sentence. If you conclude well, your message is more likely to leave a lasting impact.



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CHECKLIST



Does it start with the most interesting part? Can you trim the start, or lop it off completely?



Is it written for your audience? Does it use their language? Does it answer their questions?



Have you removed the buzz words and replaced them with everyday language?



Does every sentence and every paragraph serve an important purpose + support the main point?



Have you read back through and 'cut the fat'? Is it as concise as it could be?



Is your 'call to action' clear?

On a parting note...

Your words - be it on social media, on a blog post, in a podcast, on your website, even in an email - are giving people an impression. Make it a good one, by learning the simple strategies to improving your writing.

The way you write is a reflection of you as a person and a business owner. Your words can make you look smart, scattered, cold or competent. They can make people love you or hate you, before even having a single conversation with you.

This guide is simply a short summary of some of the key tips and tricks I've learnt over the years, and was inspired by a large collection of books and courses which have helped me become a better writer.

I'll leave you with some words by someone who inspires me to become a better writer...

Words matter. Your words (what you say) and style (how you say it) are your most cherished (and yes undervalued) assets.'

- ANN HANDLEY, EVERYBODY WRITES.