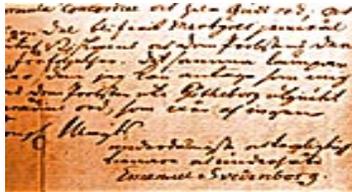


If You Can Think It

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You can write it, too.

Three ways to make your writing stand out.

Contrary to popular opinion, writing is not a one-shot process. It is the act of taking a raw piece of material and transforming it into a polished piece of work. This process takes a bit of talent to master, but almost no talent to start. By using several simple rules, any writer can transform a rough piece of work into a much better one. Post this article beside your favourite writing area and watch the quality of your work increase!

Problem 1: Writer's block

Don't torture yourself with "cold start writing." Just as a car's engine takes a while to warm up, so does your writing engine. Before starting your piece, create a 20-minute journal. In this 20 minutes, write down *anything* that crosses your mind. Aim for the highest word count possible and completely disregard "the Judge." The Judge will be dogging you the whole time, trying to get you to slow down and make sense. If you are writing in a word processor, try closing your eyes!

Problem 2: Where do I start?

Your first step is to *locate the reader*. Chances are, the reader will not know as much about the setting of your piece as you assume. Fill in this gap with as much detail as you can muster. Throughout your piece remember one thing - you cannot use too much detail! Second, *use natural vocabulary*. Your story will be more believable if it is written in language that your reader can relate to. Along this vein, *when in doubt use short sentences*. Long and twisting sentences will distance your reader. Let them spend the time reading your piece, not deciphering it.

Problem 3: How can I make it better?

After your first draft is complete, your next task is to revise it. For every writer, there are several "interfering factors" that will deaden an otherwise excellent piece of work. These are: wordiness, crippled verbs, cliches, the passive voice, and pronouns.

Wordiness dilutes the meaning of your piece. If you can say it in fewer words — do it! Wordiness comes in several forms: redundancy, intensifiers, stretchers, and thickeners. *Redundancy* pops into your piece when

you use a word that is already implied.

For example, you should replace "purple in colour" with "purple."

Intensifiers, although meant to strengthen an adjective, usually do not.

For example, you can replace "very hot" simply with "hot" or the more descriptive "searing." *Stretchers* use more words than are necessary in a sentence and can

often just be cut out. For example, you

can replace "There are seven reasons that" with "Seven reasons that." Finally, *thickeners* simply make your piece difficult to read. Both academic and legal writing are often full of thickeners. Readers simply do not need to struggle through "the heretoforementioned conjunction of lexis."

In the words of the famous Guy Allen, "verbs are the most important words in writing." A sentence that contains a *crippled verb* places the main meaning of the sentence in the object, not the verb. For example, "we would walk the dog" emphasizes the fact that the writer did something. You can revise this sentence to "we walked the dog," and firmly place the meaning of the sentence in the verb.

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Next issue: Deciphering the Dead Sea Scrolls!



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The word *cliché* comes literally from the French saying “printer’s stereotype.” On slow press days in the late 1800’s, typesetters would prepare common sayings in preparation for busier days. According to the Webster’s dictionary, cliché means something that has become overly familiar or commonplace. Because of their overuse, clichés will make your piece sound trite and unoriginal. They also have another effect: clichés get their meaning from common usage, not the words making them up. When revising your piece, replace any phrase that you have heard before with a more original one.

The passive voice is the tool of the deceitful and the enemy of the unaware. When a sentence contains the passive voice, the main meaning of the sentence is hidden. For example, “Steven’s shoes were stolen by Suzanne” should be edited to “Suzanne stole Steven’s shoes.” One earmark of the passive voice is that you can remove the agent from the sentence and the sentence will still make sense. “Steven’s shoes were stolen” is a legitimate sentence, while “stole Steven’s shoes” is not. In our revision, we are placing the meaning of the sentence where it is most visible.

Your final target in the revision of your piece should be the pronouns. Pronouns are words that refer to nouns. They include “she”, “he”, “him”, and the like. Although they help to avoid repetition, they can become confusing when the connection between the pronoun and the noun it refers to (the antecedent) becomes hazy. Just remember a simple rule: when in doubt, repeat the pronoun.

Keep these tips in mind the next time you sit down to write. With them handy, you can set your work apart from the crowd. Beginning with your rough draft, you now have the tools to pare out the interfering factors. With wordiness, crippled verbs, clichés, the passive voice, and hazy pronouns out of the way your piece can finally shine.

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*A sentence should contain no unnecessary words, a paragraph no unnecessary sentences, for the same reason that a drawing should have no unnecessary lines and a machine no unnecessary parts.
--William Strunk*