15 Ways To Write Better

HowToWriteBetter.org

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We are all writers now. Whether you write books, blog posts, emails, Instagram captions, or text messages, you are a writer. No matter your preferred medium, here are a few tips to help you write more effectively.

Treat text messages like prose.

Before hitting the send button, review your text: spelling, content, punctuation. Ask yourself: What am I attempting to *communicate*? What am I attempting to *express*? Be more deliberate with your most common form of casual writing, and you'll automatically become more deliberate in other mediums.

Words are tools.

Expand your vocabulary to make your writing more precise. There's no need to use a ten-dollar word when a ten-cent word will suffice, but having more tools in your toolbox will allow you to select the most appropriate tool for the job. Sometimes you need an ax; sometimes you need a scalpel. Pick one new word each day, and then use it at least twenty-one times in your conversations with others that day. The most useful words will stick, and your vocabulary will expand

Punctuation. Is. Pace.

To add variety, velocity, and cadence to your writing, play around with different punctuation: periods, commas, em dashes, colons, semicolons. Short, succinct sentences communicate tension. Longer, run-on sentences, on the other hand, help establish a frantic, hurried rhythm—a feeling that the pace is picking up as the words tumble onto the page.

Avoid throat-clearing.

Blogs, books, and social media posts are littered with unnecessary intros, solipsistic digressions, and avoidable drivel. Ditch the nonsense and state your points. When in doubt, delete your first two paragraphs and see whether the writing improves.

Don't waste the reader's time.

Our time and our attention are two of our most precious resources. It is selfish to force a reader to spend fifteen minutes reading something you could've—and should've—communicated in ninety seconds. If you want to earn your reader's trust, don't waste their time.

30% composition, 70% editing.

For every hour you spend writing, spend three hours editing, shaping your work into something more concise, more powerful—more beautiful. Writing truly is rewriting.

Don’t obsess about tools.

It doesn’t matter what pen Steven King used to write his most famous novel. If I were to hand you Jimmy Hendrix’s guitar, you wouldn’t start playing like Jimmy Hendrix. Pick the notebook or software that works for you, and then focus on doing the work.

Show more than you tell.

But don’t get too caught up in details. Basically, scenes that are important to the story should be dramatized with showing, but sometimes what happens between scenes can be told so the story can make progress.

Narrative urgency.

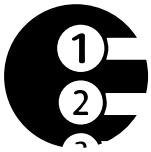
Every sentence must serve a purpose: Your first sentence must make the reader want to read the second. The second sentence must propel the reader to the third. So forth and so on until the very end. If a sentence doesn’t move the narrative forward—if it doesn’t make the writing more urgent—then it must hit the cutting-room floor, no matter how clever or precious it seems.

Avoid too many adverbs.

A sure sign of amateur writing is the overuse of adverbs, especially -ly adverbs. A woman in a story isn't incredibly pretty—she's beautiful; the sky isn't very blue—it's azure. Find the perfect words to avoid using adverbs as crutches.

Follow the rules, and then unfollow the rules.

Learn the rules so you can break them successfully. I recommend two books to my writing students to help them understand the guidelines of good writing: *Grammatically Correct* and *Garner's Modern English Usage*.



Be honest about your priorities.

Your priorities are what you do each day, the small tasks that move forward the second and minute hands on the clock: these circadian endeavors are your *musts*. Everything else is simply a *should*. You have the same amount of time as everyone else who has ever created a masterpiece. We all have the same twenty-four hours in a day. So "I don't have time to write" really means "writing isn't a priority."

Identify what's getting in your way.

Make a list of everything getting in the way of your writing. Then get rid of it. Surfing the 'net too much? Get rid of the Internet at home. Are certain people draining all your time? Get rid of your shitty relationships. Are material possessions getting in the way? Get rid of your crap.

Read more about writing.

No matter your level of competency, there's always room for improvement. For daily tips and writing-related articles, follow How to Write Better on Facebook and Twitter, and subscribe to the free How to Write Better newsletter.

Do it daily.

If you want to improve your writing, write every day. Writing is a muscle: if you don't use it, you lose it. For me, the best way to guarantee consistent writing was to start a blog. (Related article: How to Start a Successful Blog Today.)

How to Write Better

If you're serious about improving your writing, and you're willing to put in the time and effort, I teach a hundred new students a few times a year in my four-week online writing class, How to Write Better

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