

# Writing To Win More Business: Sharpening Your Skills

Maracay Homes/Oct. 13, 2016

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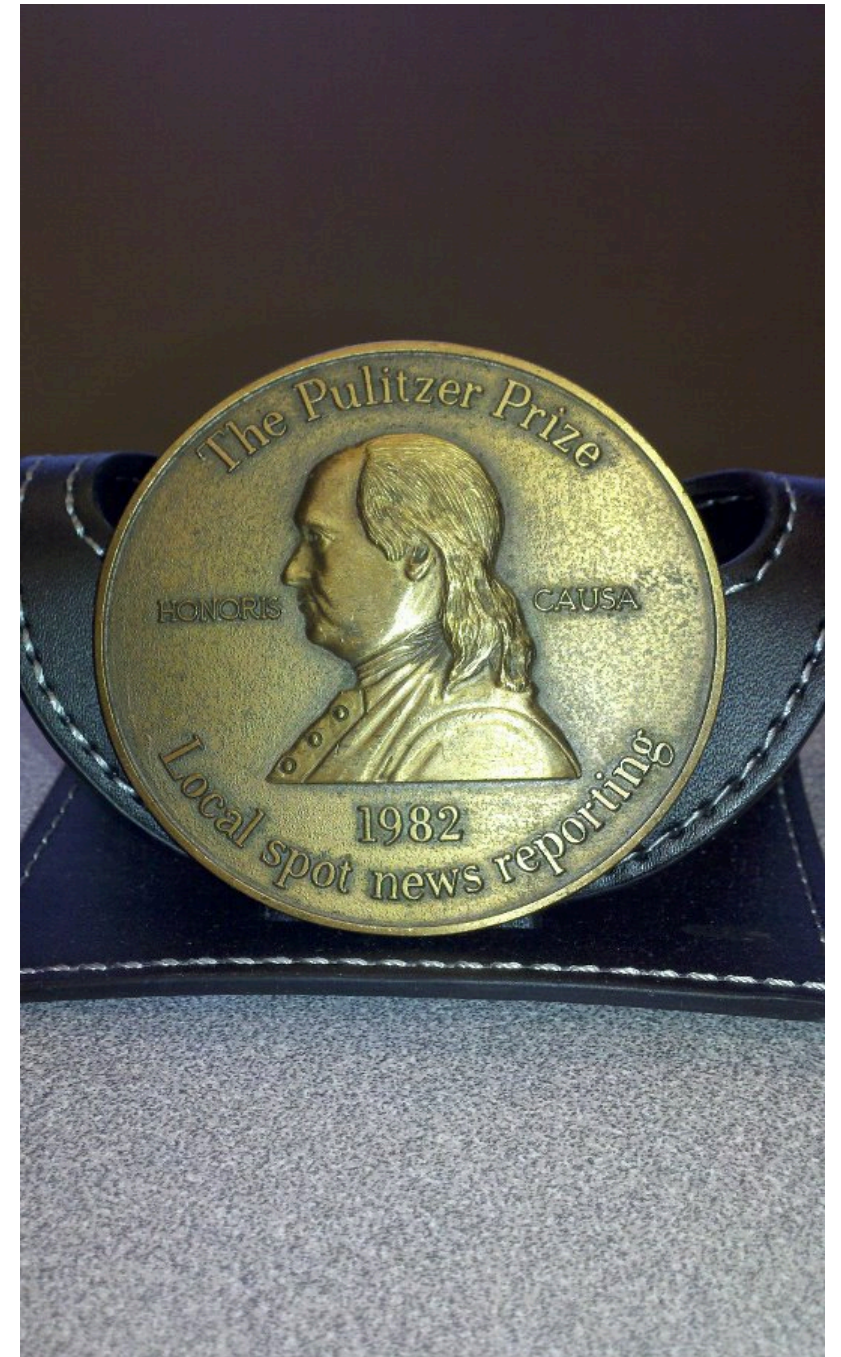
Walter Cronkite School of Journalism  
& Mass Communications



# Shameless Plugs

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- 1982 Pulitzer Prize, Local Spot News, K.C. Star/Times
- Original staff member, USA Today
- Interviewed O.J. Simpson before his famous ride in a white Bronco



# Grammar

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It does save lives.

**I like  
cooking my family  
and my pets.**

**Use commas.  
Don't be a psycho.**



# Spelling

But I love my aunt!





# Clarity

Make sure your meaning is clear when you write something – and please reread it before you hit the send button.

## SETTING IT STRAIGHT

### Typographical error

Due to a typing error, Saturday's story on local artist Jon Henninger mistakenly reported that Henninger's band mate Eric Lyday was on drugs. The story should have read that Lyday was on drums. The Sentinel regrets the error.

Found at: [englishfailblog.com](http://englishfailblog.com)

Shared by  
Grammarly



# Getting started

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“Writing is hard, even for authors who do it all the time. Less frequent practitioners – such as the business executive with an annual report to get out – often get stuck in an awkward passage or find a muddle on their screens, and then blame themselves. What should be easy and flowing looks tangled or feeble or overblown – not what was meant at all. What’s wrong with me, each one thinks. Why can’t I get this right?”

**– Roger Agnell**

# What we write

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- Land documents
- Underwriting packages
- Emails
- Correspondence
- Marketing material
- Proposals/RFPs
- Interview questions
- Quarterly reports
- Executive summaries
- Offer letters
- Notification memos
- Market updates
- Submitted articles
- Descriptive narratives
- White papers
- Blogs



# What's important when we write

- Writing that is clean and professional.
- Writing that gets to the point.
- Writing that flows, and reads easily.
- Writing that paints a picture.
- Writing that provides facts, and makes the connection.
- Writing that is strategic and free of clichés and jargon.
- Writing that recognize its audience.
- Writing in the active voice.
- Writing that avoids passive and conditional verb tenses.
- Writing that is grammatically correct.
- Writing that provides context.
- Writing that is accurate.



“I’ll show you the meaning of authority!”



# Authoritative Content

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1. **Insight:** Insight is the personal understanding gained as a result of coming in contact with particular information. Insight is the understanding gained from your own point of view. It is knowledge or information mixed with your personal experience.
2. **Simplicity:** Simplicity is about presenting information in an easy-to-understand manner. Simplicity is about making the information easily memorable by breaking it down from a complex whole to small, understandable bits. Simplicity is the evidence of insight.
3. **Depth:** Depth simply refers to how detailed your content is. Depth is about how well you're driving home your point. Depth is the extent to which you break down the concept of which you're writing.
4. **Breadth:** If depth is about details, the breadth is about association. It answers the question: "How do the insights you're sharing relate to other relevant concepts/subjects/principles/ideas?"
5. **Relevance:** The point of providing authoritative content is to help those reading it grasp and understand what you've written. People don't read for the mere fun of reading: they read because they want to learn and apply that knowledge or information.

# Inviting Content

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1. **Don't think about it:** Hemingway once said, "The first draft of anything is shit!" You're going to edit, then edit again, then edit again. If you need to step away from what you're writing for a few minutes, by all means do so.
2. **Read it out loud:** Look at an email you recently sent to a business colleague. Does it include the phrase "per our conversation?" Have you ever struck up a conversation with your favorite bartender with "as you requested ...?" Normal business people, conducting normal business, don't talk like that.

# Inviting Content

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3. **Keep sentences short:** Who remembers Micro Machines? Remember the commercial? A fast-talking voice touted the attributes of these tiny toys, always ending with: “Remember, if it doesn’t say Micro Machines, it’s not the real thing.” Normal speech requires you to take breaks to breathe. Writing requires breaks. Shorter sentences – 30 words or less – mimic natural conversation and increase readership.
4. **Common words:** Who among your business associates use SAT words in normal, everyday conversation? I thought so. We tend to use words with less than three syllables when we speak. When writing, try to avoid highly technical, or industry specific jargon. That is, unless, if it’s a document where that type of writing is required. Try to use common vocabulary and expressions whenever possible.



# Inviting Content

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5. **Speak in the first person:** Every paper, assignment or article you wrote in grade school, high school, and college. The news. Government reports. These are all formal methods of communication. They are thorough, complex, and objective. Which often means they're cold and impersonal. And they're always written in the third person. Inviting content speaks directly to the reader. When referencing a property, for example, use first person plural. The "royal we." As in, "We know this is a great industrial building. It is our intention to get the deal done."
6. **Get active:** Readers prefer the active voice. It creates clarity and allows us to communicate effectively. In active voice, the subject of your sentence performs a specific action. This helps to eliminate ambiguity and creates an authoritative tone.

# “Thrown under the bus.”

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# REDUNDANCY

Just in case you're totally oblivious.

# Dept. of Redundancy Dept.

- The City Council has approved funding to build a new municipal center for the city. It will be located downtown at the corner of Allen and Foster streets.
- Mayor Stephanie Thompson said she hoped to resolve the land-use dispute in the near future.
- The reason why the woman donated 10 acres of land to the city was because she did not think there was enough green space devoted to parks.
- That house has nearly 3,000 square feet of space and a new hot water heater, the Realtor said.
- Jones gave the ring to his girlfriend that he had won in a poker game.
- Last night, the meeting was brought to a close at 10:30 p.m.



# Dept. of Redundancy Dept. II

- Rebecca began the investigation into her husband's background.
- Mark said the group had the intention to leave early.
- Hopefully, the whole entire group will finish this year.
- She called for the startup of the talks to begin.
- At a later time, Walter would be able to finish the book.
- Don may have been small in size, but he could still dunk.
- In the grand scheme of everything that happened in the past, John was glad to be done with the interview.
- The Cardinals got a linebacker in exchange for a quarterback.

# Writing clear, concise, direct sentences



# 1. Unless you have a reason not to, use the active voice.

At the heart of every good sentence is a strong, precise verb; the converse is true as well--at the core of most confusing, awkward, or wordy sentences lies a weak verb.

**Passive:** It is believed by the candidate that a ceiling must be placed on the budget by Congress.

**Active:** The candidate said he believes that Congress must place a ceiling on the budget.

**Passive:** It was earlier demonstrated that heart attacks can be caused by high stress.

**Active:** Brown earlier showed that high stress can cause heart attacks.

## 2. Put the action of the sentence in the verb.

Don't bury it in a noun or blur it across the entire sentence. Watch out especially for nominalizations (verbs that have been made into nouns by the addition of -tion).

An evaluation of the procedures needs to be done.

The procedures need to be evaluated.

We need to evaluate the procedures.

The stability and quality of our financial performance will be developed through the profitable **execution** of our existing business, as well as the **acquisition** or develop**ment** of new businesses.

We will improve our financial performance not only by executing our existing business more profitably but by acquiring or developing new businesses.





#### **4. Use expletive constructions ... it is, there is, there are ... sparingly.**

It was her last argument that finally persuaded me.

Her last argument finally persuaded me.

There are likely to be many researchers raising questions about this methodological approach.

Many researchers are likely to raise questions about this methodological approach.

**5. Try to avoid using vague, all-purpose nouns, which often lead to wordiness.**

**-- *factor, aspect, area, situation, consideration, degree, case . . .***

Consumer demand is rising in the area of services.

Consumer demand for services is rising.

Consumers are demanding more services.

## **6. Unless your clients are familiar with your terminology, avoid writing strings of nouns.**

Customer program satisfaction

Student-professor relationship factors

Processing step change

Competitive performance test

Program implementation process evaluation

Maracay has an employee relations improvement program.

Maracay has a program to improve employee relations.

Maracay has a program to improve relations among employees.



## **7. Eliminate unnecessary prepositional phrases.**

The opinion of the working group.

The working group's opinion.

The group's opinion.





# Social media do's and don'ts

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## Social Media Do's:

- Do consider your targets
- Do set clear objectives/strategy
- Do pick your media
- Do prepare a plan
- Do measure the results

## Social Media Don'ts:

- Don't forget to engage your audience through tagging
- Don't forget the visuals
- Don't "spam" your audience – self-promotion is okay, but also remember to engage and share knowledge
- Focus only on the short term ROI

# Which is write?

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1. Affect/effect
2. Compliment/complement
3. Principle/principal
4. Phase/faze
5. There/their/they're
6. Your/you're
7. Its/it's
8. Whose/who's



# Tips for media interviews

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## 1. Make a plan for the interview.

What would you like to see in the resulting media coverage? What two or three key messages do you want to relay?

If you go into an interview and just answer questions without a thought for what you want the audience to know, you yield control of the interview to the journalist. Be prepared and know in advance what your goals are for the interview.

## 2. Ask the question you want to answer.

Don't wait for the reporter to ask the question you want to answer. She might not ask it. Instead, segue into the topic you want to discuss. For example:

"What really matters is \_\_\_\_\_."

"The most important issue is \_\_\_\_\_."

"The more interesting question is \_\_\_\_\_."

# Tips for media interviews

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## 3. Avoid technical answers.

When you talk above people's heads, you drive them away. Answer as simply as possible, and without jargon.

## 4. Stick to what the reporter asks and what you want to say.

There's no need to volunteer additional information. This goes back to planning what your goals are for the interview. You should know what you'd like to communicate from the start, and stick to that information as much as possible.

More is not better; answer questions briefly. When you give long-winded answers, you give the journalist the power to choose which parts of your answer to use and omit.

## 5. If you don't know the answer, just say so.

There's nothing wrong with saying you don't know, that there hasn't been a decision yet or that you aren't sure of the answer and will report back.



# Let's put what we've learned to work

the 8-year-old boy  
Liam  
"Wake up, ~~guy~~ <sup>Liam</sup>, ~~man~~ <sup>how we are</sup> ~~Lee~~," Mr. Finn said.  
Liam rubbed his eyes, ~~he was~~ groggy from the long ~~overnight~~ drive.  
"What time is it?" he asked.  
[ "Midnight," his <sup>older</sup> sister answered. ] - still sleeping?  
"And you've been sleeping since we left New Jersey." "You're now here."  
Liam ignored ~~that~~. He looked ~~out~~ at the ~~house~~ old, dark house. old

# Writing Resources

- <https://www.grammarly.com/>
- <http://www.poynter.org/>
- The Elements of Style
- On Writing Well
- American Heritage Dictionary
- Roget's II: The New Thesaurus
- Associated Press Style Book

Q&A

