

How To Write Better

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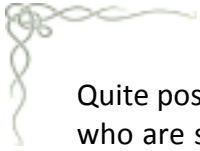
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ScrawlBug

Tips, advice and resources for the fledgeling freelancer.





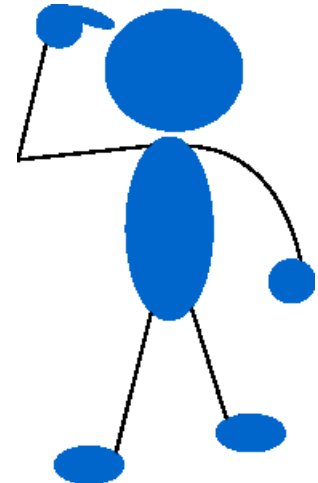
Quite possibly the scariest of all subjects for a writer is how to write better. Few are the authors who are satisfied with their work: you can be sure that even the greatest novelists of our time spend far too many hours wondering whether their latest tale will be a success, whether their readers will like it and - above all - whether their editor will shred it into tiny little pieces and force them to rewrite the whole thing!

There are, however, some basic tips from which everyone can learn, whether they're a beginner or expert, novelist or journalist. Here's a short list of those which I've picked up over the past few months:

Learn basic grammar, punctuation and spelling. While it's not absolutely essential to know all the obscure grammatical structures and every word's correct usage, it is *vital* that your words convey your message. Your style may be literary or conversational: either way, getting sentence structures within acceptable limits of readability ensures your audience spends most of their time enjoying the content instead of trying to figure out what each phrase means.

That leads nicely on to the second tip, which is to **be true to your personal style**. We all write differently, just as we all speak differently. Given the size of the Internet, it's unlikely that any particular content will be unique, so style is why authors have fans, newspapers have readerships and blogs have subscribers. The readers like the author's style as much as the content and come back for more. Of course, some people will hate your style, which brings us to the next tip.

On the same subject, but specifically for bloggers, **be ready for a rough ride**. Someone out there will hate your style. They'll direct vehement remarks and irrational criticism at your poor little web page. Such is life. Constructive criticism is one thing, pettiness and nastiness are quite another and are not worth your time.



Regardless of your style, it's important to **be succinct, direct and focussed**. Concentration spans are significantly shorter than they were a hundred years ago and few readers want to dig through a thousand words to get to the point. If you can say something in two sentences, don't use two paragraphs. Waffling is a sign of insecurity and encourages your readers to skip; being bold and direct compels them to read.

Increase your vocabulary. There are two ways to do this: literally, by increasing the number of different words you use and metaphorically, by increasing your knowledge in your subject areas. Beware the temptation to use complex, flowery language at every turn, though – simplicity and accuracy count more than the ability to use a fifteen-letter word. This isn't Scrabble.

Finally, **let your humour run around a bit**. There are *very* few subjects that are not funny in some way. Being a writer is supposed to be fun, so let the laughs flow and enjoy yourself!

