

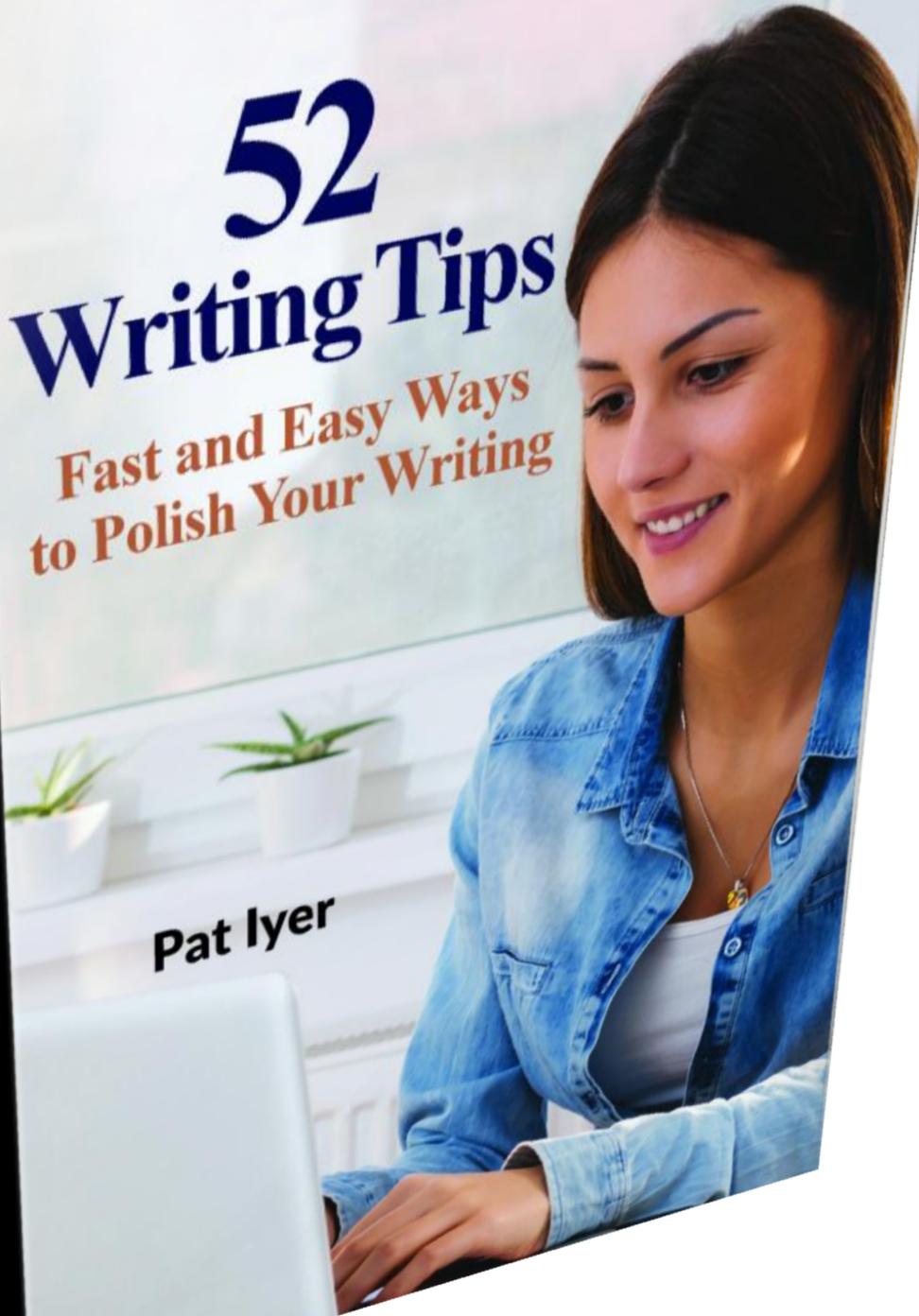
Content may be king, but Pat is definitely the queen!

Jeffrey Hayzlett, Primetime TV & Radio Host,
Speaker, Author and Part-time Cowboy

52 Writing Tips

**Fast and Easy Ways
to Polish Your Writing**

Pat Iyer



Reviews

In 52 easy-to-skim chapters, Pat Iyer covers lots of territory, digging deep where necessary and using broad strokes where appropriate. For example, when writing about how-to blogs and the em dash, she gives great detail. On the topic of getting started, she's properly positive, pragmatic, and to the point. Much here to apply and profit from whether writing an email or a book!

—**DIANNA BOOHER, AUTHOR OF 48 BOOKS INCLUDING FASTER, FEWER, BETTER EMAILS; CREATING PERSONAL PRESENCE; AND COMMUNICATE LIKE A LEADER, BOOHERRESEARCH.COM**

As the author of a book that has gone into 14 editions, I can attest to how important it is to write well. Pat's book provides practical tips that will help any person overcome the fear of writing and learn effective processes for writing. I highly recommend it.

KATHLEEN D PAGANA, PHD, RN, CSP®, KATHLEENPAGANA.COM

Writing can be a daunting project for even the most experienced expert. But in this book, Pat provides a path to success that is straight forward and attainable. She seems to know exactly where I have stopped in the past – and tells me exactly how to rectify the situation. Pat provides actionable tips, access to all types of writing and most of all allows me to be comfortable with my imperfection!

LORI KLEIMAN, SPHR SHRM-SCP, HRTOPICS.COM

The tips Pat shares will improve the quality of your book and — for the new author — make completing it much easier. Even with tips that you might think are common sense, there are little nuggets of gold sprinkled into the mix. If you are an author, do yourself a favor and put Pat's experience to work for you.

DR. GALA GORMAN, SPIRITUALFITCLUB.COM

Everything about Pat Iyer's new book is purposeful and practical! The guidance she provides goes well beyond grammatical rules, as she taps into confronting what is interfering with the actual task of writing. Her tone is practical, kind, and compassionate as she urges you to set yourself up for success. Pat's guidance will allow the vision of your book to become a reality.

JODI HINKLE, M.A.ED., LSW, HERQUEST.NET

Whether you're a newbie or an experienced author, you'll want to add Pat Iyer's newest book to your professional library. It will serve you well to have it accompany you as you take your journey from first draft all the way to final publication. The content is highly pragmatic and includes multiple tips to help you write more clearly, increase your writing efficiency, and experience less stress along the way!

TONI ROCKIS, PH.D., GRANTEDWRITERS.COM

Pat Iyer has provided a great resource for anyone who writes – or aspires to write! Her tips for getting started are inspirational and she gives us a solid method for beginning that first draft. When you know you need to write, want to write, and can't get going, this book will help!

LORNA KIBBEY, AUTHOR OF *BECOMING A BETTER BOSS - YOUR GUIDEBOOK TO 25 FUNDAMENTAL MANAGEMENT RESPONSIBILITIES*, LKIBBEY.COM

It's time to release your fears and write that book! Pat Iyer has thought of all the stumbling blocks, delaying tactics and writing roadblocks that can derail you. She shares her years of writing expertise and pearls of wisdom so you can stop saying "someday". Pat provides all the tools you need to produce a manuscript you will be proud of that will have your readers shouting "Bravo!"

LINDA FOSTEK, THE CRISIS PLANNER, BEST SELLING AUTHOR AND SPEAKER, THECRISISPLANNER.COM

Thank you, Pat, for sharing so many invaluable tools and techniques. It felt like you were speaking directly to me. Your educational insights and essential tips helped me feel more confident and assured through my process. I loved when you said, "You need to constantly remind yourself to use words as if they cost a lot of money." It describes a bad habit of mine. I will think of that line moving forward in everything I write.

SUSAN CAPURSO, LEGACYDOULA.COM

Writing that first book can be a daunting task. Pat Iyer wrote 52 Writing Tips: Fast and Easy Ways to Polish Your Writing to gather your courage to put fingers to keyboard to bang out that first draft. This book is for people in any field writing their first non-fiction book, or their second or their third. She takes you through the process of focusing on what is most important for you as a writer, how to cope with every writer's favorite procrastination techniques, and the basics of both punctuation and editing needed to turn the first draft into something you're proud to publish. The delightful dashes of humor can take you by surprise and impart valuable information.

**CATHY CHAPMAN, PHD, LIFE COACH
AND AUTHOR, ODYSSEYTOWHOLENESS.COM**

Pat Iyer is a master of communication; her newest book provides tips and techniques for polishing your writing. If you are writing your first or next book, reach out to Pat. She has taken the mystery of writing out of the process and substituted practical advice, common sense, and grammatical prowess.

**SHARON M. WEINSTEIN MS, CRNI-R®, RN, FACW,
FAAN, CSP® SHARONMWEINSTEIN.COM**

52 Writing Tips is a must read for anyone who is interested in writing an article, blog or book. Pat covers the essential writing tips including how to get started, proper punctuation, effective research and writing lean. Pat is a master.

**NANCY LYNN, AUTHOR OF THE POLISHED YOUNG
PROFESSIONAL, THEPOLISHEDPROFESSIONAL.COM**

Pat Iyer has provided a useful reference for the book-writing journey. The practical how-to suggestions presented in an enjoyable manner make this a relevant reference for new and seasoned authors. Strategies addressing perfectionism and procrastination are included for the writer's toolbox, as well as writing style, writing process and grammar rules. This book delivers a wealth of experience and information for mastering writing your book.

**SUSAN V. HAIBECK RN MS CLNC, HAIBECK AND ASSOCIATES
LEGAL NURSE CONSULTING, HAIBECKANDASSOCIATES.COM**

I thought I knew a lot about writing. After all, I've written five books and more than 1000 articles. Was I ever surprised! This book taught me dozens of writing techniques that would have saved me huge amounts of time and is already making my writing so much better. To anyone who is about to write something, get this book! Read it. Underline it. Keep it next to your writing project because this book will make you a better writer and pay for itself in a thousand ways, big and small.

**DR. ALAN ZIMMERMAN, CSP®, CPAE SPEAKER
HALL OF FAME, AUTHOR OF THE PAYOFF PRINCIPLE:
DISCOVER THE 3 SECRETS FOR GETTING WHAT YOU WANT
OUT OF LIFE AND WORK, DRZIMMERMAN.COM**

Figuring out how to get moving and finish the next book has been a challenge for me. Patricia's insightful advice helped me break through at last. I appreciate her direct and clear instructions in every chapter.

**LAURIE GUEST, CSP®, AUTHOR OF THE 10¢ DECISION:
HOW SMALL CHANGE PAYS OFF BIG, LAURIEGUEST.COM**

Pat Iyer never ceases to amaze me. She is a leader in the legal nurse consulting coaching arena. Writing is such an important part of what we do. This book is a must have resource for your library. Writing has intimidated me in the past; with Pat's help I am becoming more confident.

LISA VERDI RN LNC, LISAVERDILNC.COM

Don't read this book - unless you want to be a better writer! Great tips and tools for anyone who wants to polish their work.

KATHY B. DEMPSEY, RN, MED, CSP®, KEEPSHEDDING.COM

Pat Iyer includes something for every writer in this book of practical tips to complete that pesky project! As a writer, her experience as a legal nurse consultant shines through. Pat knows how to get organized and stay on point. Reading this book is like having a kindly mentor guide you to success.

CANDY CAMPBELL, DNP, RN, CNL, CEP, LNC, FNAP, THE INNOVATION NURSE; AUTHOR OF *IMPROV TO IMPROVE HEALTHCARE: A SYSTEM FOR CREATIVE PROBLEM-SOLVING*, CANDYCAMPBELL.COM

52

Writing Tips

Fast and Easy Ways to Polish Your Writing

Pat Iyer

The Pat Iyer Group



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Published by:
The Pat Iyer Group
11205 Sparkleberry Drive
Fort Myers, FL 33913
908-391-7933
www.patiyer.com

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ISBN: 9781689610155

About the Author



Pat Iyer

President, The Pat Iyer Group

Fort Myers, FL

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Pat learned at an early age how to correctly use language. Her articulate parents made sure that she picked the right words. It was a long time before they forgot that she read a street sign as “Watch out for *Presbyterians*.” Yes, the pedestrians escaped but the Grammar Patrol caught her.

Encouraged by a high school English teacher, Pat found she enjoyed writing reports and short stories. When she got to graduate school, an encounter with a battered wife changed Pat’s life. Curious about why a woman would stay with a husband whose beating resulted in paralysis, Pat wrote her class paper on the topic. The paper became an article in a nursing journal, and thus Pat launched her writing career.

While running her legal nurse consulting business for 28 years, Pat wrote thousands of reports. She grew her business by hiring expert witnesses and proofread and edited thousands of their reports.

Pat has written, edited or ghostwritten more than 800 books, chapters, articles, case studies, or online courses, and thousands of blog posts. Some of her nursing books were translated into Japanese, Spanish, Portuguese and the Indonesian languages. She accepts that these are correctly translated; she can't read a word of the books. They look great on her bookcase.

Experts of all kinds hire Pat as an editor or ghostwriter to polish their work or enable them to be a respected person in their field without having to write a book.

Pat is a speaker on topics related to writing for publication, writing books, blogging and content marketing.

Reach Pat through her website, patiyer.com, her email patriciaiyer@gmail.com or by calling 908-391-7933.

Acknowledgments

Thank you to the hundreds of people whose material I proofread and edited, allowing me to identify common challenges and hone my skills.

I appreciate the keen assistance of Constance Barrett, whose unwavering support and enthusiasm for this book carried it to reality. Without your help, this book would still be sitting on my hard drive.

And a final thanks you to my parents, who were my Grammar Patrol. By demanding precise use of English, they taught me to speak and write fluently and always seek the right word.

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SECTION 1

WRITING PROCESS

Introduction

SITTING DOWN IN front of a computer to write can be a daunting task. Start by asking yourself:

Who am I writing this document for? Will this be read by a prospect, client, friend, or business colleague?

What am I writing? Is it a marketing letter, a report, a thank-you or follow-up letter, an email, or something else?

What is the *purpose* of what I am writing? Is it to persuade, to inform, to evaluate, or to develop a relationship?

What do I *need* to write? Do I have the pertinent data and references?

What is my *frame of mind*? Am I alert, well rested, or fatigued and likely to make mistakes? Am I distracted?

What is my *emotional state*? Am I happy or angry? Do I realize the risks of writing, particularly emails, when I am angry? (Ask me how I know.)

How much *time* do I have to write? Can I create a block of uninterrupted time or am I rushed to complete something? Am I likely to be interrupted? Can I control my interruptions?

What is my *due date*? Do I have to reschedule events or projects in order to meet it?

Have I set up a place on my computer to *save the file*, and do I save frequently while I am writing?

The Writing Process section should help you develop the mindset, discipline, and practices that will enable you to write. In this section, as is true in the rest of the book, I share tips that will help you tackle the satisfying process of writing a book.

I've used these techniques to write or edit more than 45 books. I want you to experience the same joy of being published and of sharing your knowledge with people who need you.

You will learn to motivate yourself by regularly considering the economic and psychological benefits of having one or more published books.

You'll get encouragement in large doses. So many people got discouraged as early as grade school about their ability to write. I'm here to tell you that you're better than you think you are. Believe in yourself, and you can write that book you want to write.

You will learn several practices that will enable you to sit down in front of your computer and produce a book.

Throughout this section, you will get several reminders that when you are directing your attention to the discipline of writing a book, social media is not your friend. However, online writers' groups can provide a source of support and encouragement.

Return to this section when you get discouraged. You will find at least one idea or practice that can see you through a temporary rough spot.

And keep writing.

CHAPTER 1

7 Benefits of Being Published

MANY PEOPLE TELL me they want to write books, blogs, or articles, but don't know how to get started. This might affect you, too. When you are sitting in front of a computer trying to write publications, you may wonder, "Is this really worth it?"

Keep in mind these benefits when you question whether you should attempt to get something published. In this chapter, "publications" means articles and books. Section 4 focuses on blogging.

1. Publications **add value** to your career. They may influence a hiring or promotion decision. For example, speakers who have written books have an edge over those who have not and are more likely to be selected to present at an event.
2. Well-written publications **establish your credibility**. You may become known as an expert in your field. Someone may say about you: "She wrote the book on that subject."

Once you establish your credibility, the rewards encourage you to keep writing. Some individuals spend their whole professional careers writing articles and capitalizing on publications.

If the publications you are writing are relevant to showing your expertise, they get your name known. Your publications enable people to find you, particularly if the biographical information explains how to locate you.

This enables people to be able to ask you to speak at an event or be involved in a project of some kind. If you are visible in other ways, an Internet search will lead people to you.

3. Depending on the publication, you may receive **some compensation** for an article. Professional journals may pay you a fee for writing. Books published by a traditional publisher result in royalties, usually 10-15% of the net price. Self-published books will give you a proportionately higher amount of the net price.

I laughingly tell people I've made about 35 cents an hour in book royalties if I consider the time I spent writing, but I have made millions because of the doors my publications opened for me.

4. Authors may **generate income** in addition to royalties by buying and selling their own books. If you sign a contract with a traditional publisher, the publisher may provide a 50% discount off the net cost of the book. You may be able to presell books for a speaking event or set up a table for back of the room sales.
5. An interesting article may **lead to a request** for you to do a column. Any of these other opportunities might happen: requests for more books, speaking opportu-

nities, consulting jobs, business, fame, interviews by the press, podcasts, radio shows, television shows, and more.

6. The writing skills you develop are **translatable** to writing in different forms such as e-books or online courses and developing other products that can be sold to increase revenue. When you are comfortable with words and with the process of putting the words down on the paper, you can translate those words into various formats.
7. You can say, “I did it. I am a published author.” You’ll experience an **enormous sense of satisfaction** in completing a publication. The best feeling is opening a box of your books and smelling them. Seriously.

My publications changed my life in ways I could not foresee as an expert witness, consultant, speaker, employer, and coach.

Keep the benefits of being published in mind as you focus on writing.

CHAPTER 2

You Want to Write – Why Don't You?

READING ABOUT THE benefits of writing and publishing will get some people into action. Others, though, need a different kind of encouragement. They have harbored the buried urge to write, but they've denied themselves the satisfaction of that desire.

I wonder how many of them, when they come to the end of their lives, feel tremendous regret at having failed to fulfill this longing. You might have read that 81% of Americans believe they have a book within them to be written, and less than 1% of them write it.

Will you be in the 81% or the 1%?

The Urge to Write

Perhaps no one ever told you it was all right to realize your writing dream. If that's the case, I encourage you to fulfill

that vision. If the urge to write is your long-buried desire, it's never too late to begin.

Some people start by taking a writing course. But is that really all it takes? I know so many people who picked a course that sounded right for them. They were going to sign up any day now, as soon as the tax season ended, as soon as they replaced that irreplaceable employee . . . you get the idea.

The Avoidance

Time constraints didn't hold them back. What stopped them was the fear of taking the risk of writing. Long ago, when they were young students, maybe they never got praised for their writing. Maybe they got back compositions with words crossed out or circled, with angry red writing in the margins.

They didn't know that their teachers were over-worked and almost literally buried in compositions to read and grade. They didn't know that such teachers were only going to praise those students whose writing was so good that they almost made the work of teaching worth the long hours and aggravation.

They only knew that their sincere efforts went unnoticed and unrewarded. Their memories of failure endured.

If any of this applies to you, take heart. It's never too late to learn. You're no longer a kid in a crowded classroom. You

have gifts. You've learned a lot about life, and you have a lot of material to write about.

If you begin now, you probably won't win the Nobel Prize for Literature. *The New York Times* may not put your book on the best-seller list. However, with commitment, you can learn to fulfill your writing dream.

People are doing it every day, and they don't view age as a barrier. Many people over the age of 70 take writing courses in senior centers.

I know people who want to write but don't have the time or stamina to labor over their work. They hire a ghostwriter to capture their expertise and write in their voice, finding it so much easier to produce a book without the need to write. (Check out Chapters 51 and 52 for more on ghostwriters.)

I'll bet you've proven yourself a success in what you do. Take that feeling of success and apply it to a new field. You owe it to yourself to realize your dream. Write your book yourself or work with a ghostwriter. Either way, get it done!

CHAPTER 3

When Perfectionists Write, Trouble Can Begin

THE FEAR THAT what they write won't be perfect has prevented many would-be writers from starting. If you don't think you demand perfection of yourself, writing is a good way to find out.

The above is especially true if you are taking on a big writing project, like a book, for the first time. You may have written blogs, reports, and other forms of short writing. A book demands much more from you. You've got to come up with a winning concept, figure out who your audience is, write an outline, determine your book's format, and so much more.

Everything is bigger. The little typo that you (and the rest of the world) missed in your blog may look huge in your book-length manuscript. I've got a secret to share: every book has typos. Typos upset authors more than they upset readers.

Yes, you and your editor should make a diligent effort to find them, but some may slip through. (I cover this topic more in Section 5.) That is not a good reason to not write.

Perfectionism Can Keep You from Starting

Degrees of perfectionism exist; you may not think you're a perfectionist. Consider this: A major sign is how much you procrastinate when it comes to planning and writing the book. If you find that you have *so* many other things to do, take a hard look at your avoidance behavior.

Be honest and make a list of what you're avoiding. Even better, journal about why you don't want to start. A journal entry might read:

I've never done anything like this before. There are so many opportunities to fail. Was I crazy to think I could do this? How many people have I told that I'm writing this book? I'd better not tell anyone else.

That kind of entry gives you the basis for a list.

1. I'm inexperienced.
2. I fear failure.
3. I have exaggerated confidence in myself.
4. They'll think I'm an idiot.

Counter These Fears

1. Everyone who's ever written and published a book was at one time a beginning writer. They all faced the fears you faced. They got through them. So will you. You only learn something by doing it for the first time.
2. Everyone fears failure. Sometimes we fail. You might fail if you try to write your book. You will certainly fail if you never write it.
3. Replace the idea of exaggerated confidence with, "I have a dream of what I can do. I may be stretching myself, but that's how I grow."
4. Those who truly care about you won't think you're an idiot. Ask yourself how much you care about people you don't know. At some point, it will matter to you whether people like your book or not. Now, though, your only job is to write it. Don't think about anyone but yourself. No one else is writing the book.

If the Procrastination Continues

Sometimes it makes sense to get some coaching. A good coach (who doesn't have to be a writing coach), can help you get through more specific aspects of why you're procrastinating and what makes you need to be perfect.

If you are truly a perfectionist—and, remember, I said at the beginning that some people are situation-specific perfectionists—coaching may help you find a new freedom in other areas of your life.

That's well worth the investment.

CHAPTER 4

Is Your Writing ‘Bad’?

IT IS COMMON for writers to have doubts about their abilities. This, like the fear of imperfection, can stop people from launching their writing careers.

In *On Writing*, author Stephen King says that bad writers can’t become competent writers. I know many writers who disagree with this idea, and I am among them.

I think a bad writer can become competent with help. In fact, I’m going to eliminate the word “bad” as a category (even though I have seen some bad writing).

Because the writing is bad doesn’t mean the writer has no potential. I think a lot of people are discouraged about writing, and there are good reasons for this.

Bad Teachers

A lot of negative things can happen in the world of elementary education. Uninspired teachers may teach grammar in a way that makes it extremely boring for children. These

lessons never teach the value of punctuation, spelling, and grammar. These fundamentals of writing aren't presented as aids to communication.

Imagine if a teacher said, "Do you want people to know what you mean? You must learn how to put commas in the right places."

School systems also choose boring books for kids to read. Rarely do they ask them, "What authors do you like? What kinds of books do you like to read?" They seem to not know that the moment television entered the world, reading enjoyment faced an uphill battle.

Teachers gave uninspiring writing assignments. "How I Spent My Summer Vacation" is the standard cliché, but other assignments were just as bad.

In grading these assignments, teachers generally marked down for grammatical and other errors. They might note an outstanding essay but paid less attention to the work of a student who was sincerely struggling for self-expression.

If you were one of those students, the harsh red ink of your teacher's comments may have convinced you—at a young and vulnerable age—that you couldn't write. That's how a "bad" writer is made.

How to Overcome the Stigma

In all areas of life, we are often as good as we are told we are. If you sit down at your computer to write, and the first thing you see in your mind is those scrawled comments, you may think, “I can’t do this.”

That means you need to be much kinder to yourself than your teacher was. Think of writing as you think of exercise. If you are a runner, you’re not going to run a speedy mile your first time out. If you’re learning yoga, you start out learning how to correctly stretch your muscles. Weightlifters begin with very light weights.

You can do the same with writing. First, review the principles of grammar, punctuation, and spelling. You can find Internet sites where experts explain them in ways that are interesting and clear. I’ve included some content on this topic in Section 4.

Make lists of things you’d like to write about, just for fun. When you make this list, remember that no one needs to see what you write.

- Write because you have something to say to yourself.
- Write because you want to see what your thoughts look like when they’re written down.
- Write because you will learn more about yourself this way.

When you have some practice and confidence, look for a beginner's writing class. Locally, your community college or YMCA-YWCA may have these. If you are a senior, senior centers often have classes.

Most important, write every day, even for ten minutes. If you feel reluctant, say something like this to yourself, "It doesn't matter what anyone else thinks. This is for me."

If you persist, in time you'll have something you want to show to the world.

And remember, there are excellent editors who take a fresh look at your work and can polish it for the world.

Contact me through patiyer.com for assistance. Get the help of a professional editor to you present the most polished version of your knowledge. I love to edit other people's work and have spent thousands of hours crafting my skill.

CHAPTER 5

How a Competent Writer Gets Better

IN CHAPTER 4, I brought up the idea of “bad” writing, as described by Stephen King. In his book, *On Writing*, he lists a hierarchy of writers: bad, competent, good (and sometimes really good), and great, which he also describes as the genius level of writing.

Bad writers, King says, do get published. They may write for your local weekly paper. Some of them write best-sellers. If the subject of a book is sensational or compelling enough, a bad writer can do well. An editor can take the work of a bad writer and make it much better.

Competent writers achieve a higher level of journalism. They may write genre fiction, which, again, if the subject is compelling, can do well.

He says little about his category of good writers, but he would probably include himself among them. He does very well financially.

The last category, the great ones, include Nobel Prize winners, Dickens, James Joyce, and others.

How do competent writers become good writers?

Read a Lot, Write a Lot

In King's view, doing a lot of reading and writing are fundamental aspects to being or becoming a good writer. I fully agree. I was independently taking books out of the library, four at a time, as soon as I was old enough to ride my bike one mile to the library. (Those were the days when kids could roam around town without fear of kidnapping.)

Doing a lot of reading doesn't mean reading social media. While you may accumulate information, you will also pick up a lot of bad grammar and abbreviations. If anything, your writing may deteriorate from over-exposure. You'll see such atrocities as "Me and him went to the library."

Reading does mean tackling both fiction and non-fiction. If you're planning on writing a non-fiction book, read a lot in the area of your specialty. Make sure your book hasn't been written and absorb the style of your area of interest.

You should also be reading fiction. Your book may be non-fiction, but you will incorporate stories. You want those stories to catch readers' interest. I cover more on writing stories in Chapter 15.

Study how fiction writers write. King recommends reading both good and bad novels so that you can learn the difference between them. (Personally, I can't tolerate bad novels. If I can't get beyond the first chapter I won't continue. Sorry to disagree with you, Stephen.)

Good writers write economically: no roller-coaster sentences, no nouns preceded by three adjectives. Without consciously knowing it, you will absorb a lot.

Keep a journal to develop more skill in expressing yourself and to focus on accurately describing what you feel. Write down a story about something that happened to you today or yesterday.

Take risks. (Remember, only you see this.) If you have an urge to write some seemingly unrelated words and phrases, do it. Write a poem or dialogue. Stretch yourself to help you leap the gap between competence and good writing. Imagination makes the difference.

Seeing the progress you make during your daily writing will encourage you to continue to take more risks. As regular physical exercise increases your comfort in your body, so regular writing will help you to experience even greater enjoyment from writing than you already do.

If you are protesting the idea of daily writing, see the next chapter for tips on how to incorporate this into your life.

CHAPTER 6

Make Time for Writing

THE BIGGEST REASON I hear would-be writers give for why they don't write is, "I don't have time."

The secret of time is that we can make it.

Keep a Record

We all waste time, if we define waste as spending time on activities that don't contribute to our goals. When we write down where our time goes, we can find large pockets of it we can turn into value.

If you look on the Internet, you can find a wide variety of apps that you can use to record your time. I know people who swear by the app method.

If you don't like using apps or have too many already, you can also use the old-fashioned method of a notebook and a pen. I know this is primitive, but it works. Get a notebook you can carry with you. Always keep it near you.

If it works for you, you can supplement notebook activity with a record on your computer that uses a program like Excel. This is also a good way to record your activities at the end of the day.

Make Categories

Everyone's day is different. Some common categories might include:

- Exercise
- Cooking and Eating
- House Cleaning
- Helping Kids with Homework
- Family Time
- Reading
- Social Media

If you spend 8-10 hours a day commuting and working, break that time down into distinct activities. I'm not recommending that you steal work time to write, although you can use your lunch hour. Also, you may find it insightful to see what you do in the course of a workday.

Be honest about the time spent that you might prefer not to record, like Internet time, including social media, emailing, watching YouTube videos, gaming, or anything else you spend time on. Write it down.

Some people recommend writing time down every 15 minutes, but I think that's a good way to defeat the program. I suggest instead writing down time spent when you're about to change activities. If you spent 30 minutes cleaning house, write that down before you start to cook dinner.

The Review

Record your time for a week. Make sure you choose a typical week. Add up your totals for each category. Look over the totals and ask yourself where you can save time.

Then ask yourself what you are willing to cut out of your schedule. This may be the measure of how much you want to write. Is it more important than Facebook or YouTube? Or watching TV?

Can you find half-an-hour a day? That's enough for a beginning. Make that time as sacred as you make anything in your life.

If you have a family, tell them you won't be available for that time. You won't be answering the phone or doing anything but writing.

Then go into whatever room you've assigned as your writing space and write. Write anything, just to get yourself into the habit. If you write on your computer, do not take a Facebook break. Write.

Writing a book can be an intimidating task. Blank screens can stare at you mockingly for long hours that turn into days, weeks, and months before you make headway in your next chapter.

That's less likely to happen if you work out a plan for making progress every day on your book. In fact, writing a book can help you manage your time more wisely and encourage productivity on multiple fronts. Here are a few things you can do to make more progress in a shorter time.

Consider Using the Pomodoro Technique When Writing

The Pomodoro technique is one in which you set a timer to promote short bursts of intense productivity. This method is effective because you operate in 25-minute increments. Set a timer for 25 minutes. During that period, focus on one single task. In this case, the task would be writing your book, whether you're blocking out a chapter or simply writing an outline for the next chapter(s). You don't stop for anything other than house-fire types of emergencies until the timer rings.

Take a five-minute break before moving on to the next part of your writing. After every four short breaks, take a longer break. This gives you time to clear your mind, charge your batteries, and refocus on the work ahead of you for the day. This is a key component in your efforts to stay focused on writing your book and stop splitting focus

by multi-tasking and otherwise spinning your wheels all day long.

Prioritize Your Tasks

You have a lot on your agenda on any given day. How easy it is to get caught up in minute tasks and quickly lose time to write during your day! The longer this continues, the more time you accrue to lose the momentum of your book or abandon your book altogether.

Steady progress is much more effective. Accomplish this by doing the following:

- Give up television time to write.
- Cut out unnecessary social media socializing. While some is necessary to maintain relevance with your audience, give yourself time limits for your favorite social media platforms.
- Get up early or stay up late to make time for writing.
- Go away for a weekend, close yourself in a hotel room, and write.
- Set deadlines for getting specific writing done; then adhere to them. This can include deadlines for chapter outlines and chapter delivery. Editing deadlines. First draft. Second draft. Publishing. You get the picture.

Decide how important your book is to your professional future and consider prioritizing your writing over some work functions by delegating or bringing on another team

member to help take care of tasks that take you away from writing.

The reward for all this time management and productivity-enhancing effort is that you will discover you can write a book. How do you know? Because you just did.

Now, it's your turn to examine your patterns and see how you can fit in writing.

As with any change in routine, it may take you time to get used to doing this, but if you persist, you'll be glad you did. And as I covered in Chapter 1, who knows what else might result from you keeping a promise to yourself to write?

CHAPTER 7

Three Writing Shortcuts for the Busy Writer

ALTHOUGH I'VE EXPERIENCED the effectiveness of the writing productivity methods I've described so far in this section, they will only work if you want to write. I encourage those who want to write, and I enjoy working with them as an editor. I also recognize that people sometimes want their names on books but don't want to write them. You may be one of them.

You know being the author of a book will increase your authority and credibility. You'd love to see your name on the cover of a book. And you wonder what writing shortcuts you can use to make the project easier.

A book is a powerful tool for building a brand. It not only helps to establish your expertise in your market, but it can also exponentially expand your audience.

There's virtually no downside to writing a book—except the time needed to write it.

If you don't consider yourself a writer, you may think the benefits are out of your reach, but even self-avowed non-authors have options or shortcuts.

Here are 3 easy writing shortcuts.

Outsource

Do you want a book that's in your voice without having to do the work? Hire a ghostwriter. A ghostwriter is a writer whom you pay to write for you. These professionals will work with you to create a book that is uniquely yours, and in the end, you'll have a well-written book with your name on it, often without typing a word.

A ghostwriter typically interviews the author and creates the chapters from the transcripts. The ghostwriter puts in all the time to eliminate the dialogue and make the content organized and coherent.

A ghostwriter is the ideal person to work with when you are busy or lack the writing skills to create well-written content.

The best time to use a ghostwriter is when you recognize you should be producing more content, but you've been putting it off. You're not sure how to fit one more thing into your life. Working with a ghostwriter will take time but far less than if you wrote the content from scratch.

A ghostwriter also helps you expand your ideas, offering a fresh perspective on your topic. See Chapters 51 and 52 for tips about working with ghostwriters.

If working with a ghostwriter appeals to you, contact me through my website at patiyer.com, and let's have a chat about your project.

Repurpose

Repurposing as a writing shortcut is an easy and popular option that makes use of the hundreds or even thousands of pages of content you've already written. You will still need to create an outline, organize the content, and group it into chapters to create a smooth flow. In the process of doing so, you will see gaps in the material that you'll need to write.

Blogs, white papers, podcast and webinar transcripts, and articles are all material that you can repurpose. I completed 7 books in 2 years that were solely drawn from podcast transcripts and blogs. After my assistant edited out the transcript dialogue, it took me 1-2 days to assemble and edit each book.

Dictate

If you are one of the people who finds it easier to talk than write, dictating content may be the right writing shortcut for you. After organizing your thoughts, record your content, get it transcribed, and then start rearranging and filling in gaps.

Having a published book can work wonders for your business growth. It will bring you clients, expand your audience reach, and even attract some press. But it can't do any of that if you don't write the book in the first place. Take one of these ideas and get your book written. You won't regret it.

CHAPTER 8

How to Successfully Begin a First Draft

YOU'VE SET ASIDE time to write. Now is the time to tackle the first draft of your work.

A lot goes into the first draft, but it's most important to *get started*. In Chapter 1, I asked you to focus on the benefits of being published, just in case you ever get stalled.

Imagine that blank screen or piece of paper. Can you think of a more intimidating sight? Not if you're a new—or even an experienced—writer.

How do you break through the intimidation? Think of yourself standing at the edge of a body of water, knowing you will be shocked by the cold water. You can either slowly edge in, suffering a little at a time, or take the plunge.

Take the Plunge

If you're writing a non-fiction book, whether it's a memoir or self-help book, you need some form of outline. You plan to follow it, but you realize a lot of words are required between each outline point, and the idea of filling those empty spaces makes you nervous.

Plunge in. Here are some reassuring truths.

As I mentioned above, experienced writers fear those first words as much as the beginner. You're in good company.

Also, in the first draft, you don't have to worry about grammar, punctuation, and spelling errors. If your word processing program has a feature that helpfully points out your errors, turn it off.

Write, and if you falter, remind yourself that this is the first draft. If it helps, write in large letters on a blank piece of paper, **"THIS IS THE FIRST DRAFT."** Look at this message often.

When Social Media Beckons

Don't let yourself get distracted. If social media calls you, don't answer. Better yet, turn off social media and email notifications. It is an excuse to avoid writing.

Sometimes your avoidance mechanism uses subtle messages. You're writing away, and you realize you should check some facts. Don't check them now. Write yourself a note.

“In 2018, the percentage of women-owned businesses was . . . **FACT-CHECK THIS.**”

When you've finished your writing for the day, go back to check all the facts you need to fill in the draft.

Set Reasonable Time Limits

Beginning writers often sabotage themselves by setting unrealistic time frames for their work. They may say, “I'm going to write for two hours every evening when I get home from work.”

Then they get home, have dinner, and think about those two hours. They know they'll never last that long. Feeling discouraged, they begin to beat themselves up and end up not writing at all.

Tell yourself instead that you'll write for whatever amount of time feels comfortable. If after that time has passed, you still want to write, do so—and congratulate yourself for having passed the limit you set.

As you gain confidence, you'll be able to increase writing time, but don't overdo it.

Make Reasonable Contracts with Others

I don't recommend beginning writers write a book for a publisher's deadline unless they are working with a very hands-on developmental editor and/or ghostwriter. If, however, you find yourself with a deadline, ask yourself if it is reasonable.

Don't agree to it because you think you'll never get another chance or because you want to please the publisher/editor. The best way to fulfill your fears is to fail to meet the deadline. You will also create unnecessary and harmful stress in your life.

You can learn to like and even love writing if you are kind to yourself while you're learning. Always ask yourself, "Am I comfortable? Are the ideas flowing?"

If the answer is yes, continue. And continue.

I've got a handy quick start tool for you at patiyer.com. It'll move you through the process of planning your book. Request our **Secrets of Writing a Book** at patiyer.com

CHAPTER 9

Why Writers Need Groups

THE MOST SUCCESSFUL writers of fiction, memoir, and narrative nonfiction know that they can't go down the writing road alone. When they do the actual writing, quiet and solitude are essential. When they are ready for feedback, they turn to others.

When I say most successful writers, I don't necessarily mean *New York Times* best-selling authors, although if you read their acknowledgments pages, you'll find that many of them thank the members of their writers' groups. I also mean the writers who keep on writing, despite setbacks and failures. Success means staying in the game.

Writers' groups can help you meet your goals. When you know that you've agreed to submit a piece for group critique, you feel accountable to keep your promise.

Fellow writers can give you invaluable feedback. They may pick up on details you missed, like repeating the same information in two chapters.

You can go to your writers' groups and present a content problem that's stopping you. Because the members don't have investment in the material you are writing, they can often come up with ingenious solutions.

You can also learn a lot from how other people write. Maybe you'll see an approach you can use. At a minimum, you'll be impressed by the variety of ways in which people express themselves.

Possibly most important, over time, your writers' group will become a mutual support group. They will encourage you through the rough spots of writing, which every writer experiences.

Are You Ready to Join a Writers' Group?

You are if:

You have the time to participate in a group. This includes reading the work of others. Before asking to join a group, you do need to know what's involved: how many members, what length work do they submit? Are they asking for critiques or line editing? If every writer is submitting 2500-word chapters per week, you may reasonably feel this is more than you can handle.

However, if the reading load is manageable, make the time. Make the commitment and keep it.

You're already writing. Being in a writing group alone is not going to give you the fuel and drive to start writing. That needs to come from you.

You already have material you can share. Again, a group can't push you past the finish line. You don't need to have a completed piece of work. It can be a first draft, but it needs to be *something*.

You write consistently. Ideally, this means every day, but if you have a full-time day job and are a weekend writer, that's fine, so long as you write consistently.

You're willing to have your work critiqued, and you can handle it. This is crucial. People are going to tell you about what does not work in your writing. You must be willing to listen. This might be the most difficult aspect of participating in a writer's group. It's also the aspect that will give you the most growth, both as a writer and as a human being.

CHAPTER 10

How to Join a Writers' Group

AS I DESCRIBED in Chapter 9, a community of authors can make a big difference to your career.

Whether you do it full-time or part-time, writing is a solitary profession. Thanks to the Internet, countless writers can step out of isolation, discuss writing with other authors, and learn a lot of practical information about writing, marketing, book and cover design, and promotion.

You don't have to be a published author to join most groups. They usually contain a mix of those struggling with their first drafts, those who are ready to publish, and veteran authors.

How to Find a Group

Facebook and Goodreads have many authors' groups. You can also find groups at LinkedIn. Some, especially on Facebook, require that you've taken a course from the person who originated the group. Many do not, so check the guidelines.

You may find the choices overwhelming. Sometimes it makes sense to zero in on the genre you write. Narrow it down. There are groups for Black and lesbian and gay science fiction writers, for freelance writers, book reviewers, and much more.

Select a group according to your interests. Do you want to learn how to market effectively or get advice about writing a blog? You can find groups devoted to these subjects.

Read and *Follow* the Group's Guidelines

This is of critical importance. All author's groups have rules. One that operates universally is: Don't use a group as a place to promote your work. This means don't post: "BUY MY BOOK!"

That doesn't mean you can't talk about your book(s) and ask for help. You can say, "I'm writing a book on mindset and I need people to interview." You can also ask for critiques of book covers or synopses.

You may be able to post a request for other authors to join you in a group promotion.

Some groups specifically prohibit debate about religion and politics. Again, read and follow the guidelines. If you have any doubts about your post, directly contact the moderator.

Participate

An author's group is a great place to meet potential colleagues and friends. As in any group, follow and respond to subjects that interest you.

Make sure that you give. In general, you will earn respect if you can answer questions authors post. You may be saying, "But I don't know anything; that's why I'm there." However, you can contribute by doing cover critiques. You don't have to be an expert, but you know whether a cover attracts you or not.

You can also write words of encouragement. Every author has down days, and words of support make a big difference.

Shop Around

You may have to spend a little time in a group before you know if it's a good fit for you. It's worth taking the time to explore.

You may find you want to participate in more than one group. That's fine, but the usual word of caution applies here. It's rewarding and educational to participate in an author's group, but don't let it distract you from your main purpose.

SECTION TWO

WRITING STYLE

Introduction

THE WRITING PROCESS (Section 1) describes methods and practices for keeping you committed to writing. In this section, **Writing Style**, I build on that foundation with ways to improve your writing. Some, such as writing compelling headlines and first sentences, will take practice. I've spent a lot of time crafting my headlines, which are the most important attention-grabbing part of my writing.

Other tips, like finding relevant quotations to spice up your writing, are easy—and fun.

You'll also discover how you can write nonfiction that actively engages the senses and emotions as powerfully as good fiction. Learning the skills that enable this can make writing more rewarding—and earns you more readers.

One of the easiest—and most frequently overlooked—ways to make your book more interesting has to do with the length of sentences and paragraphs and the thoughtful placement of white space. In Chapter 18, you'll get the most effective rules for this and specific instructions on correctly formatting lists—which are an important element of nonfiction writing.

When you apply the methods listed in this section, you may be surprised at how much they improve your manuscript, articles, and blogs. In time, you will come to rely on them.

Your readers will thank you.

Get inspired with more writing tips by heading over to our YouTube channel. I periodically post new videos with more quick tips. Be sure to subscribe to get the latest updates.

Our channel is <http://LNC.tips/PatlyerYouTube>

CHAPTER 11

The Power of a Good Headline

YOU CAN WRITE the best story ever told, but without a good headline, I won't read your article. Experts estimate that 80 to 90 percent of people who read a headline won't go on to read an article because the headline didn't grab their attention.

That doesn't mean you can write a mediocre article and focus solely on a catchy headline. It means that your headline must provide a compelling reason for the reader to go beyond it.

Here are some do's and don'ts.

Don't Use Clickbait

In general, clickbait refers to content that deliberately misrepresents or over-promises something. It can be used to entice someone to click on a link that will take them to a web site.

When used in headline content, it uses false promises to induce someone to read your article.

Some examples:

- *The Most Unbelievable Weight Loss Technique You Need to Know About*
- *Seven Investments That Can Save You from the Coming Crash*
- *How to Keep Your Child from Turning Into a Drug Addict*

They all use exaggeration. Two incite fear and try to make you feel that if you don't read further, your life is doomed.

Rarely do the articles connected to such headlines deliver on expectations. Readers will remember a click-baiting writer who uses a byline. They won't click again. Clickbait isn't ethical, and it doesn't work.

Make Titles Emotionally Compelling so People Will Read Your Article

Because I used to write blogs for attorneys, I have a wealth of resources to draw from.

I could use the following titles:

- *10 Unexpected Dangers in the Emergency Room*
- *The Boy Who Shouldn't Have Died*
- *How Doctors' Illegible Writing Endanger Patients*

I wish the above were exaggerated claims, but I can deliver on their promises.

Promise to Answer a Strong Need

Suppose you're a healthcare provider who writes for the general public. Your headlines could be

- *How to Make Your Doctor Listen to You*
- *7 Questions You Should Always Ask Your Pharmacist*
- *Exercise: The Low-Cost Lifesaver*

Follow-Through

Important as your headline is, your article must fulfill its implicit promise.

Make sure that you fully describe 10 ways to avoid unexpected dangers in the ER.

If you write about exercise, present a range of exercise practices so people of different physical abilities and ages can benefit.

Put your own experience into the story. How did you make your doctor listen to you?

Also remember this: Click through is not the end of the story. Are people commenting on your articles? Do they sign up to receive your blog in their newsfeed? If you have

a special offer, do they download it? Positive answers to these questions indicate growing success.

However, you need a compelling headline to have a chance at achieving those goals. Practice until you get it right so that people will read your article or blog.

CHAPTER 12

Create Compelling First Lines

AFTER THE HEADLINE, your first line is your second chance to grab your readers' attention. If you pull them past the headline, make sure you keep them.

In Chapter 11, I shared that 80-90% of your readers won't go beyond the headline. However, if you write a good one, you want to make sure you capture their attention with a compelling first line.

Examples of Compelling Headlines and First Lines

"Your Headlines Can Save You or Sink You.

Here are 10 great ways to write headlines that zing."

"Your Doctor Says: 'Lose Weight or Die.'

Resist the urge to run home and bury your fear with food."

From Problem to Solution Formula

In these pairs, the headline presents the problem, and the next line demonstrates by reading the article, you can find solutions.

“Noise Pollution is Making You Sick.

Turn off the sounds that kill.”

The problem-to-solution formula is a very popular approach. However, the first line is important for any kind of story.

Shock-Value Headlines and Follow-ups

“I Grew Up in a Satanic Cult.

I ran for my life when I was sixteen.”

Below are some examples from old issues of *True Confessions* magazine. This magazine is worth studying, not because you want to write those kinds of stories but because they know how to ramp up the dramatic value of headlines and following lines that get read.

“When a Girl Goes to Prison:

What *really* happens on the inside.”

“Search and Rescue:

I saved a life and found love.”

Your slightly less lurid pairing might read:

“I Was 30 Days Away from Bankruptcy.

I had given up all hope.”

“He Asked, ‘Why Should I Hire You?’

I had 10 seconds to come up with an answer.”

Location Is Everything

Where your first line appears is important. This is especially true when you’re writing a blog post. Position the first line so that it falls ABOVE whatever graphic you use. That way, it’s a continuation of the headline.

If you’re writing for a publication where you don’t have that kind of design control, you can keep the headline and first line together by making the line a subhead.

For example, you might write this:

I Was 30 Days Away from Bankruptcy: I Had Given Up All Hope

I’ve changed the former first line to upper and lower-case and deleted the period. The character count is 58 for this

revised title and subtitle, less than the recommended title maximum of 70.

Be Creative

Experiment. It's always important to check your statistics and to study the comments you get on articles. It's unlikely that someone will tell you, "I loved your title and first line," but if they leave a comment, you can be confident that these article elements pulled them in enough to read further.

And that's what you want.

CHAPTER 13

Avoid Common Nonfiction Errors

YOU MAY HAVE written essays or term papers in high school and college. If you went to graduate school, you may have written a thesis. However, unless you wrote for a school paper or other publication, your experience in writing non-fiction that non-academic people read may be limited.

No one need know that, especially if you avoid some of the most glaring rookie errors.

Don't Start with a Description of the Weather Unless It's the Point of Your Story

One of the most famous clichés in literary history begins, “It was a dark and stormy night.” This beginning of the 1830 novel, *Paul Clifford*, by Edward Bulwer-Lytton, gets worse.

Avoid dark and stormy nights. The only valid reason to begin with a weather report is if it's highly relevant. You might write, "It was a hot day in Oklahoma" if you're covering the effects of long-term drought in this state.

You'll have greater effect, though if you write,

The dusty fields of eastern Oklahoma hadn't seen rain for 300 consecutive days. Farmer Harry Palmer looked up at the blue sky and said, 'This weather is going to kill us.'

Don't Begin With "It was"

Why? It's a weak beginning. It's static. Write an opening sentence that either goes somewhere or strongly sets up the central issue. No rain for 300 days is an issue. Even if you're not a farmer, you know that things aren't going to go well for the people of eastern Oklahoma. Create an emotional hook to engage your readers.

"It was," while good to avoid, also illustrates the dangers of beginning with any passive verb form. (I cover passive versus active voice in Chapter 37.) Consider the difference between

She was bored.

And

She considered whether she would be less bored if she murdered her husband.

Many readers won't be interested in a woman who was bored. But a woman considering murder? That is interesting.

Your readers will not go beyond the beginning if you don't engage them. Some may drop out after the first sentence. You don't want dropouts. Work that opening.

Bring in All the Senses

Those dusty Oklahoma fields can even smell dusty. The farmer could sneeze. Nearby cattle might breathe asthmatically. You can taste the dust coating your tongue. The dry heat might make your skin feel as if it's shrinking.

Think of all the subtle sensory ways you can bring your reader into your story. This, too, increases identification and involvement.

Stay Out of the Story—Unless It's Your Story

Don't refer to yourself unless you are writing a memoir or autobiography. A story about medical fraud, a nursing home scandal, or vice at the highest levels of government will only have you as a central character if you were in any way involved with those events— hopefully as a whistleblower and not a perpetrator.

In this vein, if you have interview material to use in your article or book, consider carefully whether you need to

include your questions. You might find that necessary, but you don't need to do so verbatim.

Senator Parsons, what do you consider to be the most important insurance reform? (followed by an answer) is less effective than “My top priority is reforming the medical billing system,” Senator Parsons declared.

It's your story because you're writing it. It will have your name on the cover. Move your authorial voice to the background.

Start with a dynamic beginning, give the reader an idea of what is coming, engage all the senses, and you can write a compelling book, article, or blog.

CHAPTER 14

How to Make Your Writing Irresistible

The Setup

WHEN WE READ something, we don't pay much attention to concepts like long sentences, paragraphs, and chapters—until they interfere with our reading. That's the point at which the writer is in danger of losing his or her audience. You don't want that point to come.

The All-Important Word Count

Non-fiction books have decreased in length over the years. You can write as few as 25,000 words and call it a book. (In fiction, this would be a novella or even novelette.)

Probably the average length of a how-to book runs up to 50,000 words. Experts' estimates of the length of chapters range from 2,500 to 5,000 words. Each chapter should be approximately the same length.

The most important element, though, is how many subjects you have. If you're writing about starting a small business, and you identify how many topics you want to include, make each topic a chapter.

This helps readers not only in the first reading but in later finding topics they want to review.

Another advantage is that shorter chapters are easier to read and absorb. This format is satisfying for readers who pick up books before going to bed and promise themselves the treat of reading one chapter. A 2,500-word chapter (about 10 double-spaced typewritten pages) is a reasonable amount of reading. Of course, some of us don't stop at reading one chapter at night. Ask me how I know.

Break Up the Text

For a book, I recommend 4-5 sentences per paragraph or no more than 10 lines. Equally important is the length of these sentences.

Do you notice that when a sentence goes on and on, you lose its flow and drift away? You don't want that to happen when someone reads your writing. Generally, the average sentence is between 10 and 20 words long. Also consider the length of the words. Ideally, read everything you write out loud. This is a good way to know if a sentence is too long.

Use Subheads

Subheads are crucial in nonfiction. Each chapter has subdivisions that should be announced with a subhead. This breaks up the text and helps the reader identify important subtopics.

Use Numbered and Bulleted Lists

Numbered or bulleted lists present information in easy-to-scan formats. They are necessary if you're giving instructions. You don't want to write, "First, you do this, and next, you do that." Use the simple numbered list.

Bulleted lists are used to highlight important facts in the text. They are sometimes in bold type. See Chapter 18 for tips on formatting lists.

Get an Idea of How Your Text Will Look in Printed Format

You may not know exactly how big your book will be yet, i.e., 6" x 9", 5-1/2" x 8," but you can set your left and right-hand margins in Word to 4-1/4" and have the approximate left and right margins for a book 6 inches wide.

Then look at it. Do you see big, dense blocks of type? Get to work. Create inviting pages with plenty of white space. Give your readers' eyes a break, and they'll keep reading.

CHAPTER 15

Tell A Story

YOU'RE WRITING A factual piece. You have lists, both numbered and bulleted. You have statistics. And you're sure the story is going to sink like a lead weight—because it's boring. You can hardly get through it. How can you expect the reader to read beyond the first few paragraphs?

Obviously, factual stories demand facts, and sometimes a writer can't find ways to buffer them. However, unless you're writing material like actuarial tables or disclaimer notices, you can look for ways to lighten the heavy burden of data.

One of the best methods is to include stories.

People love stories. A good story can bring facts and theories to life in a way that lists, statistics, and other forms of information can't achieve.

Stories activate our powers of imagination and emotion. When we read about the experiences of others, we get

involved. We feel empathy, whether the story is sad or happy.

Stories Build Bridges

You work for or own Company A. Imagine a river between you and the customers you want to gain. How do you get them over to your side? You do this by going over to their side.

A story can do this. It can say, “I know how you feel. I know what you worry about. I can help you. Let me tell you a story.”

The manufacturer of baby monitors tells the story of how one of these monitors saved a baby’s life.

The owner of a supplements company describes how his own need to find something to relieve his condition led to the discovery of one of his products.

A personal fitness trainer describes how happy she was when one of her clients was able to climb stairs again.

How I Used Stories as Part of My Sales Strategy

As a legal nurse consultant, I always included stories in what I wrote. I did this for several reasons.

I Showed the Results My Clients Achieved with My Services

When I worked for a plaintiff's lawyer, I wanted the plaintiff to receive financial reimbursement for his/her pain, suffering, and possible long-term disability. If I worked for the defendant's lawyer, I might be fighting for a medical professional who had been wrongly accused of malpractice.

I described the cases to make it clear that I cared about the people involved. I wanted them to receive the justice they deserved. By demonstrating my commitment to my clients, I showed how I was dedicated to my clients.

My Stories Highlight My Abilities

Through describing successful cases, I indirectly showcased my professionalism and proficiency. I let potential clients know about the breadth and depth of my abilities. I emphasized services my company offered.

Now after I sold my legal nurse consulting business, my clients are legal nurse consultants who want me to help them support, grow and manage their businesses. I also work with experts who want me to edit or ghostwrite their books, articles and blogs.

My stories are now different.

My use of stories helps to steadily build my businesses. Your stories can help to build yours. Remember that ultimately your business is about people. Tell them stories that they'll remember—and they'll remember you.

CHAPTER 16

Tips for Natural Sounding Writing

YOU ARE IN a restaurant with a friend. You've just seen your company's third-quarter results. As you explain the results, she asks questions which takes you deep into the conversation and to further explanations.

Do you ever wonder if you are setting the right tone with your writing? When it comes to writing memos, sales pages, or white papers, many people freeze in their tracks. They're afraid if they don't use the right (perfect) formula, they won't be effective in communication. But writing is just another form of conversation, like the one you had with your friend.

You already have a natural-born talent to communicate. The best leaders have well-developed communication abilities. You would not be in your role if you could not communicate well. Written communication should not be the stumbling block that it is for some people.

How to Get Started: Outline or Free Flow?

You are sitting down to write a report. Pretend you're in that restaurant about to tell a colleague about this great product, or service, or result you have achieved in your company. Think about what you'd say to her. What would she ask you? Keeping your reader in mind as you write helps you focus on the message.

It is usually more effective to write in a rough form than to edit your work as you write. I'll bet you remember having to turn in outlines of papers when you were in school. Our teachers made us do them because outlines really are helpful for organizing material. Start with an outline and then fill in the concepts under each main point you want to make.

Creating an outline may be difficult; you might be more comfortable with a style that involves letting your ideas flow and then organizing them. Mind maps work well as an alternative.

Using your outline, begin, and then polish your writing. The process of refining your writing involves looking at word flow, the length of paragraphs, and the way you've connected your thoughts. This is also the point at which you can add headers, subheaders, bullets, and numbered lists. Some of your readers love to read all the details. Some want to skim and get the key points.

Readers can sense your energy. It flows in everything you write. If your writing is stiff, you may easily lose your reader. (We've been trained to have short attention spans.) Read what you wrote out loud. Does it sound conversational?

While it is true that you need to get it right, don't let a craving for perfection stop you from writing. As I covered in Chapter 3, perfectionism can keep you from starting (or ever finishing.) Done is often better than perfect.

CHAPTER 17

Use Quotations to Enliven Your Writing

SPRINKLING QUOTATIONS INTO your writing is a very effective way to improve it. Doing this serves four functions.

1. Summarize a point you're making.
2. Emphasize important concepts.
3. Validate your ideas, particularly when you use one from a person both famous and respected.
4. Break up large blocks of text.

Choosing Quotations

I've found that the most effective way to find quotes is to search for a topic. For example, if I want a quote from a successful woman entrepreneur, I use that term and put "quotations" in front of it. Several sites come up, and I scroll through them.

I need to know what I'm looking for before I start reading them. I pick out several that come the closest to my goal for a suitable quote and compare them.

Several factors influence my decision.

How long is the quote? A one-sentence quote is ideal, two sentences if it really makes the point. If it's any longer, it begins to diverge into something that looks more like text.

Who said it? Avoid quotations by "Anonymous." They may sound great, but they lack the additional clout of name familiarity.

Stay away from quotes from people you've never heard of. They have the same lack-of-clout problem. However, bear in mind that you might not be in the mainstream of popular culture. If the quote really has impact, look the person up. If he or she is well-known, use it.

Sometimes the person's name isn't well-known, but her company is. For example, Debbi Fields is the founder of the Mrs. Fields company. If I saw a powerful quote by her, I would use it and name her company.

If I've heard of the author of the quote but think others may not have, I will, as in the case of Debbi Fields, add, "author," "playwright," or some other identification.

A different problem can arise if someone who is *always* quoted made the quote. Yes, Oprah, Bill Gates, and Elon

Musk do have a lot to say, but I'd be cautious about quoting them. People might say, "Oh, another Oprah quote" and skip past it.

My rule of thumb here is: The more I see one name in my scanning of quotations, the less likely I am to use it.

I would also avoid using quotations by people who may have a polarizing effect, i.e., those who are on extreme ends of the political/social spectrum. And be sensitive to the headlines. For example, the prominent men being accused of sexual harassment have lost some of their credibility as a source of quotes, along with a lot of other losses.

Build a Quotations Collection

The other way you can work with quotations is to collect them so that you have many handy to put into your articles and books. File them in categories so that you can find them easily.

Sometimes you'll get an unexpected bonus. A quotation may spark an idea for an article. You can deliberately activate this effect by going through your collection when you've run out of fresh ideas.

I close with this quotation:

A quotation in a speech, article or book is like a rifle in the hands of an infantryman. It speaks with authority.

— **BRENDAN BEHAN, IRISH PLAYWRIGHT**

CHAPTER 18

How to Use Lists in Your Writing

WHY SHOULD YOU use a list?

- Lists improve the readability of your material. They make it easy to cluster information in a format that can be quickly scanned.
- Also, lists are useful for breaking up a long sentence into a more reader friendly format.
- Readers appreciate a list that breaks the style of the material and creates a more interesting page.

Tips for Formatting Lists

Not everyone agrees on how to punctuate lists. I recommend studying different sources such as *The Chicago Manual of Style*, the *Gregg Reference Manual* and *Garner's Modern American Usage*. Then pick one style and consistently use it.

This chapter covers some highlights about lists.

All lists share one rule in common: You should skip a line before and after them.

Different types of lists are punctuated differently. Here are examples of each type of list.

Long sentence converted to a list

Long sentences increase reading difficulty. Turn that long sentence into a list when you can. This type of list breaks a long sentence into a bulleted list with a comma after each item except for the last one.

Notice that the items are not capitalized, just as they would not be if they were found within a long sentence. Also note there is no colon after the word “including”.

Productivity for businesspeople is a real concern. You are always juggling different responsibilities related to your business including

- *finances,*
- *marketing,*
- *business development, and*
- *supervision of employees.*

List of items that would not be found in a sentence

Only proper names are capitalized in this type of list. Since this is not a reformatted sentence, there is a colon at the beginning of the list and no period at the end.

Many CEOs are entrepreneurs who started their businesses as solos. They were responsible for:

- *product development*
- *accounting*
- *hiring*
- *marketing*

Long items that do not fit well into a sentence

Create a numbered list with items that are not easy to summarize in a few words. Adding bold to key concepts makes it easier to read each item. The spaces between each item also improve readability.

Here are some guidelines for being able to concentrate when writing:

1. **Open only one browser** or application window at a time. If you're writing a report, only your word processor or text pad should be open.
2. **Time your sessions.** Don't exceed a 45- to 90-minute writing session, no matter how focused you are. You need the break.

- 3. During your break get away from your task.** Get up from your desk, walk around, get a drink or snack. Give your mind a rest.
- 4. Be prepared ahead of time.** Do your research during a different session than the writing session. That way you're able to concentrate on the writing.
- 5. Block off time for email, telephone and social media.** Don't distract yourself when you are trying to write.

Get weekly, brief tips to polish your writing by downloading our new mobile app, BizEdu. You'll find videos, blogs and free reports on the app – all in the palm of your hand. Go to patiyer.com/biz-edu to get the app.

SECTION 3

BLOGGING

Introduction

IF YOU HAVE a business, a blog can help you drive traffic to your web site, and your high-quality blog posts can attract customers and clients. Since 2009, I have written thousands of blogs for attorneys, legal nurse consultants, and patients.

Blogs have helped me sell books, courses, coaching programs, speaking engagements, and more. Yes, it is a time commitment, but it gets easier and more rewarding the longer you do it.

When you've written a book or books, you can use your blog to get people interested in your books.

A blog also gives you the opportunity to practice and hone your writing skills.

This section will teach you:

- How to get started in blogging
- Different kinds of blogs to write
- How to make sure that you don't run out of ideas
- How personal your blogs should be

- How to make your blog posts get people interested in your business *without overt selling*

If you've wanted to write a blog but have hesitated because of the commitment involved in such a project, you'll find the material in this section invaluable.

Study the material carefully and start practicing its principles.

See you in the blogosphere.

Have you gotten your free copy of the audiobook of this book? Go to this link, request the download and be able to listen to this book whenever and wherever you want.

<http://patiyer.com/52WritingTipsaudiobook>

CHAPTER 19

Why You Should Have a Blog

WHY YOU SHOULD have a blog – really? “What business purpose would I get from a blog?”

Why Blog?

Demonstrate your expertise.

The posts in your blog demonstrate your knowledge of a subject of interest to your visitors. Once you clearly define your target market, your blog enables you to share new insights, stories, news, advice, tips and other helpful details. In a blog you can talk about the things you are interested in and the services you offer.

Use your blog to provide fresh content to help with your search engine ranking.

Websites tend to be static, whereas you can add new blogs as often as you like. Some people blog daily; others blog 2-3 times a week or less. Search engines thrive on fresh information. People who study the frequency of blog posts will tell you the more you can blog, the better. A blog that

contains strategically placed keywords in the blog title and body helps draw search engine attention.

Use your blog to express your personality.

Your blog opens a channel of conversation with your visitors. Take a stand; state an opinion on a hot topic in your niche. Encourage comments and feedback. A blog can provide this forum.

Use your blog to create content.

Multi-purposing content is a concept that makes sense for busy people. Harvest blog content for tweets, books, articles, white papers, videos, and more. When you take the time to create content that has value, use other ways to share that information. Learning styles vary. Some people want to read it, some people want to hear it, and others want to participate with it.

Use your blog to connect with others.

Other people in your niche will read your blog, share your ideas, and link to your blog. This will help to spread your ideas far beyond your close circles. Your quality content will travel through the social media world and gain you more visitors and higher search engine rankings. It all starts with a blog post! I hope I have convinced you why you should have a blog.

Blog about your business

Some people maintain blogs about their hobbies, interests, their personal medical journey - but in this book, I focus on a blog that is on your business website.

A business blog gives you the opportunity to let potential clients know who you are and how you can help them.

The most immediate effect of a business blog is to provide a method of sharing free content that demonstrates your expertise. It shares information to establish that relationship.

Business owners and employees who blog this way are specifically selling products and services, but **not overtly**. While a blog provides helpful information to your audience, the purpose is to highlight what your company does.

You wouldn't blog about grooming dogs if you had a service that provided overnight delivery. You would talk about the important values, the things that your audience is concerned about. They will see you as a source of helpful tips, tools, and ideas that will stimulate them, and naturally think of you when they have a need.

Blog as a soft sell

Blog for exposure, to tell people about your company, and to have links at the end that lead to sections of your website for further content.

Know, Like, Trust

The people with whom you wish to connect in a business sense should feel comfortable with you, know who you are, and what you offer. They like you; they trust you; and then they're ready to move into a buying arrangement.

Who are you selling to? If you think about the people who walk into a store, those retailers know the profile of their typical customer. They understand who is attracted to their merchandise.

I've had the experience of going into a clothing store in Massachusetts where I thought the clothes were designed for children. The largest sizes—and I'm a small person—didn't even come close to fitting me. But the store employees knew their audience was skinny teenage girls, and that's who they were targeting, not skinny old ladies like me.

Who comes to your website? To increase your knowledge about your visitors, you can do online surveys, and you can ask people about their age, their interests, and what are the most important challenges that they face. The answers will drive your blog topics.

If you have a service-based business, for example, you would want to know about the pain points. In marketing language, these are the things that are really challenging for people:

- What makes them worry

- What makes them anxious
- What preoccupies them

How can you help with these issues? If you aren't sure about this, assemble a focus group, asking questions, and do surveys.

These are popular questions for surveys:

- If you could ask me any question, what would it be?
- What is your biggest challenge about ___?

And please don't ask, "What keeps you up at night?" It could be a sexy partner, indigestion, a twitchy bedmate, or a fretful infant.

The surveys help you gather information about their needs. You can also go on forums that are made up of the people whom you're targeting and find out what people are talking about. What are their concerns?

These topics form the content for your business blog.

Be Consistent

A lot of blogs are started and abandoned. As many as 50 percent of them never get launched in any consistent way. Pick a reasonable, realistic schedule for blogging. It might be once a month. It might be once a week. It might be every day, depending upon how many resources you have in your company.

What really looks bad from a business perspective is blogs that have old dates on them, particularly when you are not regularly blogging.

Even though I blog routinely, I remove the date settings – just in case. I confess I look at other company blogs to see when they were last updated. If the last blog was 2 years ago, which I’ve seen, there are cobwebs on that site!

In summary, know the purpose of your blog, find out who your target audience is, and be consistent.

CHAPTER 20

Blogging and Relationship Marketing

AS A BEGINNING blogger, you may mainly be concerned with getting posts written. As you gain confidence, learn to think of blogging as a vehicle for relationship marketing. They go together.

Blogging shows your expertise – you’re connecting with your readers and sharing your knowledge. You are a resource for them or at least provide them with good information on your web site that can help them.

A blog doesn’t focus on selling. It’s geared to educating, communicating, giving readers a resource that’s going to help them do things faster, better, cheaper, or whatever is the focus of your business. It’s an investment in a relationship with your target audience.

Your buyers are inundated with marketing messages. Think about it from the online marketing perspective. They are being bombarded with calls saying, “I can help

you get #1 on Google”, “I can help you with your SEO.” Lots of unwanted emails fill their inboxes.

Blogging and Relationship Marketing go Hand in Hand

Use your blog to educate your potential clients (in my case, it was attorneys), train them and teach them something new. By doing that you start to build that “Know, Like and Trust” factor. It’s about them.

People listen to two different radio stations, especially on the Internet and face-to-face.

This is what I mean: Some people like to broadcast on the radio station **WIIAM**. What WIIAM stands for is “What Is Interesting About **Me**”. When people are searching out content on the Internet or they are on Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter or reading blogs people are listening to **WIIFM** “What’s In It **For** Me”.

As we know in radio, AM is kind of a lower frequency and doesn’t have the quality. FM is better for music and sounds better. People are much more interested in “How Can You Help Me?” as opposed to “Who You Are” and “What You Do.” One of the biggest mistakes that people make is constantly trying to sell and promote themselves. If, instead, they find a way to give great information on a blog that helps readers, they are going to see the results.

Many small business owners have the misperception that it's effective to say, *"Let me tell you all about the services that I offer."* Blogging and relationship marketing supply information to the prospect that will entice that person to be able to engage your services and find out more. This is one of the primary purposes of a blog.

A lot of people treat networking as if they walked into a bar and saw somebody who looks pretty or handsome. They shake that person's hand and say, "Hey, you want to get married?"

A real relationship takes dating and time. It takes caring and giving equal benefits to both sides. Building a relationship is all about asking "What's In It for Them?" that I can provide in a unique way.

- "How can I be a resource?"
- "How can I be a support mechanism?"
- "How can I give them something that everybody else in the marketplace is not doing other than trying to come in, get work and take their money?"

Bloggging and relationship marketing are perfect together.

CHAPTER 21

Attract and Keep Readers with How-To Blogs

A **HOW-TO BLOG CAN** strengthen your relationship with readers and potential customers and clients. Take advantage of one of the Internet's primary benefits: the ability to show and tell people how to do practical things. The possibilities are endless.

My favorite how-to video was part of a series done by a woman to teach other women how to do simple, car-related functions. I wanted to see exactly how to measure tire pressure. I'm grateful for that video.

Applying the concept of a how-to video, consider the how-to blog. What can you describe in a blog that gives your audience a step-by-step process to follow?

That how-to blog post could be a point-by-point discussion or step-by-step guide for something your company provides.

Provides Information Quickly

I have learned that some of the video makers get a little carried away with themselves. Too often, what could be thirty seconds of video get stretched out with small talk and a lot of “look at me” shots.

Also, how exciting is it to see a cursor sliding around a screen looking for the right column?

Screenshots, on the other hand, can be the perfect accompaniment to a “how-to” blog. If you want to show some features in Word that help writers, go to a video that explains them. I consistently use Snagit, made by Techsmith, to create screenshots. Microsoft computers also come with a free tool, found in the Windows Accessories, called a snipping tool.

All you need to do is pause the video and use a snipping tool that available on both PCs and Macintosh. (Check specifics for your operating system.)

Collect appropriate screenshots from the video and give instructions below each shot. For example, if I were to make a blog post on how to check tire pressure, I might do the following:

1. Screenshot of the measuring gauge.
2. Close-up of the numbers on it.
3. Show removal of valve cap.
4. Place gauge in correct position.

5. Show reading on gauge.
6. Show correct positioning of air pump nozzle over valve.
7. Replace valve cap.

What's nice about this kind of how-to post is that, as a reference, it's much faster to scan than a video. If you forgot how to measure tire pressure, you could go to your handy bookmark and see, in about 30 seconds, how to do it.

That principle holds true for any how-to blog post. And that means a reader returning to your blog for more updates.

Fringe Benefits

Your areas of expertise may involve greater complexity, but you can still break the needed actions down step by step.

Here, though, human psychology comes into play. When we identify a complex process and show step-by-step how to do it, the psychology can be “Well, you know, it's so complex. Maybe I'd rather just pay that company to do it for me rather than for me to have to figure out how to accomplish that.”

Therefore, how-to posts always need a call to action at the end for more information. You may find that the action is, “Can you do this for me?”

Note: Although this is NOT a legal opinion, it's generally agreed that you won't get into trouble if you snip anything from a video that's under 30 seconds long. If you're concerned about legalities, see <https://www.youtube.com/yt/about/copyright/fair-use/>

CHAPTER 22

How Personal Should Your Blog Be?

WHEN PEOPLE READ your blog, they want to know who you are. This brings up the question of how personally you should write. While this is a subjective choice, I offer some general guidelines here.

The first blog I ever wrote was about Captain Sully’s plane landing on the Hudson River. It was such a compelling incident that I wanted to share my reaction to his heroic effort to save the people from plunging into the Hudson River.

I had heard that expression: “in the event of a water landing” and had thought, “Yeah, right.” But that blog post was my first step towards sharing my reaction and talking about courage in extraordinary circumstances.

I have written about some of my personal struggles, childhood experiences, business mistakes, failures, and fears.

When I do so, I receive emails and comments from my readers more often than for other types of blogs.

Choose Your Comfort Zone

People rightfully have many security and privacy concerns these days when it comes to posting personal information on the Internet. I would be reluctant to write, “In five days I will be going on a two-week vacation.” Burglars of the world would take note.

However, I might write about any insights I gained during that vacation. Maybe I had to handle a crisis long-distance. Maybe I learned that my office ran perfectly well without me. These insights fit well into the theme of a blog about my business.

Your blog may also not be the place to post pictures of the family pets, unless they come to the office with you and supervise work. You may not want to post photos of your children (and they may not want you to do this).

However, it’s perfectly appropriate to say that you are married, have children, love to read and swim, and enjoy walking before dinner. You are the face of a business, and you are also human. People don’t want to relate to a name and an image alone.

Why Showing Who You Are Makes a Difference

You can use other ways to let people know who you are, beyond your degrees and expertise. You might, for example, recount a struggle you had over a bill with a company and describe how that reminded you of the importance of caring customer service.

You might then give some examples of customer care practices in your business. This could be a good way to work in customer testimonials.

Adding the personal touch gives you the opportunity to say, through several ways, that you don't simply want someone's business, you want to establish a relationship.

In today's impersonal world, that can make a critical difference in whom a potential client or customer chooses.

CHAPTER 23

How to Conquer Blogger's Block

A WOULD-BE BLOGGER MAY be thoroughly convinced that regular blog posts will enhance his/her business. What stops the fledgling blogger is the fear of not having any ideas for the blog. If you're one of these people, hope is here.

Blogger's block is a special kind of writer's block. A fiction writer may get stuck in a story because something is missing: a plot element, a needed character, or even the reason she's writing this endless tale. In writing *The Stand*, Stephen King discovered that he had to kill off half of his characters in order to move forward.

Writers of short and longer nonfiction may discover that they don't have enough information to proceed. They may realize that they haven't thought their ideas through to a logical conclusion.

For me, blogger's block refers more to running out of ideas—or believing that this will happen, which often brings the fear to life. It's an unhappy state of mind that can be frightening.

People like your blog. They look forward to reading it. Maybe you get income from it. When you are blocked, you know you can't stop, but you can't move forward.

Don't Panic

The best way to beat blogger's block is to prevent it. Plan for its appearance in your life.

Don't rely on inspiration to provide material for your blog. Be alert and ready to see opportunities for a story.

Maybe you read a news item about battles between high-school students and teachers over cell phones. This would make a good subject for your parenting blog.

The story of a freezing kitten saved by a caring family could inspire a pet blog post, but if your blog focuses on the importance of kindness, you, too, can use this.

While it's important to be ready to find ideas, you can also look for them. Read what bloggers whose subject matter is like yours write.

Important Warning: Don't Plagiarize

When you read their posts, you may find that you have a different perspective on the subject. You may have had different experiences. Read their posts thoughtfully, and let their material marinate.

You might read a post about the best way to discipline children who won't do their homework and realize that you have another approach. This will make a good subject for your blog.

Build a File of Potential Subjects

In order to create a file, make notes about every potential topic. Write whatever ideas come to you and stop when you run out of ideas. You will return to the subjects later.

Also take the time to brainstorm. Jot down every subject you can think of. Don't worry if some of them don't seem particularly inspiring. When you brainstorm, you don't censor. You invite your creative self to provide ideas.

Think of this as planting the seeds for future blog posts. While resting in the file, they are also growing in your mind. You can't see them yet, but when the time comes, you can have an abundant harvest.

CHAPTER 24

Blogging: It Does Not Have to Be Daunting

AS WITH ANY form of writing, some people keep themselves from blogging by allowing themselves to get overwhelmed with the details. If you are like some of my coaching clients, you enjoy reading blogs, but the idea of writing one may throw you.

You want to write a blog? What's stopping you? This is not a rhetorical question. I want you to ask yourself what stands in the way.

Here are some of the answers I've heard.

- “It's a big commitment.”
- “You have to do it every week—at least.”
- “I don't know what to write about. How does anyone think of all those article subjects?”
- “No one will read it on my site.”

They're all objections, and if you're convinced of their truth, you've proven your point. You shouldn't start a blog.

Some of us, though, come up with those kinds of answers to talk ourselves out of projects. If you're on the fence about this and would like to explore the idea of writing a blog, let's look at the objections above, one by one.

'It's a Big Commitment.'

Try removing the word, "big." It looks smaller, doesn't it?

It's a commitment, but keep the following in mind:

- It's not like getting married or having a baby.
- You only must come up with 300 words. Of course, some blog posts can be longer, but 300 words is the minimum.
- No one is going to die if you don't post for one week. You also can write a couple of blogs at a time when you are on a roll, and schedule them to appear when you want them to show.

'You have to do it every week—at least.'

It's a good idea, if you can do it, to post every week. I've blogged either 1 or 2 times a week for 10 years. I've written thousands of blogs for legal nurse consultants, attorneys and patients. Don't get intimidated by that number: you start where I started – with the first blog.

Seth Godin, blogger par excellence, posts every day. I think that is not a realistic or desirable goal for most business owners. I'd rather see you marketing and generating income and reserving an hour a week for blogging.

And yes, you can do it for an hour a week if you are organized and keep track of your ideas for blogs. Focus on blogging regularly, and increase the frequency to whatever is comfortable for you. A lot of your comfort, though, will depend on whether you can change your mind about the next answer on the list.

'I don't know what to write about. How does anyone think of all those blogging subjects?'

Alternate wording of this objection: "I never could (know what to write about)." You're right about that if you think, "One year of blog posts every week is 52 subjects. I can't think of 52 subjects." Break it down into manageable pieces. Don't think about a year; think about one month. That's four articles. You can do four articles.

To make sure that you can (and to even put you in the running for 52), allow yourself preparation time. See what other people in your niche write about in their blog posts. Free-associate, brainstorm. And never copy their blogs. That is plagiarism and could get you in BIG trouble.

Refer to the file I described in the previous chapter. Your text file is devoted to possible subjects; write down every

idea you can come up with. Do not censor. Write, write, and then write some more.

This file is your gold mine. Every time you get an idea for your blog: when you're shopping, waiting at the dentist's office, write it down. Use the back of a shopping list or any available piece of paper or a note on your phone. Or send an email to yourself with the idea. Make sure it's legible, though—no “sttnhm pof, artiio!!”

You are surrounded by topics.

'No one will read it on my site.'

Not at first. You will need to promote and publicize your blog. Search engine optimization is crucial. Your goal now is to think about what you want to write and then use that for blogging.

Once your blog is ready, you will share it on your website, LinkedIn, your business page on Facebook, and to your list of clients and prospects. You'll get comments, which will encourage you to keep writing.

CHAPTER 25

Follow the Gold, Not the Glitter

AS A **BLOGGER**, you're convinced of blogging's value. You have lots of ideas, and you like to write. What could go wrong? You can get consumed by the desire for your blog to be (very) popular.

One of the biggest mistakes entrepreneurs and business-people make regarding social media is to view success in terms of statistics. They think:

- “If 1000 people viewed my blog post, that equals success.”
- “If 100 people downloaded my podcast, I've made it.”
- “If I have 50 comments on a post or podcast, the world liked it.”

Of course, when one of their social media posts gets little attention, they are failures.

They will check their statistics hourly, hoping for a rise in the numbers. Their spirits rise and fall according to the statistics.

That's Following the Glitter

I can write about this with some knowledge because I have pursued glitter with frantic attention. I've wondered why my thoughtful, heartfelt, and timely post didn't attract a lot of attention. I've castigated myself. I've wondered if there was some big secret about social media that no one was telling me.

Like anyone, I have more to learn about social media, but I've learned a few things that may be worth more than all the books on how to succeed on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and other platforms.

Checking and Focusing on Statistics Wastes Your Time and Energy

If you clocked how much time you spend checking the statistics for your latest post, you'd realize the time you've taken that could be spent writing the next one.

If you acknowledge how depressed and discouraged you feel when your statistics are low, you'd recognize that you've robbed yourself of the enthusiasm and fire you need to write an article or post.

When you follow the glitter, you don't get the benefit of the gold.

What's Gold?

The most important element of gold is mastery, which means doing something repeatedly until you're good at it. It means accepting that your first blog posts, podcasts, and articles may not be very good. They may even be less than not very good.

We're familiar with the statement, "If something is worth doing, it's worth doing well." Consider this: If something is worth doing, it's worth doing badly.

It's worth doing badly because that's how we learn from our mistakes. We learn from the blog posts that are awkwardly written and wander all over the place. We learn how to do a better job of writing them.

Practice may not make perfect, but it makes improvement. It makes for increased confidence. It builds commitment.

Here's More Gold

What you want from your engagement with social media is quality, not quantity. The comments that say, "Nice article" or "Great job" have much less meaning than those that thoughtfully consider what you've written and in which the author offers some of her own ideas on the subject.

That commenter will remember you. She is more likely to follow you. If your interests intersect, she may reach out to you about a project she thinks you might find interesting, or you may decide to make direct contact.

She's not a fan. She's a potential colleague.

Social media makes the most sense as a business strategy when you focus on making meaningful contacts. The more you practice your writing, the more carefully you read and respond to thoughtful comments, the closer you bring yourself to forming a network of associates and meaningful relationships.

That's gold.

CHAPTER 26

Content Curation Helps Busy Readers

THE MORE COMFORTABLE you get with blogging, the more you can focus on providing value for your readers. Here's an area where readers will greatly appreciate your help.

TMI—Too Much Information— and FOMO—Fear of Missing Out—demonstrate the conflicts and confusion that dominate our participation in the online world.

We experience TMI every time we go to Facebook, LinkedIn, or a news web site. Twitter is a storm of TMI.

On a mundane level, we don't need to know that Sharon Z went to the doctor and got a medical all-clear, although we're vaguely glad for her. On a global level, a lot is going on that no one person can understand. We're inundated with data that we can't process.

We may decide to take a break from all forms of news, but then FOMO kicks in. What if we're missing out on something important that we *need* to know? We may especially worry in the areas of business. Lack of knowledge could cause us to make poor decisions.

This is why your readers will appreciate content curation. The idea that somebody could collect information around a topic of interest to us makes the content curation blog post very appealing.

Content Curation Defined

As the writer of a content curation blog post, do some research on a topic that will be of interest to your target market. You have a headline that introduces the topic. You have a small introduction, and then you find three or four blog posts or articles or videos around that topic. You comment on these, giving your take and analysis.

You're pulling the information together for your reader, but by commenting on it, you're also showing your expertise as the author of that blog post. You also include the link to those articles for those people interested in reading the original source.

You Can Go Broad or Deep

The above method of content curation may present some diverse viewpoints or highlight different aspects of an issue.

You can also go deep by focusing on a single video or an article that you particularly like and provide your own reaction to the information. Somebody else has pulled that content together for you, but you specifically provide an analysis.

These are very popular blog posts because people want to know what you think about a topic, and you're going a little bit more in-depth. You might, instead, take a contrary view and say, "Here's this article, and I don't agree with it."

I must feel strongly about an issue to take a contrary view. This type of post can generate lots of comments. My recommendation would be to take the contrary view judiciously. Think of it as a spice that seasons, not one that burns the mouth.

Note: Do not copy each of those articles verbatim into your blog post. You summarize them in a couple of paragraphs. It is a violation of copyright law to put the entire article into your blog post. You give the author credit, of course, for the summation of what you're talking about. That's where the link to the original blog post comes in.

CHAPTER 27

How to Use Statistics Effectively in Your Blog

RELAX. I'M NOT about to tell you that in order to blog successfully, you must understand mathematics.

If you're like me, you may have a temptation to shudder at the word, "statistics." When I found out I had to take statistics in graduate school, I almost didn't go. I felt that strongly about a course I perceived to be rooted in math. Not my strong point. I was happy with the B I earned in that course. Very happy it was not worse.

However, statistics have come a long way, and they are embedded in infographics in all different ways. One of the keys to remember is that infographics are designed to share.

People who put together infographics want you to share that information. They supply a link, which is usually at the bottom of the infographics, that you can paste into a blog post.

Note: Make sure you *can* use it. Just because an infographic shows up in a Google search doesn't make it free or uncopyrighted. Google makes no representations about the legality of copying any image.

Summarize the Most Important Information

If you find that an infographic isn't available for reproduction, you can still use the statistics. For example, if you are writing a blog about the most popular social media platforms for Generation Z, include the data from an infographic.

Give It Your Spin

Whatever method you use to provide the statistics, you can offer your take on that information. To continue with the Generation Z example, their favorite social media are YouTube, Instagram, and Snap Chat. This is valuable information if your company provides consulting for companies that want to sell to that demographic group.

You can include either an infographic or relevant statistics. The more dramatic they are, the better. As a bonus, you could put together a cheat sheet that describes best practices for getting visible on these media. Offer it to your readers and say, "For even more valuable information, we'll give you a subscription to our free email newsletter."

If you want to highlight customer service, you might find an infographic about customer service that could be embedded in a blog post. It might talk about the kinds of things that commonly drive customers up the wall, like being put on hold for long periods of time or being shuffled to five different people within a company while trying to solve a problem.

You could talk about this as the business owner or the business employee. You could say why that doesn't happen in your company. You could say, "Here's why we know this is an issue. We take customer satisfaction seriously. We've taken the following measures to make sure our customers don't have to experience these problems."

Statistics don't have to be dry. They can engage and quicken the imagination. Best of all, even though you didn't go out and find them, your use of statistics helps to position you as an expert in your field.

CHAPTER 28

Top 9 Types of Blog Posts

AS YOU FINE-TUNE your blogging skills, you'll discover that you don't want to follow the same format in every post. Fortunately, you can choose from several approaches.

Have you ever noticed how certain types of blog posts stop you in your tracks and draw you in? Here are the secrets behind the ways in which posts engage you.

1. **The post uses top tips.** We love to read condensed, to-the-point material that presents useful information. The author has done the work for us by sharing the best of the best.
2. **The post tells a story.** We have been conditioned since we were children to settle down to hear a story. Stories engage, entertain, and teach us.
3. **The post expresses an opinion.** The author shares heartfelt messages, outrage, or wonderment over current events. She or he goes out on a limb to stir up some controversy.
4. **The post uses humor.** We enjoy laughing; dry humor, ironic writing, and other methods lighten our day.

5. **The post shares lessons learned.** Isn't it more helpful to learn from someone else's mistakes than to make them ourselves? Wouldn't you like to avoid the embarrassing mistakes that someone shares in a blog post?
6. **The post provides a case study.** It dissects what happened that resulted in a great success or a colossal failure. The story aspect combined with lessons learned is memorable.
7. **The post reviews a book, product or service.** Rather than invest our money and time, we appreciate a review written by someone we trust. That helps us determine if we want to make the purchase.
8. **The post tells you how to do something.** You are searching for a solution, and the post gives it to you. You learn details that might have otherwise tripped you up.
9. **The post distills the wisdom of an expert.** The post shares the insights of top people in your field, people you admire. You learn more about their unique perspective and useful information you can apply.

CHAPTER 29

What is the Ideal Blog Post Length?

IF, AS PART of your work in learning how to blog effectively, you read other blogs (I highly recommend this), you may be puzzled by the widely ranging lengths of different posts. Are you confused about the ideal blog post length? A lot of people ask me how many words they should strive for.

Who Needs to See Your Blog Post?

Did you know when you blog you are writing for humans and spiders (bots)? Yes, spiders can read. It is really only worth blogging if both “bods” (human readers) and “bots” like what they see. Ensuring bods read and bots index your posts means readers will return and bots will index and rank your site higher on the Search Results pages. That is your goal – to rank high enough so that a prospect looking for someone with your expertise will find you.

The Ideal Blog Post Length

One decision all bloggers need to make, and many struggle with, is how long their blog posts should be. This depends on the author, your blog style, topic, and your audience. There are many different approaches but it's about discovering the one that works best for you.

A Few Basic Guidelines

Experts agree that Big G (Google) and the other search engine algorithms reward posts that are at least 500-700 words. These posts get higher ranking.

However, you can always write shorter content to link to in social media posts, such as responding to a simple question posed to your audience or culled from an email in your inbox.

Longer content performs better in today's internet landscape and there is no upper limit (from a search engine perspective) on how long a blog post can be. However, there may be upper limits imposed by how much time it takes you to write a blog post.

Put together quality material but don't get so caught up in perfectionism that you make it another business. Blogging needs to be balanced with other aspects of your life and business.

Let's say you are shooting for a longer post. There are several ways to maximize the impact and improve the readability of longer posts. Break up text with links and images, and use headers to divide the content into chunks.

Remember there are 2 factors to consider in order to determine your ideal post length.

1. How much you're willing or able to write.

If you don't have a lot of experience writing, you may find it challenging or even difficult to plan and write long content. However, you can create long content by connecting a few related pieces of short content together.

2. What your target audience prefers.

The best and fastest way to discover this, is to write content at different lengths and see which posts perform best. Even though long content generally performs better with search engines, you also want your readers to consume your content fully and have them engage with it.

Once you start publishing your blogs, pay attention to which blog posts get the most engagement and this will give you a specific guideline suited to your audience. Your ideal blog post length may vary with the topic and the amount of time you must write. It is fun to alter it.

CHAPTER 30

How to Create a Compelling Blog

YOU'RE NOW READY to take the next step: making your blog serve several purposes. You want to provide blog posts that keep readers coming back for more. You want to provide interesting content while highlighting your business. You also want to attract prospects to contact you for services.

Here are 5 methods for doing this.

Keywords

Determine the keywords and phrases you want to highlight in the blog. Include the keywords in the post title, at least one header, the first and last paragraph and a few more times. The rule of thumb is to include keywords in 2.5% of your content.

Also, begin the meta data (blog post description) with the keywords.

Use a Word Press plug in that gives you feedback on the success of your keywords. You'll soon learn if you are using them often enough.

Links

Include links to other relevant blogs on your site and to outside sources. Search engines reward you for these links.

Quotations and Photos

Combining a beautiful photo with a relevant quote attracts attention. This is also very popular on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter.

You could quote a generally well-known person, i.e., Martin Luther King, Gandhi, etc. You could quote yourself (if you're quotable). You could also quote a thought leader in your field, maybe one you'd like to have an association with.

When you put the quotes into a blog post, tag that person when you put the blog post on Facebook. The post will appear on their Facebook feed, or if you're doing this through LinkedIn, the same concept applies. This person is encouraged to share your blog post.

Keep providing opportunities for other people to find out about your company and go back to your web site, read your blog, as well as read about your services.

Interview Your Clients for Your Blog

One day when I was thinking about what I wanted to blog about, I decided, “I’ll ask some of my clients why they hire expert witnesses.” As I quoted their answers, I put the attorneys’ names in bold in the blog. They loved this and shared it with other attorneys because their names were in it.

In my blog, I summarized what they said about why it was important to have a well-qualified expert. Of course, that was what my company did. We supplied well-qualified experts, and my clients were talking about why they used my company rather than me talking about how great my company was. This blog post generated a lot of business for me.

Post an Article Someone Else Wrote

Use your blog space to reproduce another person’s content. You need to get permission to do this. However, you will generally get it without question. Approach a blogger for permission to share the content on your blog.

Bloggers know that it helps their visibility and success when a whole new group of people read what they write. They will appreciate and remember you. Most likely, they will take a careful look at your blog posts and services. This guerilla marketing tip will cause you to stand out.

Use these methods to help make your blogs more interesting and to get more attention from prospects.

SECTION 4

GRAMMAR

Introduction

IF YOU ARE phobic about grammar, you may be tempted to skip this section. You will remember interminable and tedious classes in which the teacher seemed to be doing his or her best to make grammar as boring and incomprehensible as possible.

You may have grown up in a household like mine where a family member carefully instructed you on grammar and correct word usage. I call that experience “the Grammar Patrol”. Although I occasionally resented being pounced on when I mispronounced a word (okay, I always resented it), I learned to be precise when I spoke. People now compliment me on how articulate I am.

With that in mind, I have designed this section to be reader friendly. I’ll show you simple examples that explain some of the most common grammatical usages, how to use puzzling punctuation forms, and the differences between the words that seem and, in many cases, sound similar or identical.

Some people believe that only very fussy people care about grammar and punctuation these days. While it’s true that

careless emailing and the many abbreviations that texting has introduced have launched assaults on correct grammar, people still care.

Some of those people may be your present or future employers. The first article in this series cites statistics that 75% of employers want employees with good grammatical skills. Only 50% of applicants have those skills. Good grammar can make the difference between getting and not getting a job.

Studying the examples in this section can help you have a clear advantage over your competitors. If you are an entrepreneur, your grammatical skills will show potential clients and customers your attention to detail. Again, this gives you an advantage over those competing for their business.

In ways both obvious and subtle, grammatical skills enhance your ability to communicate effectively with others.

I could easily have doubled the size of this book by including many more tips about grammar, punctuation and word usage. Consider this section as only scratching the surface of this topic. Let's begin.

Get more tips on this topic by purchasing a copy of **How to Get Published**. It has an extensive appendix with tips on grammar skills, punctuation and easily confused words. Order it at patiyer.com.

CHAPTER 31

Writing: It's Not Just for Writers

“I’M NOT A writer. Why should I have to learn about grammar, spelling, and punctuation? No one expects me to be good at that.” Have you ever said that, or known someone who said this?

When I refer to writers, I’m not talking about those who have great writing skills but about basic competence. Too many people don’t have this.

Are you like me in that you spot typos wherever you go?

What if Getting a Job Depended on Your Writing Skills?

Bizzy Coy, in the article, “Why You Can’t Get a Job Without Solid Writing Skills,” (<https://www.mediabistro.com/climb-the-ladder/skills-expertise/solid-writing-skills/>) on MediaBistro, writes that 75% of businesses want employees skilled in writing. However, nearly 50% of applicants don’t have those skills.

He lists six areas where good writing skills are essential: video, audio, social media, B2C copywriting, sponsored content, and B2B copywriting.

If you don't have these skills, you've reduced your chances of getting a job. If you do, your employment future looks a lot brighter.

Solopreneurs and Owners of Small Businesses Need These Skills, Too

You might say, "I have an administrative assistant who takes care of all that." *All* of it? Every email you write? Every text or IM?

You say, "No one expects them to be perfect." True, and you will find, however, that people do expect them to be readable. All too often, they aren't.

For example, you're trying to win a new client, and a lot of the communication takes place via email. Does it matter if you make grammatical and spelling errors?

William Arruda, in the Personal Branding Blog, (<https://www.thepersonalbrandingblog.com/proper-grammar-is-important-in-business-communication/>) writes:

"Poor grammar is one of the reasons why customers avoid certain companies. When users visit your website and read poorly constructed sentences, you've created an initial impression that the site

and the company behind it are not trustworthy. Therefore, it is always important that you check and proofread your work before posting or sending messages.

“A simple spelling mistake can lose you a customer; that would be your competitor’s gain. Using proper grammar denotes a professional approach to business. By constructing a well-written letter or response to a query, you are giving your customers and suppliers the impression as business professionals, you are treating all your transactions seriously and you value them highly.”

You wouldn’t show up for a business meeting in a wrinkled, dusty, shabby suit. What you write should have the same degree of grooming as your personal appearance.

It’s worth taking the time or, if necessary, spending the money to learn the basic rules of grammar, spelling, and punctuation. It’s money in the bank.

Just one new customer could make the effort worth it.

CHAPTER 32

Don't Make These Mistakes: Common Writing Errors

IN AN AGE of texting and emoticons, when communication can be as brief as “?,” grammar may seem like something that only old and uptight people find necessary.

In practical reality, grammar still counts. Poor grammatical usage strikes many as the written equivalent of bad manners.

Worse, it could convince a reader that you don't take writing seriously. Whether your work is a self-published novel or a business report, you don't want to be disregarded for mistakes that you can avoid.

The following are some common grammatical pitfalls. I am going to use the simplest examples. More exist in each category. When in doubt, look it up.

Failure of Subject and Verb to Agree

Positive reviews and reader interest has stimulated me to write more.

This sentence has two subjects: “Positive reviews” and “reader interest.”

The sentence should read:

Positive reviews and reader interest have stimulated me to write more.

It gets more complicated when other words get in between the subject and verb.

Incorrect:

Careful reading, editing, and proofreading by the editor I hired has helped me improve my writing.

It would be easy to think that the editor has helped, and she has, but the sentence refers specifically to the actions of the editor, so it should read:

Correct:

Careful reading, editing, and proofreading by the editor I hired have helped me improve my writing.

Incomplete Sentences

Incorrect:

We went to the store. And then to the bank.

Correct:

We went to the store and then to the bank.

You may be yelling, “Foul! I read a book the other day by a famous novelist. He used incomplete sentences all over the place.”

You’re right. When you’re a famous novelist or any kind of famous author, you can do this, too—sparingly. Until then, don’t.

The one exception might be to give extra emphasis to something, as in

He loaded the new program into the computer. Disaster.

Confusing Pronoun References

Incorrect:

When Marie finally understood what Jane was saying, she was so relieved.

Who was relieved, Marie or Jane?

You don't want to write, "When Marie finally understood what Jane was saying, Marie (or Jane) was so relieved."

Instead, rewrite the sentence.

Correct:

Marie was so relieved when she finally understood what Jane was saying.

Sentences That Go on Forever

Incorrect:

When I think about grammar, I get so confused because there are so many rules, and I often feel that I don't understand them, and sometimes I want to crawl into bed and forget about the whole thing, and what I usually do is watch TV.

All the commas are in the right places in the above sentence, and it has no other grammatical errors, but the reader may experience fatigue reading something in which each phrase has equal weight. What is the writer trying to say?

Some people talk to hear themselves speak. Some people write to get hypnotized by the many words on a page.

Break the trance, and while you're at it, break a long sentence into shorter ones. Eliminate repetitious statements.

Correct:

The many rules of grammar confuse me so much that sometimes I can hardly bear to study them. Instead of learning the rules, I watch TV.

Instead of watching TV, spend some time brushing up on grammar.

CHAPTER 33

Mixing Singular and Plural

ARE YOU CONFUSING singular and plural forms in the same sentence? And is this wrong?

Grammar rarely enters the world of culture and politics. Pronouns are a notable exception to this generality.

Prior to the 1970s, the default pronoun was “he.”

If a student is considering several colleges, he needs to choose wisely.

Or:

A student who is considering several colleges must choose his options wisely”

Only when no possible excuse existed for using the feminine form was it employed.

A mother often needs to juggle her time between work and home responsibilities. She often experiences great stress because of this.

Goodbye to Him

Feminists challenged this realm of masculine dominance. “His/her,” “he or she,” and “(s)he” were some of the forms that replaced the default “he/his.”

We also ended up with what looked like an incorrect use of “they.”

- *A researcher is supposed to be objective in their findings.*
- *If someone gets lost, they are sometimes reluctant to ask another person for directions.*

Any grammarian reading this will be sure these uses are incorrect. In fact, he or she may describe this as one of the most common and grammatical errors. (S)he will either revert to “his/her,” or rewrite the sentence.

Sometimes you can do this easily:

- *Researchers are supposed to be objective in their findings.*
- *If people get lost, they are sometimes reluctant to ask another person for directions.*

Some Surprising News

On the other hand, some authorities say the singular noun combined with a plural pronoun is not a recent development and that it is grammatically correct. The Oxford Dictionary web site says:

“In fact, the use of plural pronouns to refer back to a singular subject isn’t new: it represents a revival of a practice dating from the 16th century. It’s increasingly common in current English and is now widely accepted both in speech and in writing.”

<https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/usage/he-or-she-versus-they>

It Still Looks Awkward

The Oxford Dictionary folks know their English language usage, but I would disagree that the single/plural usage is as widely accepted as they suggest.

You can certainly get away with it in speech and probably on your blog. However, I recommend—especially if you’re submitting something to a publication for the first time—that you do your best to avoid that usage. (See my book, **How to Get Published**, which I describe at the end of this book. You’ll get critical tips to use when seeking publication of your work.)

Editors may reject a piece for reasons you’ll never hear about. You won’t have the opportunity to cite the Oxford Dictionary web site in your defense. Your chances of success in publication increase when you follow the most commonly accepted grammatical usages. Any deviations cause mental speed bumps.

One rule in writing reigns supreme: Do nothing to interrupt the flow of reading. I advise rewriting sentences rather than alerting those of us who are still appalled by mixing singular and plural forms in the same sentence.

CHAPTER 34

Is a Cat a ‘That’?

Is a cow an “it”? In order to answer these questions, I need to address a related grammatical question.

Is a Human a ‘That’?

As an editor, I’ve noticed people are using “that” instead of “who.”

- *The man that fixed my car.*
- *I was surprised to see all the children that had been let out of school early.*
- *She had a husband that was very ill.*

To me, it sounds wrong. *Things* go with “that.”

- *The car that the man fixed.*
- *The school that let all the children out of school early.*
- *The disease that made her husband very ill.*

It's Not Always So

People, including distinguished people, have been using “who” and “that” interchangeably for centuries. This had entirely escaped my notice. If great writers didn't think it made such a big difference, why should I?

You might agree, thinking, “Well, good, here's one more grammatical rule I can forget.”

Here's the problem. Most contemporary grammarians, ranging from the writers of the Oxford Dictionaries blog to the very digestible Grammar Girl (highly recommended, go to quickanddirtytips.com), have a strong preference for connecting humans to “who.”

This means two things.

A lot of people will think that if you use “that” instead of “who,” you don't know how to use “that” correctly. You can't talk to each of these people and explain that Chaucer did it, too. You might as well go with the preferred usage.

Secondly, these experts also feel that attaching “that” to humans dehumanizes them. They become like televisions, laundry baskets, and stop signs.

So why use a word that may dehumanize your writing?

The Cat Comes Back

What about animals? They aren't things, and they aren't humans.

Some people say that if you don't know the sex of the animal, using "that" and "it" is logical. I agree. By the same rule, if you do know, employ the correct word.

He showed us Clyde, his prize bull, who was the father of 50 calves.

Clyde is clearly male.

If you're writing about your own companion animal, you will want to also use "she" or "he" instead of it. You will also use "who."

What happens when the gender isn't clear, and you're not writing about an individual animal?

- *The zebras that grazed on the savannah always were on the lookout for a cheetah.*
- *The wild dogs that roamed the streets at night were usually hungry.*

Or:

- *The zebras who grazed on the savannah always were on the lookout for a cheetah.*
- *The wild dogs who roamed the streets at night were usually hungry.*

I like the second versions because these animals have problems. The zebras don't want to turn into a cheetah's dinner. The dogs are homeless and hungry. The use of "who" doesn't turn them into humans, but it makes them creatures worthy of our interest.

And that makes your writing worthy of interest.

CHAPTER 35

Sentence Fragments

ALSO KNOWN AS incomplete sentences, fragments are generally frowned on in the English language. Exceptions exist, and I'll get to them later. First, let's define a sentence fragment. It's a sentence that doesn't have a subject and verb of its own.

I thought about writing this article.

“I” is the subject, and “thought” is the verb.

Celine and Michael became depressed when they realized they couldn't find their car.

Both “Celine” and “Michael” are subjects. “Became” is the verb.

This sentence, however, has more to it.

. . . when they realized they couldn't find their car.

You might be thinking, “What about ‘they’? Isn’t that a subject, and isn’t ‘realized’ a verb?” Yes, but the phrase makes no sense on its own. Its meaning depends on the previous part of the sentence, which makes it a **dependent clause**.

“Celine and Michael became depressed” is a sentence on its own. It says what happened. It’s not very informative, but it’s grammatically complete. That makes it an **independent clause**.

You can quickly spot a dependent clause by the conjunction that begins it: after, though, although, because, since, when, whether, etc.

Here are a few more examples.

- *Why are you rooting through your bag?*
- *Because I’m looking for the coupon I wanted to give you.*

People talk this way all the time, and it sounds natural. It wouldn’t be wrong to use it in written dialogue, sparingly. You could easily make it a complete sentence, though.

I’m looking for the coupon I wanted to give you.

“Because” isn’t necessary.

The Sliding Scale of Complete/ Incomplete Sentences

The basic principle of whether to use an incomplete sentence relates to the formality of the writing.

Advertising copy

Advertising copy has lots of declarative sentences like

MUST

BUY

NOW!

SPECIAL OFFER ONE DAY ONLY!

We see that advertising copywriters thrive on sentence fragments.

Haiku

This poetic form attracts fragment fans.

Snow in my shoe

Abandoned

Sparrow's nest

—*BOOK OF HAIKU, JACK KEROUAC*

Fiction

I see a lot of incomplete sentences in fiction.

He looked out over the winter landscape. Snow drifts the height of a building. A sky hung with gray sheets.

You might revise the paragraph to delete the sentence fragments:

He looked out over the winter landscape: snow drifts the height of a building, a sky hung with gray sheets.

The first version, though, has a more desolate feeling to it.

In addition, as I mentioned earlier, incomplete sentences are acceptable in dialogue. The key is sparing use. Otherwise, the prose reads in a choppy, disconcerting manner.

Can You Use Incomplete Sentences in Nonfiction?

And why would you?

I just did, to show that you can. Sometimes a writer wants to emphasize certain points. Imagine, for example, beginning an article on global warming like this:

Drowned cities.

Dust bowls everywhere.

Unbreathable air.

This is your children's future.

Incomplete sentences can be catchy but ration their use. Otherwise, you run the risk of subjecting your readers to choppy reading. Your sentence fragments will lose their dramatic impact.

In conclusion, you may *deliberately* use sentence fragments to best advantage. Don't use them by mistake.

CHAPTER 36

Pick the Right Word

PEOPLE WHO WRITE well easily convey their ideas and increase their influence. Poor writing makes you stand out – in an unpleasant way. Here are some tips for smoother writing.

Easily Confused Words: Insure, Ensure, Assure

- Insure relates to insurance policies and limiting financial liability.
- Assure is something you say or do to make another person comfortable.
- Ensure is what you do to guarantee a result.

Here are examples:

- *I purchased a homeowner's policy to insure my house.*
- *I can assure you your clients will come away with actionable items.*

- *This program will ensure your employees will improve their customer service.*
- *I insured my car so I could ensure I could fix it and assure my parents.*

Correct Use of Semicolons

These often-overlooked punctuation marks make your writing more professional.

A semicolon joins two sentences when there is no conjunction such as “and” or “but” in between.

- *The HR department completed an assessment; it showed the need for training.*
- *The VP for Sales completed a sound check the morning of the event; she was horrified by the room’s acoustics.*

A semicolon separates items in a sentence that has commas.

The corporation has offices in Philadelphia, PA; Chicago, IL; and San Francisco, CA.

Be Brief

Make your writing smoother with a minimal amount of words.

Don't

Your clients will find our services delightful, will be amazed and come away inspired by our services.

Do

Your clients will be delighted, amazed and inspired by our services.

Be Consistent

Repeat the same grammatical form to make it easy for your reader to assimilate your ideas. This is also called “parallel structure”.

Don't

The audience members cheered, were getting on their feet, and clapped at the end of the speech.

Do

The audience members cheered, clapped, and stood at the end of the speech.

CHAPTER 37

Active Wording Attracts Active Readers

PASSIVE SENTENCE CONSTRUCTION can drain the power and focus of your writing.

In general terms, passive voice means a combination of a verb with “was,” “is,” “were,” “will be,” or any other form of the verb, “to be.” The accompanying verb will usually end in “ed.”

Here is an example.

*The first day of my new job will always **be remembered** by me with terror.*

Rewrite this as,

*I will always **remember** the first day of my new job with terror.*

In this instance, **be remembered** and **remember** are, respectively, the passive and active forms.

The meaning of this sentence has a lot of potential power. “Terror” activates strong emotion. However, “be remembered” distances the emotional impact. “Remember” in its active form makes it more immediate.

Sometimes Passive Voice is Appropriate

Writing has its rules, but none of them are ironclad.

The most common use of passive voice is in situations where either we don’t know or don’t care who caused a situation.

In the resulting shootout, three people were killed.

We don’t know who killed them, and to say, “In the resulting shootout, three people died” doesn’t specify the violent nature of their deaths.

She was robbed. Again, we don’t know who did it. Rewriting the sentence to say, “*An unknown person robbed her*” would subtract from the impact of the act. People might focus on wondering who this person was, but the important fact is that she was robbed.

Her teeth were shaped like daggers. We don’t care who shaped them, and we don’t want to meet her.

The meat was overcooked, but we were hungry and ate it.
We don't care who overcooked it. Hunger is the point of this sentence.

Why People Often Use the Passive Voice

People usually write technical or business pieces in passive voice. That, I suppose, gives them a distant and impersonal tone that someone decided long ago was appropriate to such writing.

You, however, unless you are writing such a piece, don't want a distant and impersonal tone. You want to communicate with your reader. You want them to feel that you are writing *for* them. Active verb forms convey this.

Author Stephen King believes that passive form suggests a kind of timidity about direct assertion. He suggests that cautious, unassertive authors take refuge in the tone of technical writing.

If you come from a technical writing background, I recommend that you pay special attention to searching your writing for use of passive voice, as it will be automatic for you. You'll see how much more alive your writing becomes with the increased use of active voice.

Authorities generally recommend limiting passive tense to less than 10 percent of your writing. That doesn't mean you

need to eliminate this form entirely. Use it deliberately to vary your sentence construction.

As I said earlier, no rules in writing are ironclad. What matters is whether you're breaking one out of ignorance or on purpose.

In other words, know the rules and break them only when it improves your writing.

CHAPTER 38

Kill Your Adjectives

MARK TWAIN SAID that. His actual words were, “When you catch an adjective, kill it.” He explained he meant *most* adjectives. He objected to them because they tended to create (adjective alert) flowery and verbose writing.

Sometimes Adjective are Unnecessary

*His face was **dark**, **bitter**, and **belligerent**, and he yelled at the woman in a **loud** and **aggressive** voice.*

That sentence has five adjectives. How much does they tell us?

Do faces really get dark as an expression of mood? Caucasian faces might redden as more blood flows to the cheeks, but I wouldn't count on “dark” to express anything meaningful.

And how can a face be bitter? How does a bitter expression look? This word describes nothing.

“Belligerent” has potential. Someone might thrust a chin forward in a belligerent manner, but that word might better describe an overall body language that includes fists tightened, shoulders tensed, and other signs that a person is about to initiate a fight.

If the writer has noted the man yelled, we can assume his voice was loud. Yelling is most often a sign of aggression. We can eliminate these two adjectives and get a much better picture of his mood if we knew what he said.

The rewritten sentence might read like this:

He thrust his chin forward and raised his fists to her. “I’ll never let you leave me.”

We can be sure that he didn’t speak in a gentle, kindly, or quiet voice because the first sentence describing his body language suggests hostility and anger.

Sometimes an Adjective is Weak

“Pretty,” “nice,” “big,” “frightening,” “friendly” are examples of weak adjectives. Sometimes these adjectives have a place in writing, but always look for stronger replacements. These may not always be adjectives.

For example:

He decided that she had a pretty face. But what does he think of her?

Her face appealed to him. The verb is stronger because it's active, and it tells us his reaction to her.

The loud sound was frightening. “Loud,” “sound,” and “frightening” are all weak.

The siren's blast terrified her. Two strong nouns and one strong verb tell us exactly how she feels.

The friendly dog approached the man. How do we know it's friendly?

The dog wagged its tail and placed a paw on the man's knee. This is a friendly dog.

Show, Don't Tell

Herein lies one of the biggest pitfalls of adjectives. They tell instead of showing. (Adverbs have the same problem.) Showing is always more powerful.

If we go back to the friendly dog example, you can see that the writer expects the reader to believe without evidence the dog is friendly. We want evidence. Show us the wagging tail and the extended paw.

Although the examples I've given are not about business, the same applies to a description of a business and its services.

We offer the best cell phone service. **Best** is an adjective that tells me nothing. I'll go on to the next company on my list.

Ninety-seven percent of our customers have used our cell phone service for two years or longer. Now I'm interested enough to investigate.

I'll look at your web site, and if offers further tangible information about the value of your product, you may win me as a customer.

Never underestimate the power of killing an adjective.

CHAPTER 39

Use Adverbs with Caution

I could have written “cautiously,” but I didn’t want to be guilty of using an adverb before I’d even begun the body of the chapter. I say “guilty” because adverb overuse is one of the cardinal errors of writing.

What Is an Adverb?

Adverbs provide additional description to verbs, adjectives, another adverb, phrases, sentences, or clauses. Often, but not always, they end with “ly.”

- *They ran **quickly**.*
- *She was **very** beautiful.*
- *She **so** hoped she would the prize.*

What’s Wrong with Them?

The above examples look harmless. This is why they’re not.

“They ran quickly” is awkward and doesn’t provide a strong visual image. Instead, try:

- *They raced.*
- *They dashed.*
- *They hurried.*

Each of these changes implies speed and urgency much more effectively than the original.

“She was very beautiful” is equally awkward, in part because “beautiful” might seem like an absolute. If someone is more than beautiful, try “gorgeous,” “stunning,” or “breathtaking.”

In “She so hoped that she would win the prize,” “so” is meaningless. It doesn’t suggest how much she hoped. Was she eager, desperate, anxious? We have no idea.

An Indictment of Adverbs

“I believe the road to hell is paved with adverbs.”

—STEPHEN KING IN *ON WRITING*.

King gets to the heart of why adverbs don’t add much to writing. He says in using them, writers signal that they haven’t expressed themselves clearly. The adverb gets tacked on for additional emphasis.

And they have a tacked-on feeling. That’s why “ran quickly” and “very beautiful” sound so awkward. They’ve been added without a feeling for elegant writing. When I say “elegant,” I don’t necessarily mean great literature. I mean

something you can read without getting jolted by literary potholes.

Show, Don't Tell

Like adjectives, one of the biggest problems adverbs present is they tell, rather than show.

Consider the following examples:

- *He spoke angrily.*
- *He growled.*
- *He roared.*

Examples 2 and 3 give the reader a sensory impression. You can hear and feel a roar or a growl. Whenever possible, replace a verb and an adverb with a stronger verb.

Don't Throw Out Adverbs Altogether

Occasionally, adverbs have their purposes. The general opinion about their recommended usage is about once in every 300 words.

If you want to measure your adverb use, do a word count on something you've written and then read it and count the adverbs. If the count is within the 1 to 300 ratio, you're fine for frequency, but also look at how you've used the adverbs. If you can find a way to replace them with stronger verbs, do so.

CHAPTER 40

Parentheses and Brackets

SHE LOST a job because of typos. I know this because she lost a job with me. I looked at countless resumes when I had my own business supplying expert witnesses to attorneys. The moment I saw a typographical error, grammatical mistake, or punctuation error, I stopped reading.

Do you think that's unfair? Are you saying, "Anyone can make a mistake"? Yes, they can, and I do, too. A resume, however, represents what you can do. Those who can't proofread their introduction to a potential employer may make other—and bigger—mistakes.

I worked hard to build my business. The work that I sent out to lawyers represented the quality of my business, and I needed employees and expert witnesses who shared my attention to detail.

If you think punctuation is that boring thing you had to learn in grade school, reconsider. A parenthesis, comma, or semicolon could determine your future.

In this chapter, I tackle a few of the less-understood rules of punctuation.

Parentheses and Brackets

These two types of punctuation confuse a lot of people. When they are used separately, brackets usually indicate that something has been added to a quotation—not by the original speaker.

Harry told me, “We went to the Dinosaur Museum [that’s the one on 45th St.], and Philip had a great time.”

This usage doesn’t come up a lot in writing, but I thought I’d get it out of the way.

Parentheses set off words within a sentence or text. Usually, they add information about something else in the sentence. The sentence should always make sense without the information within the parentheses.

Mark worked very hard (and for many hours) on the project.

Rewrite this as *Mark worked very hard on the project.*

The sentence makes sense without “and for many hours.” The length of time Mark spent on the project adds emphasis to his hard work.

You could think of the words within parentheses as less important but adding color.

Punctuation and Parentheses (and Brackets)

Many people get lost when inserting periods at ends of sentences. I am here to help you find your way.

(Sometimes an entire sentence is within parentheses.)

A period almost always comes directly at the end of a complete sentence, and the above sentence is no exception. A phrase *within* parentheses at the end of a sentence gets different rules, though.

Here is an example (with an ending phrase enclosed within parentheses).

In this example, the phrase within parentheses is *not* a complete sentence. It's part of the sentence, so the period comes *after* the closed parentheses.

The easiest way to remember this is:

When a parenthetical phrase equals a complete sentence, it ends with a period before the closed parenthesis.

When a parenthetical phrase is part of a longer sentence, the period comes after the closed parenthesis.

Brackets within Parentheses

The brackets were feeling abandoned and lonely, so I had to return to them.

Our primary work in the administration of placebos to hospitalized mental patients was with a pilot group of schizophrenics. (We administered similar tests in another hospital [A Controlled Study with Placebos, Journal of Mind-Body Research, January 2005], but we have not correlated the results of the two tests.)

This kind of placement is most likely to show up in a curriculum vita or annotated bibliography, but you never know into what kinds of punctuational crisis life may propel you.

By the way, note that the above parenthetical sentence ends with the period *inside* the parentheses.

CHAPTER 41

Make the Comma Your Friend

A COMMA MAY BE a little squiggle, but it does a lot for your writing. It adds meaning, clarity, elegance, and, in some cases, beauty to your writing. Its absence can bore or confuse the reader.

Comma usage is loaded with rules; it's a good idea to study them. Below are some of the most common examples.

Add a Comma to an Introductory Phrase

Prepositions call for commas at the end of the phrases they begin.

- *If you go into the office today, . . .*
- *Before you buy that, . . .*
- *After you finish doing that, . . .*
- *In 2019, . . .*

Use Commas to Separate Independent Clauses

Here's another rule that will cover a lot of situations. Always use a comma in a compound sentence with two or more independent clauses, which are separated by conjunctions. (Use a semicolon when there is no conjunction.)

You will usually find conjunctions such as “and,” “but,” “or,” “yet,” “so.”

He ran to the liquor store, and he bought a case of beer.

He did two things, and each of these phrases could have been a sentence on its own.

He ran to the liquor store. He bought a case of beer.

If instead, the sentence read: “He ran to the liquor store and bought a case of beer,” the comma is not needed because it doesn't contain two independent clauses.

Here's another one.

I wanted to go swimming, but I needed to drink beer first.

Each of these phrases could (and should) stand alone:

I wanted to go swimming.

I needed to drink beer first.

This story is not going to end well. Ask the inebriated people who decided to dive into the shallow end of the swimming pool.

Commas Belong Between All Items in a Series

It's only fair to say that not everyone agrees with this rule. In AP Style used in newspapers, the comma between the last two items of a series is omitted.

She liked to wear clothes made by Saks Fifth Avenue, Chicco and J. Jill.

Should you follow this format? It depends. This can lead to sentences like, *The speaker is survived by his two children, a monkey and a parakeet.*

The bigger question for me is “Why leave it out?” It takes no effort to type a comma, and it makes an orderly, easy-to-understand list.

Incorrect

In order to prepare for my test, I needed to study prepositions, conjunctions and hyphenation.

Correct

In order to prepare for my test, I needed to study prepositions, conjunctions, and hyphenation.

Incorrect

Before I left the house, I checked that the stove was off, made sure that the lights were out and looked for my key.

Correct

Before I left the house, I checked that the stove was off, made sure that the lights were out, and looked for my key.

Use Commas in Direct Address

These examples are correct:

- *Joe, I admire your class.*
- *I think, Jose, you couldn't be more wrong.*
- *Thank you, Pat, for inviting me to be a guest on your podcast.*

Use Commas to Set Off Quotations

She interrupted the speaker to say, “*Joe, that’s outrageous.*”

“Joe, that’s preposterous,” she said.

“Joe, I’d like to make a point of order,” she said, “to prove that you’re an idiot.”

Joe said, “It is time for another question. Next?”

CHAPTER 42

What Is the Em Dash, and Why Should You Care?

THIS IS AN em dash. — It has the approximate width of a capital H. The poor em dash is perhaps the most misunderstood and misused of all punctuation marks. Used well, it adds emphasis and precision to your writing.

This form of punctuation is a newcomer to the world of writing and printing. It's believed to have originated with the Gutenberg Bible, but it wasn't widely used until the 1700s. This means it hasn't been around long enough to have hard-and-fast rules attached to its use.

One Rule We Know

The easiest rule about the em dash is that it can be used to indicate an interrupted thought.

- *Let's go to the store—oh, I didn't notice that you were reading.*
- *I had the greatest time at—watch, you're about to step into a puddle.*

- *Yes, I really want to hear your story—oh, hi, Max, did you have a nice time last night?*

In the above examples, no other form of punctuation will work.

Em dashes can also be used for a less extreme form of interruption.

I was going to the store—but I changed my mind because the baby fell out of the crib.

Unlike in the examples above, the em dash doesn't mark a complete change of subject. It could also be replaced by a comma.

I was going to the store, but I changed my mind because the baby fell out of the crib.

Here I prefer the first version because I think of the em dash as a more dramatic form of punctuation, which in this case describes a dramatic event. It's saying, "Pay attention to this."

Here's another example of using the em dash in a dramatic way.

Pfizer, the largest drug manufacturer, raised prices for 40 drugs—with some increases hitting 9 percent.

Other Accepted Uses for Em dashes

The em dash can mark an afterthought, especially when it's intended to be humorous or ironic.

I don't believe in ghosts—except the one in my closet.

It can connect a series of subjects with a conclusion.

Yoga, chi kung, tai chi—these are excellent methods of gentle exercise.

In fairness to other forms of punctuation, you could also write

Yoga, chi kung, and tai chi are excellent methods of gentle exercise.

Em dashes can be used to surround a parenthetical set of words.

The leading Presidential hopefuls—Jones, Smith, and Brown—disagree sharply on foreign policy.

Commas or parentheses could be used here, but they wouldn't set off the names so distinctly.

- *The leading Presidential hopefuls, Jones, Smith, and Brown, disagree sharply on foreign policy.*
- *The leading Presidential hopefuls (Jones, Smith, and Brown) disagree sharply on foreign policy.*

Avoid Overuse

Most grammarians agree overuse is the biggest danger of em dashes. Keep in mind that they break up a line of thought and can thus lead to choppy and disjointed writing—and reading.

If your paragraph has more than one em dash (or two, in the case of em dashes setting off words, as above), replace them with commas or parentheses.

Remember, above all, that an em dash is best used for dramatic effect. This can highlight your prose. Used too often, it will simply overwhelm it.

CHAPTER 43

The Treacherous Homophone: Part One

THE INEXPERIENCED WRITER often misuses words that sound the same but have different spellings and meanings. These are called homophones, a word that sounds the same as another word but has a different meaning.

Many homophones exist in every language to trip up the unwary. I'm focusing in this chapter on a trio and a pair whose misuse is responsible for a large percentage of grammatical/spelling errors.

If you can conquer these groups, you'll be well on the way to producing cleaner and more accurate writing, and you'll find it much easier and less time-consuming to proofread your work.

I follow with two chapters devoted to additional homophones that cause much difficulty to anyone who writes.

Errors in usage of the trio and the pair have proliferated due to our increased exposure to misuse of these words. I suspect that you've run across these errors, perhaps without recognizing them, several times today alone.

These errors have a pervasive and insidious quality. I know the difference between "there," "they're," and "their." I can also distinguish between "its" and "it's."

Because so many people don't, though, I've found the constant repetition of errors in emails and on web sites has caused me on occasion to misuse these words. Only because I proofread everything I write, including emails, do I catch myself using these words incorrectly.

There, They're, and Their

"There" has two uses. As an adverb it means "in or at that place."

I am going there now.

It can also be used as a pronoun introducing a clause or sentence.

There is a possibility she is right.

"They're" is a contraction for "They are." The apostrophe replaces the word space and letter "a."

They're going there.

“Their” is the possessive case of the pronoun they. Think “belonging to.”

Their mission is to clear up word confusion.

It’s and Its

“It’s” is a contraction of “It is.” As with “They’re,” the apostrophe replaces a space and a letter.

It’s time to clear up the confusion about language.

“Its” indicates possession.

The dog wagged its tail.

Vigilance is the Price of Grammatical Freedom

If you didn’t know these differences before, commit them to memory. Train yourself to notice errors in your emails and in anything else you read. Ask yourself if a usage is correct.

If you *did* know these differences but that knowledge has been washed away by a deluge of misuse, you will need to be vigilant. Because I was so sure I knew the differences between the various words, I didn’t notice when I started mindlessly making errors.

The threat is real.

CHAPTER 44

The Treacherous Homophone: Part Two

IN THE PREVIOUS chapter, I explained the differences between two of the most common homophone groupings: its, it's and there, their, and they're.

In this chapter, join me for a deeper journey into the homophone jungle. Please note that some of the word pairs aren't pure homophones, such as the first one: accept/except, and the second: affect/effect. For the purposes of language skills, I believe that they're close enough in sound to get easily confused.

Accept/Except

To accept is to receive with the more subtle meaning of "allow."

I accepted the invitation with gratitude.

To except means to exclude.

He excepted the children from his ruling.

Advice/Advise

“Advice” and “advise” are closely related in meaning. They both refer to opinions and recommendations. The difference is that advice is a noun and advise is a verb.

- *I advise you to closely study homophones.*
- *He paid close attention to his teacher’s advice to study the list of homophones.*

Affect/Effect

A simple rule for understanding the difference between these two words is to remember that “affect” is a verb that means to influence something. “Effect,” a noun, is the thing that was influenced.

- *Her reputation affected the results of the election.*
- *Her reputation had the effect of changing the election results.*

Adding confusion to this issue, affect can also be a noun:
She had a surly affect as she snarled, “You are in my seat!”

Bare/Bear

People rarely get confused when “bear” refers to the large animal that may chase you. (I speak as a person who wonders what I’d do in this event.) Confusion occurs with the verb forms of bare/bear.

“Bare” means to expose, whether body or emotions are involved.

He was afraid to bare his feelings.

“Bear” means carrying, as in water bearer. It may also refer to carrying emotional or other burdens.

He was able to bear the burden of responsibility for his family.

Complementary/Complimentary

Vocabulary alert: These two words are notoriously misused. I saw an article on a well-respected email provider’s site about “complimentary” colors.

Both “compliment” and “complement” can be used either as nouns or verbs, adding to the confusion.

“Compliment” means to praise or flatter. When used as “complimentary,” it means free.

- *“You look lovely.” She treasured the compliment.*

- *They were surprised that their registration for the event entitled them to complimentary tickets for the local movie house.*

“Complement” means to complete. Complementary colors: red-green, blue-orange, and yellow-purple, are opposite each other on the color wheel. When combined in the correct proportions, they *complete* each other to form white light. If you think of “complete” or “completion,” you will use complement correctly.

As the “good” and “bad” cops, Jones and Davis complemented each other.

CHAPTER 45

The Treacherous Homophone: Part Three

IN THE FIRST chapter on homophones, I explained the differences between two of the most common homophone groupings: its/it's and there, their, and they're.

In Chapter 44, I explored the differences between accept and except, advice and advise, affect and effect, bare and bear, and compliment and complement.

This chapter concludes the series, not because no more homophones exist in the English language, but because I am highlighting some of the most common and trickiest pairs.

Again, please note that some of the word pairs aren't pure homophones, such as lose and loose. As in Chapter 44, I include them because they're close enough to get easily confused.

Lose/Loose

“Lose” is a verb that means to be defeated.

He was afraid that he would lose the race, which would end his chances to win the championship.

“Loose” is an adjective that means not fitting correctly or not being exact.

- *His loose trousers sagged and billowed.*
- *The judges’ loose interpretation of the qualifications allowed Jim to compete in the race.*

Principal/Principle

“Principal” is an adjective that means primary or most important. It’s also a noun that is used to refer to the head of a school or an important person.

- *The principal ingredient in his success was his determination.*
- *Attorney Jose Rodriquez was a principal of the law firm.*
- *Because of her disruptive behavior in class, Sally had to go see the principal.*

“Principle” is a noun. It refers to a fundamental truth that an individual or group holds. It may determine behavior or subsidiary beliefs.

His principles would not allow him to cheat.

Reign/Rein

“Reign” can be either a verb or a noun. It refers to being in power. Early in my legal nurse consulting career, a client asked me to look at his soon-to-be-released newsletter. I saw this headline:

Bill Elwood completes a long rein as partner of our law firm. My client did a quick edit after I showed him the error. Why is this wrong? “Rein” can also be a verb or noun. As a noun, it usually refers to the narrow strip of leather attached to a horse’s bit. As a verb, it means to control, as in “rein in.”

- *The rider held the horse’s reins.*
- *He used them to rein the horse in when it ran too fast.*

Reign refers to ruling and supremacy. *Bill reigned over the law firm. He wondered why turnover was so high.*

One of the most confusing aspects of “reign” and “rein” occurs in phrases like “holding the reins of power.” Since to reign means to have power, people often incorrectly write “the reigns of power.”

Site/Sight/Cite

These words can be used as either verbs or nouns.

As a verb, “site” means to locate or situate. As a noun, it refers to a location.

- *They sited the house on a hill that overlooked the valley.*
- *The site of the house pleased the owners because of its view*

As a verb, “sight” means to see. As a noun, it means what one sees.

- *Anne sighted Lucy walking several hundred feet ahead.*
- *The sight of Lucy relieved Anne because she was lost on the mountain.*

“Cite” can be used as a quote as evidence for or justification of an argument or statement, especially in a scholarly work.

He cited his sources when he wrote his report.

As a verb, cite can also be praise.

The search and rescue team cited her for her bravery when she found the missing hiker.

Stationary/Stationery

“Stationary” is an adjective that means unmoving.

Though he pushed the button, the elevator remained stationary.

“Stationery” is a noun referring to writing materials, especially paper of a good quality.

She used her best stationery so he would know she took his request seriously.

SECTION 5

PROOFREADING AND EDITING

Introduction

EDITING IS A crucial part of writing. It involves shaping the often-raw words that come spilling out of a writer's mind into a document—whether it's a report, blog, web site material, or book—that effectively communicates with those who read it.

I'll share my superpower: I *love* to edit. I love the process of refining, trimming and reorganizing material. I've edited thousands of expert witness reports and hundreds of chapters written by other people and seen the common types of challenges writers face.

In this section, you will learn how to edit your work. Some of this information is very specific, like “Keep paragraphs short.” “Go easy on the adjectives and adverbs.” Some of it provides moral support: “Remember that this book is *not* you.”

You'll discover how to ruthlessly eliminate unnecessary words so the meaning of what you intend to say shines through. You'll also get practical explanations about how professional editors of various kinds and proofreaders can fine-tune your work. Finally, you'll learn what a

ghostwriter does and get useful information to help you decide whether you want to hire this kind of expert.

Editing—whether you do it or hire someone else—is the stage of writing that can make the difference between a mediocre work that no one ever buys or recommends and material that captures the attention of its intended audience. However you decide to handle this essential stage, give it your full attention.

This section can help you make an informed choice that will give your book its best chance in the world of publishing.

Be sure to download my free **Editing Checklist** at patiyer.com and use it to check your work.

CHAPTER 46

How to Edit Your Own Work

YOU'VE WRITTEN A report, speech, newsletter, or other document. You've put a lot of time and thought into it. You have an *investment* in it. Now you need to edit it.

You can find lots of practical advice about how to edit your work. However, none of these suggestions will work for you until you address issues that have plagued the best writers who ever lived.

You've Worked Hard on This and You've Lost Perspective

This happens to every writer. It means that you've immersed yourself in your subject matter. Even when you haven't been writing, you may have been thinking about the piece and getting great ideas about what would improve that troublesome middle section.

When you mentally write "The End," you must mean it—for a while. You need some distance between yourself and what you've written. Your involvement and identification

with what you've written must loosen before you edit it. Otherwise, you'll feel as if you're amputating pieces of yourself when you pick up a pen to make changes.

Repeat 'This Is Not Me'

Even when you do allow a period—which will vary, according to your time constraints—to pass before the editing phase, you may feel attached to what you've written. This will especially be true if you're new to writing.

As you gain experience in writing, this feeling will dissipate. It's normal to feel attached to the first big report or speech you've ever written. Once you've written dozens, the attachment fades.

You can speed up the process of detachment by telling yourself that this paper isn't your children or your pet. It isn't your car. It's a vehicle for you to express facts, ideas, and principles. You want it to do this accurately and in a way that communicates with other people.

It's a *tool* for doing that.

Be Ruthless

With the concept of “tool” in mind, approach the editing process as if you're not the writer but the reader. Many writers find it helpful to read their work out loud. You *must* do this if you've written a speech.

Be honest. Make notes wherever you think your phrasing is awkward. Flag anything that's unclear. Notice if you repeat words or if your language is too formal.

Being ruthless means boldly making changes that will make your work shine. Consider these guidelines.

Make your writing to the point

If you want to explain why you were drawn to the area of human development, don't describe all the careers you hated before you discovered the one you loved. It's like a road trip; detours make the journey longer, and you forget where you were going.

Make paragraphs short

I like to limit a paragraph to one idea. This gives the reader the opportunity to pause to absorb one concept before reading another. I recommend a maximum of four sentences per paragraph or no more than 10 lines of text.

Go easy on the adverbs and adjectives

To give you an idea of this rule's power, compare the effect of "spoke loudly" versus "shouted" or "very attractive" as opposed to "beautiful."

Strong verbs and nouns also give authority to your writing. When you have a point to make, you need that authority. If,

for example, you're presenting industry statistics, you don't write, "These figures suggest." You write "These figures confirm." Be definite.

Walk Away From Your Work. Repeat 'This Is Not Me.' Be Ruthless.

These principles will help you hone your writing. Practice will sharpen it into a powerful tool to serve you.

CHAPTER 47

Make Your Writing Lean: Part One

I MAY HAVE OPINIONS about human impatience over having to read anything that takes longer than five minutes. However, Twitter exists. Emoticons—that you don’t even have to read—abound. A picture is worth 1,000 words, and you *can* and *do* judge a book by its cover.

If you are going to or do write, you need to constantly remind yourself to use words as if they cost a lot of money. This is especially true for non-fiction writers. Your readers are looking for facts and information.

They probably like graphs. They definitely like summaries at the end of each chapter to which they can refer if they don’t have time to re-read the whole thing. Have you ever read a piece of writing that bored you without your knowing why? You started reading it because you had an interest in the subject, but you found yourself unable to finish it.

Many elements may contribute to your boredom, but a prime offender is writing that is stuffed with unnecessary words and phrases.

You can eliminate the following words from your writing without loss of clarity.

Just, Really, Actually, Totally, Basically

- *I **just** wanted you to know (or I **only** wanted you to know).*
- *I **really** wanted to tell you.*
- *I **actually** believe you.*
- *I **totally** agree with you.*
- *I **basically** think you're right.*

These words all modify verbs, and they weaken their power. If I **basically** think you're right, you might wonder in what areas I think you're wrong.

Really, actually, and **totally** imply a passion that might make the listener think the speaker protests too much. Is she sincere?

Just is a filler word that is meaningless, as is **only**. "I wanted you to know" is a clean, direct statement that needs no modification.

Slightly, Very, Pretty

- *I am **slightly** upset.*
- *I am **very** upset*
- *I am **pretty** upset.*

These words modify the passive form of a verb. Again, the listener would question the honesty of the speaker. Can you ever be slightly upset or worried or angry?

If you're **pretty** or **very** upset, you need to consider upgrading the word "upset." Very upset could mean furious or raging or heartbroken. Any of these words paint a more accurate picture of what a person feels.

Literally, As a Matter of Fact

Erase "literally" from your oral and written vocabulary. It could win awards for misuse. It means exactly.

I literally climbed the mountain in two hours.

This is correct if you did.

*I **literally** receive a mountain of email a day.*

Really? Mt. Everest is coming to your inbox?

As a matter of fact is a close competitor to "literally." If you're wondering, **in fact** is also in the running. Both

phrases tend to weaken the factual quality of whatever follows them.

Being that, In Terms Of, Even

Being that is an awkward phrasing. **Because** is an elegant replacement.

In terms of accuracy, two plus two equals four. The opening phrase is hardly needed.

Even Fred knew I was telling the truth. I don't think this says much for Fred. This isn't the worst offender among filler words, but it's unneeded.

See the Difference

Version 1

It was a very hot day, and Mary was totally tired. She was also pretty angry at Harry, who'd gotten up really early just so that he could take the air-conditioned car, leaving her the totally inefficient clunker whose air conditioning didn't work at all.

Version 2

The day was a scorcher, and Mary was exhausted. She was also furious at Harry, who'd gotten up before dawn and driven off in the air-conditioned car, leaving her the clunker whose air conditioning hadn't worked since 1998.

The second version gives us a clear picture of the weather and Mary's mood. We can be certain that Harry will not get a warm welcome tonight—but it might be a scorcher.

Look for empty words in your rough drafts and devote your editing efforts to removing and replacing them. You will find that your remaining words will have much more life. I heard about a writer who set the goal of removing one unnecessary word from each paragraph of her book. At last count, she had removed 14,000 words from a 400-page manuscript.

You, too, can edit your way to slimmer, trimmer writing.

The Question of Honesty

**I honestly believe. To be honest with you.
To be truthful.**

Is it possible to dishonestly believe? It is, but it's called fooling yourself.

Not only are the above phrases unnecessary, they can have negative implications. "To be honest with you" implies that you're not always honest with the person with whom you're speaking—or maybe with anyone else. When you insist on your honesty, people will suspect you. It implies that honesty is a choice rather than a habit.

Unnecessary Verification

Of course. As you know. The fact of the matter is. As a matter of fact.

Will you get the package for me?

Of course, I will.

Use of this phrase implies, “How can you doubt me?” Paradoxically, it may make your reliability questionable.

Of course, this product will continue to grow in popularity.

Used in this context, “of course,” if not supported by facts, suggests that the reader should believe the statement. It carries a tone of “Everyone knows this; why don’t you?”

“The fact of the matter is” that this is one of the clunkiest and meaningless phrases ever devised. Whenever I see it in writing, I imagine it delivered in an aggressive tone, which is an unpleasant association. Delete it wherever you see it.

“As a matter of fact,” also qualifies as a useless phrase and has aggressive overtones.

Unnecessary Taglines

Though dialog is primarily the province of fiction writers, you might interview someone and want to quote them. Watch out for the following:

I believe that more women need to assume leadership in business,' she said, pounding the table.

Someone can speak while pounding the table, but the action loses its effect. Instead, write:

She pounded the table. "I believe more women need to assume leadership in business."

The action leads the way to the comment. This format also bypasses the trap of writing, "I believe more women need to assume leadership in business," she said forcefully (or angrily or vehemently). An action verb always has greater strength than an adverb.

Miscellaneous

At the end of the day. When all is said and done.

Eliminate these award-winning phrases in the category of "most meaningless" (which is a redundant phrase) from your writing.

Next, in our verbal weight-reduction plan, we will examine more redundancies. If you've ever used the phrase, "free gift," you need to read this.

CHAPTER 48

Make Your Writing Lean: Part Two

When One Word Makes Another Unnecessary

This chapter studies unnecessary pairings of words. These pairings will weaken your writing. They can be deadly if you're trying to impress readers with facts, which, as you'll see below, shouldn't be "actual facts." In general, they weaken all varieties of writing.

Free gift: NO! Sorry to shout, but this is the worst of the worst, and it's creeping like fungus into the wording of countless offers. "Gift" or "free." No exceptions. Or, for truth in advertising, if the gift isn't free, write, "some strings attached"—which no one wrote ever or will.

My personal belief: If it's yours, it's personal. The same applies to saying, "My own." The use of "personal" or "own" implies a need to make sure your claim is clear.

Plan ahead: Have you ever planned behind?

Possibly might: “Might” and “possibly” suggest “maybe.” Choose between them.

Protest against: A protest communicates that one is opposed. You don’t need to say “against.” This is different from using the word, “argue,” since you can argue either for or against.

Unexpected surprise: What is an *expected* surprise?

Unintended mistake: We can safely assume that a mistake is unintended.

Absolutely certain: Certainty is its own absolute. “Absolutely,” the adverb, should be avoided. Use it with caution as an adjective. “It was an absolute victory.” That would mean that the victory was unquestionable.

Actual experience or actual fact: “Actual” is generally a tricky word. People use it to give emphasis to something as being real. However, “This was my actual experience” doesn’t make it more believable. In a similar vein, a fact is a fact. It has been confirmed as true.

Postpone until later: See “plan ahead.” No one postpones until *earlier*.

Add an additional: There’s a big clue in this pairing. “Add” is part of “additional.” This is the best possible sign that “add” is unnecessary. Subtract it from your writing. Or subtract “additional.”

Added bonus: This is the cousin of “free gift.” A bonus is something added.

Advance notice: Giving notice is letting someone know something in advance. You can use either “advance” or “notice,” but not both.

Ask a question: This is so commonly used that most people don’t pay attention. However, to ask is to question.

Usual custom: Customs are what is usual. You don’t need both words.

Difficult dilemma: Dilemmas are never easy. You can eliminate “difficult.”

Direct confrontation: A confrontation is always direct.

End result: Results always occur at the end of a situation or series of action. “End” is not needed.

Circle around: This is the only way you can circle.

Raise up: See above.

You might be surprised how many examples of this you can find even in so-called literary prose. They take up a lot of space. Readers may not stop and say, “Ah-ha, a redundancy,” but they’ll get bored.

Stephen King, for example, is a very good writer. Yet, in *On Writing*, he writes a hypothetical query letter as

a model. In it, he writes, “I am a young writer of twenty-eight years.” He couldn’t be an old one.

Avoid repetition. We want to make sure what we write is accurate. As a result, we may repeat facts. If you noted that the capital of Pakistan is Karachi on page 45 of your manuscript, you don’t have to repeat this on page 83.

Look relentlessly for those repetitions. You will find them.

In addition, if what you write requires you to frequently use acronyms or abbreviations, you can assume people know what AWOL and ESL mean, but more obscure terms should be spelled out once. After that, use the abbreviated forms, and, if you feel kind, have a glossary at the end of the book.

Sneaky Redundancies

These combinations are more subtle and require thoughtful editing. Basically, you need to look for words in a sentence that say the same thing, i.e., one of them is redundant.

This winter we may potentially have mild weather.

“May” and “potentially” say the same thing. Eliminate “potentially.”

The existence of mild oceanic temperatures implies that global warming may be accelerating.

“May” is unnecessary in this sentence. Replace “may be” with “is.”

Unnecessary Words and Phrases

If you look carefully, which is an essential part of editing, you’ll find many. Usually, they will be words people use so often that to the casual eye, they’re invisible. Here are some examples.

People overuse “that.” Look at what you’ve written and see how it reads without “that.”

Don’t use “very often” (“often” is enough), “It so happened,” or “etcetera.” These are filler phrases. If you examine your manuscript, you’ll find a lot of them.

Words and Phrases to Eliminate from Your Vocabulary

The following phrases aren’t redundant, but some are meaningless. Some are clichés; some aren’t even words. All of them will weaken your writing.

Truth Be Told

Weak: *Truth be told, I wasn’t sure what to do next.*

Stronger: *I struggled over what to do next.*

The second sentence includes a strong, active verb.

I was delighted to read on several grammar sites that “truth be told” is considered old-fashioned and obsolete. Ironically, it seems to be getting increasingly popular. I’ve seen it in novels by authors who otherwise write well, and it stops me every time. It’s just as intrusive in any kind of nonfiction.

You never need to point out that you’re writing the truth. It’s a mistake to do so. (You should always tell the truth, right?)

Also, you begin a sentence passively when you use this phrase. Truth be told, you don’t need it.

When all is said and done

This is a meaningless phrase. All is never said and done. You can always find more to do or say.

If one is using it to mean, “In conclusion,” use the latter phrase because it has validity. You’re indicating that you’ve come to the end of your argument or thesis.

In the end

This phrase is a companion to the one above. It’s equally unnecessary and exemplifies lazy writing.

Weak: *In the end, they agreed that getting married wouldn't work for them.*

Stronger: *They discussed the question of marriage for days and decided that it wouldn't work for them.*

There are

This phrase tempts me a lot. It's another lazy one. It's an easy way to lead into a sentence, but it's another filler phrase. It employs a passive voice and the deceptive "there," which should usually refer to a location.

Weak: *There are many ways to begin a sentence.*

Stronger: *You can use a number of catchy phrases to begin a sentence.*

Basically

You may notice that in these selections, most of the words begin sentences. Again, this reflects lazy writing. "Basically" resembles "actually" in that it says very little. These words simply take up space that belongs to more vivid language.

Starting to / Beginning to

For a long time, I used both phrases unquestioningly. I finally realized they both had a tentative quality. Why am I starting, for example, to question the value of these phrases?

I'm not starting; I'm questioning. Eliminating "starting" and "beginning" gives a complete feeling to a statement.

For All Intensive Purposes

Someone may have intensive purposes, but they have nothing to do with this phrase.

The correct usage is "for all intents and purposes." While we're on the subject, though, I don't recommend using this phrase either. What does it mean? Nothing. It's another filler phrase that has snuck into the language. Let it sneak out.

Irregardless

There is no such word. Don't use it. Please.

Reminder

Don't edit as you write. Don't pare down your words until you've reached the revision stage. Then get ruthless. Develop a healthy suspicion about your writing. Practice learning to make each word earn its place.

You could come to enjoy it.

CHAPTER 49

How to Proofread Your Work

HAVE YOU EVER made a cringe-worthy typo? I have. Embarrassing typos reflect on your expertise. Knowing how to proofread your work product makes the difference between something that makes you ashamed and something that makes you proud.

Sound harsh? There are a lot of typos in everyday signs, on the internet and in ads – who cares? Your readers do.

Google also cares. Websites with typos get lower rankings.

Having said that, no one is perfect. My goal is to be as clear and accurate as possible. I use some techniques to proofread that you might find valuable.

Proofread when you are fresh. Is this when you first wake up? Right after dinner? Do this work when you are most alert and able to focus.

Avoid last-minute proofing. Whenever possible, walk away from it and look at it again the next day. Allow your material to settle overnight before you look at it again.

Print it out. It is easier for most writers to spot errors on paper rather than on a monitor. Get out the red pen and go to work.

I'm going to assume for these tips that you are writing a report. **Look at it in stages.** For example, you might first read the body of the report for typos that spell check does not catch. You know those pesky ones, like *int he*, and *form* versus *from* and *trial* versus *trail*. When a hotel catering department employee documented the trail attorneys were coming to the facility, she ordered fake trees and leaves to make them feel at home. Imagine the surprise of the trial attorneys when they walked into that setting.

That is my next point. You may habitually make the same mistakes. **Look for the words you commonly misspell.**

After looking at the body of the report, **look at the headers.** Make sure you are consistently capitalizing the major words in your headers. If you use subheads, the first word of the subhead is capitalized.

Look for consistency. One of the common errors I have seen is people not being consistent in writing dates. Pick one method and stick with it. Either write out the month in letters or use numbers, but don't use both systems in one document.

Look for what I call **idiosyncratic capitalization**. Know and follow the rules of capitalization.

Have someone else with excellent proofreading skills read your material— a spouse, trusted friend — just to get a different perspective and to make sure you did not miss anything obvious. Hire an editor, as I recommend in the next chapter.

People are very touchy about wanting their names to be spelled and pronounced correctly. Just yesterday someone called me Mrs. Iyler. I really dislike being called Mrs. Lyer. What a bad name for an expert witness!

CHAPTER 50

What Kind of Editor Do You Need?

SSOME WRITERS, THOSE who have just begun the process, know that they need editors. Others, who have a little more experience, may question that need. “I know how to spell and punctuate,” they say. “I have good grammar skills.”

Editing, though, involves much more. Think about your home and car. How much of the work needed for maintenance and repair do you do yourself? For how much do you hire professionals?

An editor, in any of the categories I describe below, has a professional ability to make your manuscript shine.

To simplify these descriptions, I’m taking the example of a nonfiction book, although these forms of editing can also apply to fiction, blog posts, marketing materials, and other forms of writing.

At What Stage is Your Project?

- Have you ever started this kind of project before?
- Do you have an idea you want to develop?
- Do you have a rough draft?
- Have you finished a manuscript?
- Do you feel stuck at any stage of the writing?

Developmental Editing

In the early stages of a writing project, consider hiring a developmental editor to lend structure or organization. Say, for example, you want to share the lessons you've learned in building a business. Maybe you can't decide whether to have the lessons unfold in within the context of telling your life story (autobiography) or to tuck the autobiographical elements within the format of each lesson.

A developmental editor can help you make these decisions and break your information into individual elements so they can be best organized.

This kind of editor may work with you from the beginning to the end of the project.

Developmental editors go much deeper into changing the manuscript. If you think of proofreaders and copy editors as doing cosmetic surgery, developmental editors do major surgery. They may recommend major changes in the structure of a book or suggest the author add chapters or

sections. Developmental editors may entirely restructure a book to help it reach its fullest potential.

Content Editor

This editor will evaluate your manuscript and make suggestions for changes that can be minor or major. This may involve fine-tuning, the smoothness of flow from one topic to the next. If you've inadvertently repeated a story in Chapter 11 that you told in Chapter 2, the content editor should catch that. He or she gives your book a macroscopic (looking at the larger aspects) polish.

Line Editor

This editor provides the microscopic polish. She or he looks for clichés, poor pacing, run-on or overly long sentences, overuse of passive voice, incorrect word usage, and other errors. This kind of editing does not officially include grammar and punctuation.

Copy-editing and Proofreading

From my viewpoint, most of the differences between these forms of editing are too minor to be noted. This editor works on punctuation, grammar, and spelling. While **copy editors** check for errors, his or her work doesn't represent the final stage of checking. They are focused on stylistic issues such as doing rewrites if needed to fix problems with transitions. They edit for wordiness, clichés, repetition, factual errors, and to ensure the style of writing is consistent throughout the work.

Proofreaders go through a manuscript for typographical, spelling, and grammatical errors. This is typically the last stage of preparing a work for publication. They check the overall appearance of the pages before printing, looking for unintentional space, missing titles, incorrectly numbered pages, and related issues. If they see typos and other errors, they will mark them for correction.

You may end up needing all these professionals in the course of your publishing journey in order to ensure that your book is as good as it can be.

I have experience writing or editing over 800 books, chapters, case studies, online courses or articles, writing thousands of blog posts, and editing thousands of expert witness reports. That is a lot of time spent with a red pen! Contact me through patiyer.com.

CHAPTER 51

What to Expect When You Work with a Ghostwriter

WHEN YOU THINK about having a book written about yourself, you may ask: “How do they do it? How does someone who doesn’t know me write a book that sounds as if I wrote it?”

This important question underlines the importance of choosing a talented, empathetic ghostwriter. In order to succeed, the ghostwriter must deliver the kind of authenticity that makes sure your voice is part of what they write. How does the expert do this?

She Asks Questions

Before you begin working together, she will probably ask you questions like this:

- Could you describe the book you would like to write?
- Why does this appeal to you?
- Have you begun?

- When would you like to see the book in print?
- Why are you considering hiring a ghostwriter?
- What are your publishing plans? Traditional? If so, what kind, i.e., a business press, a more general publisher? Would you prefer to self-publish?
- Who do you see as your audience? Why will your book appeal to them?

She Gets to Know Your Voice

The ghostwriter who does a thorough job will study your online presence. This could involve YouTube clips, including speeches you may have given at conferences, tweets, Facebook posts, and any blog posts you've written. This will give her a good feel for your voice and speech mannerisms.

During your work together, much of which will consist of phone interviews, she will be constantly honing her awareness of how you express yourself. She will note key phrases you use in speech, whether you speak in long or short sentences, and other characteristic features. She will immerse herself in your style of expression.

She Will Do Additional Research

She will carefully study your business, especially your corporate web site. The conscientious ghostwriter will pay special attention to your passions and interests. She will read any biographical information available about you.

By the time the ghostwriter has finished the manuscript, she will have worked hard to create a book that has your personality imprinted within it. If you have chosen an editor to do the final version, introduce them to each other. The ghostwriter can explain the details that make this *your* book. A good relationship between these two people so important to your book can smooth the path to publication.

Consider the Above as a Checklist

When you're choosing among candidates to ghostwrite your book, ask them how they do their work. If their answers don't cover the bases described in this chapter, you may want to reconsider.

To understand what a ghostwriter does, it helps to understand what she does not do.

Ghostwriters aren't proofreaders, copy editors, or developmental editors, although some ghostwriters perform all these services as well.

The Role of the Ghostwriter

None of the editors I described in Chapter 50 *write the book*. That's what a ghostwriter does. He or she writes books and may do supplemental research.

Ghostwriters *do not* provide the facts, the expertise, or the advice in a book. They take data and turn it into a manuscript, saving the author hundreds of hours of time.

They may provide this service for articles, blogs, nonfiction and fiction books or memoirs. They may write website or marketing copy. A ghostwriter provides these services for those who either don't consider themselves competent writers or who don't have the time to write.

For example, one of my clients is a person in the same field I built a business in for 28 years. She hires me to write 4 blogs a month for her, which she shares with her clients.

How Common Is It for an Author to Work With a Ghostwriter?

These are some celebrities who've hired ghostwriters: Richard Branson, Stephen Covey, Beyonce, Lance Armstrong, Hillary Clinton, Donald Trump, many CEOs, and athletes.

Sometimes ghostwriters are named on the cover or in the acknowledgments of the book. Depending on the agreement, they will either write under the client's name or be credited on the book, such as Greg Williams with Pat Iyer, or "as told to" or "edited by."

Some ghostwriters receive no recognition and sign nondisclosure agreements that prohibit them from revealing their involvement or how much they were paid to write a book. Because of this, it's difficult to know how many books are ghostwritten. Estimates are that up to 60% of the books on the nonfiction best seller lists are ghostwritten.

Many factors go into making a good writer, but the career of ghostwriter has some very special demands. Make sure the person you choose answers your questions—and your needs.

The client who hires a ghostwriter is still the author and responsible for the content and expertise shared in the book.

Does this intrigue you? Use our contact form on Patiyer.com to request a time to talk with Pat Iyer about your book – the one trapped in your head that you want to share with the world.

CHAPTER 52

What are the Pros and Cons of Working with a Ghostwriter?

If the idea of being a published author without needing to write the book appeals to you, consider hiring a ghostwriter like me. I'll share the pros and cons, but in reverse order.

Cons

1. **You need to make an investment**, which can range from \$20,000 to a \$100,000 or more. According to *Writer's Market*, hiring a ghostwriter for a book that includes the writer's name on the cover ranges from \$22,800 to \$80,000. If no credit is given, that range jumps from \$36,200 to \$100,000. These estimates can vary based on the complexity and length of the book.

Hourly rates are around \$100 an hour for researching, writing, emails, phone calls, and so on.

In calculating what your return will be, don't count on huge sales unless you're a celebrity or for other reasons have a large following. Think of how having a published book can enhance your business in terms of getting public speaker offers, being an expert, and drawing new clients to yourself. The rewards can be great.

- 2. It can take up to six months to write your book.** Great ghostwriters dedicate a lot of their time to your book. It is not easy to be a great ghostwriter. Those with skill who can write well and in another's voice are at the top of the game.
- 3. You must choose the right ghostwriter.** This means not only one who is highly rated and recommended but who is right for you. A sound decision can make the difference between a fantastic or a mediocre book. You're making a big investment, and it does have its risks—even if you choose a good ghostwriter. A ghostwriter cannot offer a money-back guarantee because she'd be setting herself up for endless revisions from the people who are never satisfied. You pay for the ghostwriter's time.
- 4. You will need to be involved to a degree.** It is a fantasy to think you can hire a person, have a conversation with her, and then walk away from the project with expectations that the book will get written without further involvement on your part. The ghostwriter will need to ask you questions in structured interviews. You will be supplying content, reviewing, and proof-reading drafts of content.
- 5. Remember, it's your book.** Ideally, you want this involvement. Even if you're not doing the actual writing, the content is yours. If you fully own it, you'll make a big contribution to the quality of the product.
- 6. Creating the manuscript is the first step in your book production.** Ghostwriters typically do not create covers, print or market your book. You may need an editor or proofreader to have another set of eyes on the manuscript. You'll need to manage the book launch.

Pros

- 1. The ghostwriter helps to provide clarification for the author.** You may have a lot of ideas but are unsure about how to organize them. You might overlook important elements of the story you want to tell. By asking questions, the ghostwriter can stimulate your thinking so that you can expand on your original ideas. Through this deep level of engagement, you and the ghostwriter get to know each other, which helps to provide the basis for a strong collaboration.
- 2. Through these conversations, the ghostwriter learns your voice.** The transcripts provide further information in that they demonstrate your phrasing, ideas, and mannerisms. A skilled ghostwriter will weave these into the finished product.
- 3. The ghostwriter saves you a huge amount of time,** which is the primary reason for hiring one. For example, I recorded 90 minutes of answers to questions with one author, which resulted in 14-16 hours of editing work for me. Imagine not having to spend that time yourself, and instead investing it into your business.
- 4. You don't have to learn how to write a book.** Many books and courses have been created about how to write a book for an excellent reason. No one was born with this skill. Those who acquire it are often long-time and enthusiastic readers. Not only do they love a great story, they love language. They are *readers*, and they bring their love of reading to writing. This is a description of the best ghostwriters.
- 5. You will get your book done** – that book may be sitting in your head for years. “One day I’ll write my book...” Recall the statistic of 81% of Americans want

to write a book, some will start it, and less than 1% will get it completed. Often it is because they lack the time, discipline or knowledge of how to write a book. One of the most frustrating experiences is the regret over a dream unfulfilled.

6. **Your book will get done faster than if you tried to write it.** Experienced ghostwriters have systems that streamline the process.
7. **Your ghostwriter enjoys writing and editing.** You may not. You might rather do something else than sit at a keyboard. Your ghostwriter likes that space.

A ghostwriter helps you achieve the thrill of being an author, without the extensive time commitment needed to write. If this appeals to you, let's talk. Contact me through patiyer.com to see if we are a good fit to work together.

Thank you for going on this journey with me. I wish you much success in your writing.

Please Write a Review

When you enjoy a book, it is a natural desire to tell others about it. Amazon.com provides a way to share your thoughts and I invite you to write a book review. It is easy. Here are tips:

1. On Amazon.com, click on the drop down menu and select the book category, and then enter these words in the search bar: 52 Writing Tips + Iyer. That should bring you to the page that displays this book. Click on my book image to get to the product page.
2. Scroll down until you see a bar that says, “Write a customer review.”
3. Assign several stars to the book - that match your opinion of the book.
4. Create a **title** for the review. This can be a simple phrase, like “Awesome Tip Book.” If you are not sure what to say, look at the titles of other book reviews.
5. It is easiest to write the book in a **word processor** and then paste it into Amazon.com. Your word processor will pick up typos before your review goes public.
6. Write the review as if you were **talking to another person** – you are – a person who comes to Amazon.com and is considering buying this book.

7. Include a description of what you found **most helpful**. Was it an idea, chapter, tip? Share that with the readers.
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Here are some sample phrases:

- *While overall the book was good, I would change it by. . .*
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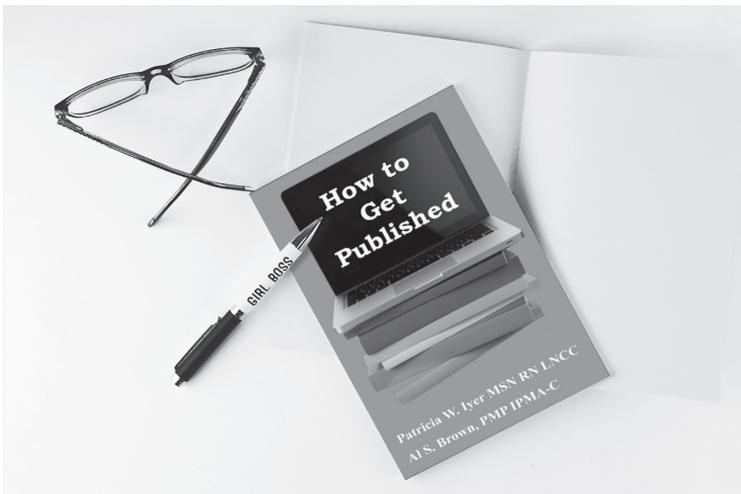
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Appendix A: Improving Your Writing Skills

Appendix B: Resources

Appendix C: Author Guidelines

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