

Writing Tips

An eNewsletter Dedicated to Helping Businesspeople Write Smarter and Faster

Significantly Improve Your Writing by Focusing on a Few Simple Rules

When I speak to businesspeople about improving their writing skills, few have a clear idea of what to do or where to start. As a branch of learning, the subject of writing seems boundless and amorphous, with so many areas to master that the task seems impossible even if you did know where to begin.

Help is here. By focusing on just a few key concepts—which will be discussed in this issue and future ones—businesspeople can see a significant improvement in their writing skills. One of those concepts is conciseness.

Writing Mantra

Yes, you say, that's nothing new. "Write clearly and concisely" is a mantra repeated in every writing class, workshop, and textbook in the English-writing world. But that's precisely the problem. People have heard the phrase so often that it's become a cliché that goes in one ear and out the other.

Why is learning to write concisely a key concept that will dramatically improve your writing? Because many wondrous things happen as a result of writing briefly and to the point. Here's an analogy.

Basketball Connection

A good friend of mine signed up for a weeklong basketball camp run by a star in the National Basketball Association (NBA). My friend, I'll call him Ed, set two goals: to be the top scorer and the top rebounder at the end of the week. But by the end of the first day, Ed knew his goals were out of reach.

There were lots of good players in camp, and no matter how hard he tried, scoring points and grabbing rebounds wasn't easy. The pro took Ed aside and told him he was working way too hard. He told him to forget about scoring and rebounding and focus instead on being first under the basket each time down the court.

That was it. That was the grand strategy, the insider advice from one of the top players in the NBA: Be first under the basket. It seemed too simplistic. But it worked. At the end of camp, Ed won the trophy for top scorer and second place for rebounding. Here's why.

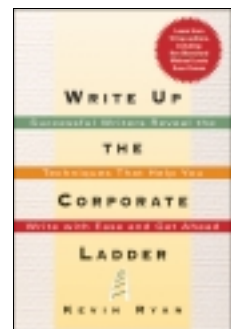
Scoring points while five opposing players are trying to take the ball away from you requires mastering a variety of skills: working through a double-team, dribbling in a crowd, making hook shots, fadeaways, screens, and much more. Your mind is processing a million thoughts a second. The game becomes fast and confusing.

Focus on the Simple and Doable

Scoring points with no opposing players around you involves two skills: wind sprints (so you can be first under the basket) and lay-ups, the easiest shot in the game. The pro reminded my friend to focus on the simple and doable.

In This Issue

- Significantly Improve Your Writing Skills
- Writing Tip
- Writing & Business Resources
- Fun Facts
- Wacky & Wise Websites
- Word of the Day
- Word Origins
- Executive Writer Hotline
- Executive Writer Courses
- Client List
- Contact Us



The business-writing book, *Write Up the Corporate Ladder* by Kevin Ryan, is available on Amazon.com for **30% off** and qualifies for **free shipping**. For details >> [Click Here](#)

"Professionals everywhere should soon be singing the praises of the straightforward, common-sense advice imparted ... in *Write Up the Corporate Ladder*. Void of the antiquated, worn out writing adages we've had our fill of, it's a fresh look at what experts concur is one of the most essential skills in business today."

Robin Hendricks, M.Ad.Ed.
Managing Editor, Medical
Education Broadcast Network

The same is true with the concept of writing concisely. When you focus on that, many other writing problems take care of themselves. For example, if you write fewer words, you will make fewer grammar, spelling and punctuation errors. If you make fewer mechanical errors, you will spend less time editing and proofreading your drafts.

When you write fewer words, any gaps in your logic or arguments will stand out like a beacon, and it will be easier to repair those gaps. When your final draft is as concise as it can be, your ideas are easier to see and understand, your line of reasoning is crystal clear, and, therefore, everything you write is more persuasive. Concise documents have a professional yet friendly tone and style, so you don't have to worry about "creating" the right style; it will just happen when you focus on writing succinctly.

Look Smart on Paper

By concentrating on this one simple concept instead of many complex ones, you will accomplish all the goals good writers hope to achieve with every piece they write: clarity of your ideas, persuasive reasoning, professional tone, fewer mechanical errors, less time spent writing and proofreading.

But how do you write concisely? How do you know what to cut and what to leave? How do you make these decisions and know when to stop? For people with well-developed Writer's Intuitions and good writing instincts, this isn't a problem. Others can inquire about The Executive Writer Business Writing Workshop where this process is taught using examples, exercises, instructor and peer feedback, so you leave knowing exactly what to do. Learning how to write concisely takes practice, but it's a skill that will pay dividends for the rest of your business career by making writing less of a chore and making you look smart, professional, and decisive on paper. **KR**

Fun Facts



- > Barbie's full name is Barbara Millicent Roberts.
- > Most dust particles in your house are made from dead skin.
- > The plastic things on the end of shoelaces are called aglets.
- > The first owner of the Marlboro Company died of lung cancer.
- > Apples, not caffeine, are more efficient at waking you up in the morning.
- > The 57 on the Heinz ketchup bottle represents the number of varieties of pickles the company once sold.
- > What is a *shebeen*: an Irish dancer, priestess associated with ancient dolmen burial tombs, an illegal public house, or an Irish pikestaff? (Answer on p.3)

Writing Tip: Dust Off Your Thesaurus



When writing letters, reports, memos and other business correspondence that centers on one specific topic, you will often notice that a single word—like *affect*, *provide*, *professional*, etc.—will appear again and again throughout the text. It's key to your message, but when you read your draft out loud, that one repeated word becomes trite-sounding, even boring and distracting. That's when you should fire up your word-processing thesaurus (under the Tools menu) or pull the dusty little *Roget's Thesaurus* paperback off your bookshelf and find one or two

Word Origins

The phrase **think outside the box** refers to a puzzle made up of nine dots arranged in a square grid. The goal is to connect all nine dots with four straight lines drawn continuously without removing your pen from the paper. The solution requires some of the lines to extend beyond the border of the grid or box. Management consultants used this puzzle in the 1970s to demonstrate the need to discard unwarranted assumptions, like the assumption that the lines must remain within the grid.

SATisfy Your Curiosity

Test your skills by answering this sample question from the SAT exam. Fill in the two blanks: Despite their ___ proportions, the murals of Diego Rivera give his Mexican compatriots the sense that their history is ___ and human in scale, not remote and larger than life. (Answer p. 4)

1. focused : prolonged
2. monumental : accessible
3. realistic : extraneous
4. vast : ancient
5. narrow : overwhelming

replacement words to sprinkle throughout your text. (The word *thesaurus* is the Latin version of the Greek word *thesauros*, which means treasure.)

Word of the Day



superfluous (soo-PER-floo-us) adjective

1. exceeding what is sufficient or necessary; extra; not needed.

“Keith noted that section two in the marketing report was superfluous, so he deleted it during the edit stage.” Want a new word each day? >> [Click Here](#)

Wacky & Wise Websites



>> [Click Here](#) Your first stop in any Internet health search. This site is sponsored by the National Institute of Health and its National Library of Medicine, the world’s largest medical library.

>> [Click Here](#) This *Wall Street Journal* website has all the information you need to know to start a small business.

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Writing & Business Resources



>> [Click Here](#) Before renewing your business magazine subscriptions, check out the low rates here.

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The Executive Writer Courses



The Executive Writer offers two foundational courses, **The Business Writing Workshop** and **The Grammar Workshop**. We also offer **One-on-One** and **Small-Group Tutorials** for businesspeople who prefer a private

course that fits their busy schedules. In addition, using the The Business Writing Workshop and The Grammar Workshop as starting points, we develop **Custom Courses**, such as How to Write Articles for Publication in Industry Magazines or The Grammar Workshop for PR Specialists. For more information, please contact info@executivewriter.com.

The Executive Writer Hotline

If you have a question about grammar, punctuation, word usage, clarity of a sentence, or any other writing issue, get free answers ASAP by sending your questions to:

info@executivewriter.com

Irish Quiz

A shebeen is an illegal public house.

Partial Client List

Children's Miracle Network
 Lucent Technologies
 Motorola
 Novell, Inc.
 Procter & Gamble
 Prometric/Thompson Learning
 Salt Lake Chamber of Commerce
 United Way
 U.S. Food and Drug Administration

"Thanks very much for being an asset to our annual Communications & Public Affairs Training Program. You know you were dubious about attending a writing workshop but felt obligated to do so, and then afterwards were able to say, hand on heart, that the session was stimulating and thought-provoking.... Thanks so much for making the session come to life and getting people to think about how they express themselves in the written form."

Shelagh Lester-Smith
 Vice President and Director of Corporate
 Communications and Public Affairs, **Motorola**

Speaking Engagements



Hire author Kevin Ryan, Ph.D., to speak at your next conference, training session, or business function. His keynote, **How Good Writing Develops Good Thinkers Who Are Great for Business**, includes writing tips that participants can apply the moment they leave the room, plus information on the connection between clear writing and clear thinking that can help your business. Please contact Kevin directly at kevin@executivewriter.com. Topics can also be customized to address your organization's specific writing needs. For Kevin's bio >> [Click Here](#)

Steal This Stuff



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SAT Answer

monumental : accessible

SAT-rated difficulty level:
 Medium



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