Just Write!

The first commandment of good writing is... to just *write*! Yep, there is no process to go through, no courses to get through, no moment of inspiration that will strike you all of a sudden. The important thing to remember here is that you are getting your thoughts out of your head and onto a paper or a document. This is the first and most important step.

Now, let's look at some steps to structure your writing better.

1. ## Put everything in your first draft.

   Do **not** edit while writing your first draft. Put all your thoughts on the topic down.

2. ## Try *this hack* for structuring your content.

   Write **blocks of content**, of one paragraph each, on each of the points you want to elaborate upon. **Number** these paragraphs 1, 2, 3, etc. You can then **move these blocks around** to create a visual structure of how you want your content to flow.

   > **Here is a real-life example of how Nobel Prize-winning author Kazuo Ishiguro uses this technique in his writing:** I have two desks. One has a writing slope and the other has a computer on it. The computer dates from 1996. It’s not connected to the Internet. I prefer to work by pen on my writing slope for the initial drafts. I want it to be more or less illegible to anyone apart from myself. The rough draft is a big mess. I pay no attention to anything to do with style or coherence. I just need to get everything down on paper. If I’m suddenly struck by a new idea that doesn’t fit with what’s gone before, I’ll still put it in. I just make a note to go back and sort it all out later. Then I plan the whole thing out from that. I number sections and move them around. By the time I write my next draft, I have a clearer idea of where I’m going. This time round, I write much more carefully. . . . I rarely go beyond the third draft. Having said that, there are individual passages that I’ve had

> to write over and over again. *—from an interview with The Paris Review*
>
> .

3. ## One **common writing block** that people run into

I wrote 100 words, and don't know what more to add! What you need is a few questions you can answer to fill out those blank spaces. What questions, you ask.
If you are stuck and cannot think, or if you just want to save some time, generative AI can come to your rescue. Ask an AI tool like Gemini or ChatGPT to give you questions to write a better article/blog post. Make your prompt as detailed as you can.
For instance, if I were to ask Gemini to help me out with questions with building a blog post on good writing for non-profits, this is the prompt I would use:

> “I am writing a blog post on good writing hacks and techniques. This blog post is primarily intended for those working in communications in the non-profit sector, but may also include change makers and others who do not have an inclination for, or any training, in writing. Please help me with a set of questions to structure this post better.

Here is the response Gemini gave me:

Questions to Structure Your Blog Post on Good Writing Hacks and Techniques

Here are some questions to help you structure your blog post and ensure it provides valuable insights for non-profit communicators and change makers:

Understanding Your Audience

- Who is your target audience? (e.g., non-profit professionals, volunteers, donors)
- What are their writing challenges or goals? (e.g., crafting compelling grant proposals, writing engaging social media posts)

Essential Writing Principles

- What are the fundamental principles of good writing? (e.g., clarity, conciseness, coherence)
- How can these principles be applied to non-profit writing?

Practical Tips and Techniques

- What are some practical tips for improving writing skills? (e.g., active vs. passive voice, avoiding jargon, using strong verbs)
- How can these techniques be used to enhance the impact of non-profit communications?

Specific Writing Scenarios

- What are common writing scenarios in the non-profit sector? (e.g., press releases, newsletters, grant proposals)
- What specific tips or techniques can be applied to these scenarios?

Storytelling and Engagement

- How can storytelling be used to connect with audiences and drive action?
- What are effective techniques for creating engaging content?

Tools and Resources

- What are some helpful writing tools or resources? (e.g., style guides, online writing courses)
- How can these resources be used to improve writing skills?

Overcoming Writer's Block

- What are common causes of writer's block?
- How can writers overcome writer's block and keep their creativity flowing?

Examples and Case Studies

- Can you provide examples of effective non-profit writing?
- What can readers learn from these examples?

By addressing these questions, you can create a comprehensive and informative blog post that empowers non-profit communicators and change makers to improve their writing skills and achieve their goals.

As you can see, this has given me input to build not one, but multiple blog posts, if needed.

4. ## If you are writing in English, use active voice as much as possible.

It suggests action and keeps the reader engaged.

Active Voice:

- The subject of the sentence *does* the action.
- Example: "The dog chased the cat."

Passive Voice:

- The subject of the sentence *receives* the action.
- Example: "The cat was chased by the dog."

Why is active voice generally preferred?

- It's clearer and more direct.
- It often makes your writing more engaging.

When might you use passive voice?

- When you don't know who did the action.
- When you want to emphasize the object of the action.

Active voice	**Passive voice**
She is singing a song.	A song is being sung by her.
K is walking a dog.	A dog is being walked by K.
B cooked tonight's dinner.	Tonight's dinner was cooked by B.

Remember: Try to use active voice most of the time, but don't be afraid to use passive voice when it's appropriate. When in doubt, stick to active voice. You can use a tool like hemingwayapp to help you figure out if your sentences are in active/passive voice if you find it difficult to figure it out yourself.

5. ## Don't write run-on sentences.

These are long and confusing for readers.

Here's an example of a long, run-on sentence:

The cat, which was chasing the mouse, suddenly stopped and looked behind it, startled by the loud noise that was coming from the kitchen, where the dog had knocked over a bowl of food, which was now scattered all over the floor, attracting the attention of the flies that were buzzing around the window.

> **What can you do: Break it down into smaller sentences.**

The cat, which was chasing the mouse, suddenly stopped. It was startled by the loud noise coming from the kitchen. The dog had knocked over a bowl of food. The food was now scattered all over the floor, attracting a lot of flies that were now buzzing around the window.

6. Don't use sentence fragments.

A sentence is like a complete thought. It needs a beginning, middle, and end to make sense.

A sentence fragment is like a piece of a thought. It's missing something important, so it doesn't make full sense on its own.

Here's an example:

- **Complete sentence:** The cat chased the mouse.
- **Fragment:** Chased the mouse.

In the second example, "Chased the mouse" is missing the beginning part that tells us who chased the mouse. So, it's a fragment.

> **Here's an example of sentence fragments contributing to bad writing:**

The book was boring. No plot. Uninteresting characters. Didn't finish it.

While these fragments convey the message, they feel choppy and incomplete. Combining them into longer, more complex sentences can improve the flow and coherence of the writing.

>

> **Let's make this read better.**
>
> *The book was so boring that I didn't finish it. There was no compelling plot and the characters were uninteresting.*

7. Of sentences & paragraphs

Every sentence has to be a *complete thought*, and has to lead to the next sentence.
Each paragraph has to be a *complete idea*; it can have **as many sentences as needed** to convey that idea. Each paragraph also needs to lead to the next.
Use **subheadings** to club ideas together, and to indicate a change to another idea/topic in the piece.

8. Ready to step up your writing a notch?

Let's look at the next step to writing in a way that people want to keep reading. The human brain is easily bored. It does not want to keep looking at large chunks of text. You need to keep it engaged. And curious about what's coming next. One of the best ways you can do this is quite simple: *vary the length of the sentences in a paragraph*.
For example, just take a look at the paragraph above.

9. You can apply the same principle to paragraphs.

Use long, not-so-long and short paragraphs to create a nice rhythm for the reader.
Here's an example:
The cat sat on the windowsill, watching the birds flit from tree to tree. It was a sunny day, and the warmth of the sun felt good on its fur. The cat yawned and stretched, its claws digging into the soft cushion beneath it.

Suddenly, a small bird landed on the branch of a nearby tree. The cat's eyes narrowed. It crouched low, its muscles tense. The bird chirped nervously.

The cat pounced. The bird squawked and flapped its wings, but it was too late. The cat had caught it.

The cat sat proudly on the windowsill, its prey clutched in its claws. It had successfully

hunted down the bird, demonstrating its natural instincts and agility. The sun continued to shine, casting a warm glow on the scene. The cat's eyes, however, were focused on its prize, a small, feathered creature that would soon become its meal.

10. ## Inviting Titles, Crisp Intros

Titles should pull the reader into the story. These are best kept short and simple; try not to use big words. A good headline is ideally not more than 7-8 words (60-70 character). If this seems like a hard ask, you can always write an honest headline which gives the reader an idea of what you have written without telling the whole story.

Here are some examples:

Short and Simple:

- New Initiative Launched
- Volunteers Needed

Teasing and Intriguing:

- Can One Person Make a Difference?
- The Secret to Fundraising, Solved
- Is This the End of Migrant Issues?

Honest and Informative:

- Climate Action | It's Time to Do Your Bit for The Planet
- Creating New Generations of Tinkerers
- Enabling Better Digital Literacy

These are just examples. The best headline for your content will depend on the specific topic and the message you want to convey.

Let's try this exercise:

> Remember the topic you picked in the last chapter, and wrote a synopsis for?
> Let's write a **300-400 word blog post** on that topic. Every time you feel stuck or confused, go back to your synopsis for guidance.



Revision #12

Created 2024-09-23 10:03:21 UTC by Sumi

Updated 2024-12-19 07:15:27 UTC by Sumi