

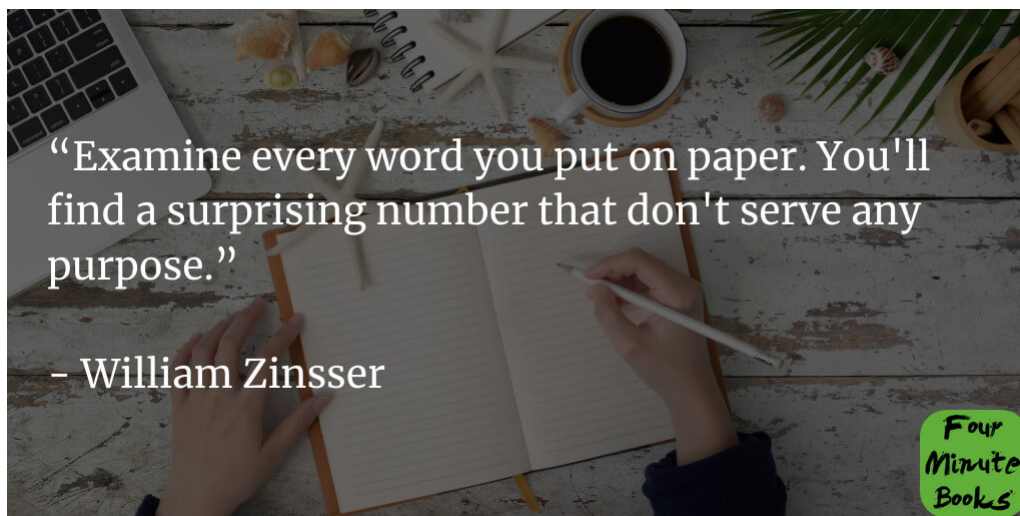
# On Writing Well Summary



**1-Sentence-Summary:** *On Writing Well* is your guide to becoming a great non-fiction writer that explains why you must learn and practice principles like simplicity, consistency, voice, editing, and enthusiasm if you want to persuade readers and make a difference in their lives.

**Read in:** 4 minutes

**Favorite quote from the author:**



In the last 24 months, I’ve written over 500,000 words. On many days, I sat in front of a blank screen, either not knowing what to write, or paralyzed by perfectionism.

Every one of those days, however, I made mistakes. Sometimes I allowed them to hold me back and others I let them slide. With each sentence I was becoming a better writer, but only because I’d learned the importance of intentional improvement.

At each step, my writing brought me opportunities that allowed me to become better at it. If it weren’t for trying to learn and practice the secrets to writing well, I would never have had those chances for success, but it took time and effort to get them.

It would have been much easier if I’d had a book like William Zinsser’s *On Writing Well: The Classic Guide to Writing Nonfiction* to teach me the skills to practice. With this book in your toolkit, you’ll become a great writer long before you ever thought possible!

Here’s a quick rundown of some of the best tips it teaches:

1. Simple writing conveys meaning the best, so ruthlessly eliminate unnecessary words and phrases.
2. Spend a lot of time crafting great beginnings and endings because they count more than you think.
3. If what you're writing doesn't inspire you, it won't inspire your reader, so make sure your heart is in your typing.

Let's get right to these lessons and learn how to become better writers!

## **Lesson 1: Cut out unnecessary words and phrases as much as possible because simple writing is the best at conveying meaning.**

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Of all the lectures I participated in throughout college, one stands out every time I think about great writing. The professor was telling us that you don't find good writing in fancy magazines like the *New York Times* and *Time*.

She told us the reason for this is that most people retain information best when reading at a fifth-grade reading level, and magazines like these are far above that.

**In essence, she was saying that complex writing is bad writing.**

It's easy to fall into the trap of over-complicating your words and phrases when you start out. You want to impress, but what you end up doing is making yourself unintelligible. If you're hoping to have any kind of impact, you don't want that.

To write clearly, think clearly. Declutter your mind as you write by focusing on what you're trying to say. When you're finished, edit each sentence and word by asking if you've said what you wanted to.

If anything you've got on the page doesn't contribute to a clear message, delete it. Instead of writing "in order to" just write "to." Stop saying verbose phrases like "at this juncture" when people will understand and relate to you better if you just say "now."

As Stephen King famously said:

"Kill your darlings."

## **Lesson 2: Your beginnings and endings make a big difference for reader engagement, so spend time making them great.**

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One of my high school teachers was well-known for saying "you never get a second chance to make a good first impression." The more I thought about it the more I grew to like this piece of wisdom. Especially for how it applies to writing.

If your intro is terrible, nobody will keep reading no matter how brilliant, interesting, or thought-provoking the rest of the piece is. You might as well be a person wearing a fedora in their Tinder profile picture!

Try making the first sentence something that makes people stop and think. Some of my favorite writers like to use statements that contradict widely-held beliefs. Alternatively, you can craft a persuasive story, personal or otherwise, to hook readers.

**No matter how you do it, the introduction must show people what's in it for them.** Put yourself in their shoes and consider what would appeal to them the most. What would you want to read? Give them a taste of that right from the start.

Also, make sure to end each paragraph with something interesting to make the reader want to continue. Think of it like the end of an episode of your favorite TV show. When my wife and I were watching *Lost*, it was hard to stop at just one episode because they always hooked us in at the end! Do the same in your writing.

When it's time to conclude, don't summarize too much. Review everything briefly, recap the benefits to the reader, and wrap it up!

### **Lesson 3: Inspire yourself with your writing and you will inspire those who read it.**

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You can practice the skills we've covered so far and all of the others in this book and you'll write well. But if you don't learn to get your heart into it, your readers won't connect with your words. It takes enjoyment, confidence, and inspiration, but it's not easy.

Your conditioning from school makes it difficult to be inspired as you write. You were taught to be afraid of writing. That it was something you had to do to get a grade.

And forget about writing what you wanted, you always had to stick to the prompts.

You can unlearn all of this and discover the joy of writing though. Start by remembering that you need to be inspired by life to be inspired as you write. **Be adventurous, ask questions, and keep an open mind.**

You'll meet people and have experiences that will light a fire inside that you can share in your work.

Also, remember to follow your passions without worrying about what you or others will think. If you're passionate about what you're writing, that will shine through and your readers will feel it. Then it will have an impact on them and they'll keep coming back for more.

I know I could write a more interesting piece on caterpillars than celebrities, for example, because I love raising caterpillars but don't care about famous people much.

Write about what you enjoy and enjoy what you write about and others will love reading your work.

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## **On Writing Well Review**

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I love writing and reading books that help me become a better writer. *On Writing Well* is refreshing because it goes beyond the typical writing advice you usually hear. It gives tips that will inspire you to do what's really necessary to become a great writer.

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## **Who would I recommend the On Writing Well summary to?**

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The 28-year-old that is just getting started on their writing journey, the 45-year-old blogger who is looking to write their first book, and anyone that wants to become a master at communicating with words on a page.