

Business writing is a superpower.

But schools and employers do a horrible job teaching people to write.

In 1981, two advertising executives wrote a timeless guide for how to write in the business world.

And here are 12 of their tips you should staple to your desktop:

586 Retweets **69** Quote Tweets **3,099** Likes

The goal of your writing is effective communication - writing that *works*

Busy people read what you write.

So you are more useful to them when your writing takes up less of their time.

The goal: invest the time to write well now to save others time in the future.

Clearly organize your writing.

Writing well means thinking well.

- Start with an outline
- State your objective
- List out your main points

Then, number and underline your main points to guide the reader.

And finally, end with a summary.

Copy and paste this formula.

Open with short paragraphs and short sentences.

Crack open the Wall Street Journal and read the top three stories.

I bet they all start with one or two sentences.

The goal of your first sentence: get the reader to read your second sentence.

NEVER open with a Wall of Text.

1

A wall of text is an excessively long post to a noticeboard or talk page discussion. Some walls are intentionally disruptive, such as when an editor attempts to overwhelm a discussion with a massive irrelevant kilobytes. Other walls are due to lack of awareness of good practices, such as when an editor tries to cram every one of their cogent points into a single comprehensive response that is roughly the length of a short novel. Not all long posts are walls of text; some can be nuanced and thoughtful. Just remember: the longer it is, the less of it people will read. The chunk-o'text defense (COTD) is an alleged wikilawyering strategy whereby an editor accused of wrongdoing defends their actions with a giant chunk of text that contains so many diffs, assertions, examples, and allegations as to be virtually unanswerable. However, an equal-but-opposite questionable strategy is dismissal of legitimate evidence and valid rationales with a claim of "text-walling" or "TL;DR". Not every matter can be addressed with a one-liner, and validity does not correspond to length, especially the more complex the matter is. The COTD is characterized by noise and hand-waving, not simply verbosity. The massive wall of text (MWOT) often appears in disputes and bombards you with so much information and underhanded hostility that it's almost impossible to keep up without replying with one of your own. They are a good indication that people are talking past each other. Common features include: New arguments unrelated to the matter at hand, Already-discussed arguments, Giant paragraphs that never really come to a point, Thinly-veiled personal attacks, Sarcasm, The rush you feel through your veins as you type it. Pointing out to someone that they're text-walling only shows that you don't care for their opinion, or that you're averse to nuance. Similarly, linking to this page in response to a massive wall of text is just a cudgel to use against your opponents. This may be true, because there is a genuine difference between a massive wall of text and a well-reasoned, nuanced argument. Expect to hear that all massive walls of text are in fact well-reasoned, nuanced arguments.

The only known cure is to not write them.

Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Wall_of_text

Use short words.

The goal here isn't to make your writing shorter.

The goal is to reduce friction.

Short words are easier to speak. And since your reader is **speaking** the words in their head as they read, you can make it easy for them.

Here are some easy fixes:

Prefer this...

Now

Start

Show

Finish

Speed up, move along

Use

Place, put

...to this

Currently

Initiate

Indicate

Finalize

Expedite

Utilize

Position

Use adjectives and adverbs for precision, not exclamation points.

Cut *lazy* words like very, great, awfully, and basically. These do nothing for you.

But use vigorous ones to sharpen your point:

- Tiny raise
- Moist handshake
- Crisply presented
- Baffling instructions

Use down-to-earth language and avoid jargon.

People use jargon thinking it shows off what they know.

But they really use it to hide their lack of understanding.

An easy fix: use the Feynman Technique.

When explaining something, pretend you are explaining it to a sixth grader.

Be specific.

Your biggest writing weakness: using generalities.

Don't make the reader guess.

"Our campaign was a great success and we came in under budget"



"We increased click-through rates by 21% while spending 19% less than expected."

Choose the right word.

- it's ≠ its
- into ≠ in to
- affect ≠ effect
- principal ≠ principle
- indifferent ≠ disinterested

When you confuse words like these, your reader may conclude you don't know any better.

And illiteracy does not breed respect.

Make your writing perfect.

- No typos
- No misspelling
- No errors in numbers or data

There are no excuses for these, especially with tools like Grammarly.

Spend the extra five minutes to make these fixes.

Or spend \$5 per month and let software solve them for you.

Get to the point.

Take the time to build down what you have to say.

Then, express it confidently in simple, declarative sentences.

Especially in memos and emails, put your declaration in the subject line or as the first line.

Let your reader know exactly where you're going.

Write the way you talk. Naturally.

People think the written language and the spoken language are different.

They aren't.

- Choose a topic
- Write a paragraph about it
- Then, record yourself talking about it

Iterate until these match up.

Remove the words you don't need.

- In order to → to
- Take action → act
- In the event of → if
- Equally as → equally
- Advance plan → plan
- For the purpose of → to
- At this point in time → now


Business writing, simplified:

- Be specific
- Avoid jargon
- Don't mumble
- Get to the point
- Use short words
- Organize clearly
- Write how you talk
- Create a banned words list
- Use adjectives and adverbs for precision

The best writers will shape the future.

Which is why clear writing is **the** highest-value skill you can learn.

And if you found these valuable:

1. Follow me here on LinkedIn for more writing posts – I'm Dickie Bush 
2. Like, share, and hit reply with your biggest takeaway!

Also! If you want more digital writing frameworks like this, subscribe to The Digital Writing Compass 👁👁

Digital writing tips, templates, and frameworks every Monday at 10 AM EST.

Join 37,120 prolific writers who call it "absurdly valuable."

digitalwritingcompass.com

THE DIGITAL WRITING COMPASS

WEEKLY, ACTIONABLE DIGITAL WRITING FRAMEWORKS

SHIP 30 FOR 30



DICKIE BUSH



NICOLAS COLE

**Also, pick up a copy and keep it on
your desk!**

COMPLETELY REVISED AND UPDATED THIRD EDITION

**"The Strunk and White of business writing."
—Louis Begley**

WRITING THAT WORKS

HOW TO COMMUNICATE
EFFECTIVELY IN BUSINESS

✧ e-mail ✧ letters ✧ memos
✧ presentations ✧ plans
✧ proposals ✧ reports
✧ speeches ✧ resumes

More than
100,000
copies sold!

Kenneth Roman and Joel Raphaelson