

One of the most legendary marketers of all time:  
David Ogilvy

In 1982, David wrote an internal memo to the employees of his advertising agency titled "How to write."

And in just 10 bullets he put together a masterclass in effective writing.

Here's a breakdown of each one:



**1,650** Retweets

**166** Quote Tweets

**7,466** Likes

The memo starts with a clear \*why\*

"The better you write, the higher you will go in Ogilvy & Mather.

People who think well, write well.

Good writing is not a natural gift. You have to learn to write well."

Replace "Ogilvy & Mather" with any company and this holds true.

*A memo drafted by David Ogilvy for the management to circulate as they saw fit:*

September 7, 1982

### **How To Write**

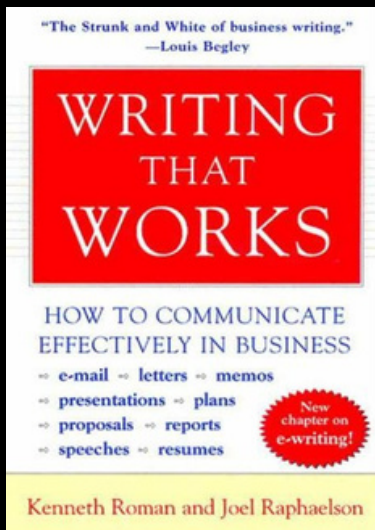
The better you write, the higher you will go in Ogilvy & Mather.  
People who *think* well, *write* well.

Good writing is not a natural gift. You have to *learn* to write well.

1. Read the Roman-Raphelson book on writing.  
Read it three times.

Every company on Earth would be a better place if this book was required reading before email permissions were given.

If you are still sending emails with Walls of Text, order this.



2. Write the way you talk. Naturally.

"Finding your writing voice" is a waste of time.

You already have your voice - the one you use every day.

How to start using it in your writing?

- Choose a topic
- Record yourself talking about it

Then, transcribe it and start there.

3. Use short words, short sentences, and short paragraphs.

This one takes practice.

But the easiest way to find when you're being too wordy?

Read everything aloud before you publish it.

When you find yourself getting caught up, it's a sign you need to simplify.

4. Never use jargon words like "reconceptualizes, demassification, attitudinally, judgementally."

Here's how to think about jargon;

When you see someone using it, they're hiding their lack of understanding.

An easy solution: pretend you are writing to an 8th grader.

5. Never write more than two pages on any subject.

99% of books should be blog posts. And 99% of blog posts should be tweets.

I would preface this by saying: never \*publish\* more than two pages on any subject.

If it can't fit in two pages, it should be simpler.

## 6. Check your quotations.

This one is simple enough. Misquotes are unforced errors.



7. Never send a letter or memo on the day you write it. Read it aloud the next morning, then edit it.

This is the number one piece of writing advice I can give people.

If you are publishing something important, always, always, give it room to breathe.

And always read it aloud.

8. If it something important, get a colleague to improve it.

This pairs nicely with point number 7. If it's something really important, write it, give it a day, edit it, then send it to a colleague.

9. Before you send your letter or memo, make sure it is crystal clear what you want the recipient to do.

So simple, but easy to forget.

Put yourself in the reader's shoes and identify exactly the next step they should take after reading.

Then, articulate those steps for them.

10. If you want ACTION, don't write. Go and tell the guy what you want.

Last and most importantly, writing is never a replacement for a targeted conversation.

In fact, most emails and messages should be direct conversations, especially ones that require action.

In summary:


- Never use jargon
- Use shorter words
- Write how you talk
- Check your quotations
- Read "Writing That Works"
- Give your writing time to breathe
- Get edits on important messages
- Never write more than two pages

Staples these on your desktop.

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:

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DICKIE BUSH



NICOLAS COLE

September 7, 1982

## How To Write

The better you write, the higher you will go in Ogilvy & Mather.  
People who *think* well, *write* well.

Good writing is not a natural gift. You have to *learn* to write well.  
Here are 10 hints:

- (1) Read the Roman-Raphaelson book on writing.\* Read it three times.
- (2) Write the way you talk. Naturally.
- (3) Use short words, short sentences and short paragraphs
- (4) Never use jargon words like *reconceptualize*, *demassification*, *attitudinally*, *judgmentally*. They are hallmarks of a pretentious ass.
- (5) Never write more than two pages on any subject.
- (6) Check your quotations.
- (7) Never send a letter or a memo on the day you write it. Read it aloud the next morning—and then edit it.
- (8) If it is something important, get a colleague to improve it.
- (9) Before you send your letter or memo, make sure it is crystal clear what you want the recipient to do.
- (10) If you want ACTION, *don't write*. Go and tell the guy what you want.

David



\*Writing That Works, Harper & Row, 1981