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About me

- Published first magazine when I was about 8 years old.
- My father had a printing machine in the garage.
- Worked in advertising for 15 years.
- Worked online for 15 years.
- Education, online dating, advertising archive, and Moodscope.
- Write at least 3,000 words a week (Moodscope messages).
- Confession – I know little about proper grammar.

Introduction

- You're learning academic writing but also times when need to communicate with ordinary people.
- We use blogs and social media more and more to share our ideas – Seth is great example.
- Different style of writing for online – that's what I'm focusing on today.
- These are my 5 Golden Rules.

1. Visualise your reader

- See your writing as being like a spoken conversation – keep it natural.
- Imagine the person you're talking to – Busy? Curious? Depressed? etc.
- Always good to ask yourself 'what do they think now?' and 'what do I want them to think?'
- Adopt appropriate tone of voice – maybe informal – maybe respectful – maybe suggesting rather than telling.
- Rhetorical questions can be good – ask a question your reader might put, and then answer it.
- Experiment with recording yourself on your phone, then typing the exact words you've said.
- Copy out someone else's writing that you admire.

2. Keep it simple

- If story-telling make your first paragraph a summary.
- Use as few words as possible.
- Use simple words, not pompous ones.
- Keep sentences and paragraphs short – a one-sentence paragraph can make a strong point.
- Use punctuation sparingly – avoid exclamation marks.
- Use numbered lists and bullet points.
- Don't try to make yourself look clever – you should be invisible.

3. Make it interesting

- Earn your reader's attention – you're competing with thousands of other interruptions.
- Tell stories with specific examples.
- Vary your pace so there are a good mix of long and short sentences.
- If you get stuck, use a random-idea generating approach.
- Try not to write when you're tired.
- If you're bored writing it, they'll be bored reading it.
- If you haven't got something to say, don't say it.

4. Use pictures and videos

- A picture tells a thousand words.
- Writing online needn't always be expressed as the written word – use pictures and videos too.
- In advertising, copywriters often work on projects with no words at all.
- Will a diagram work better, or a table?
- Try not to use pictures just because they look attractive – make them have meaning too.
- Pictures can add emotion and drama.
- Drawing a storyboard can help with your writing even if it doesn't end up illustrated.

5. Always re-write after writing

- Read your writing out loud and you'll spot clumsiness.
- Repair repeated words.
- Ideal to sleep on your writing and revisit it the next day.
- Leaving errors in your writing is sloppy and means I probably won't trust and respect you.
- Ask someone to read your writing who's not familiar with the subject.
- Go back to your own writing six months after you wrote it – how could you have improved it?

My 5 Golden Rules

1. Visualise your reader.
2. Keep it simple.
3. Make it interesting.
4. Use pictures and videos.
5. Always re-write after writing.