

Hello, Dear Writer

Do you have a rambling mind?

Do you like *Magnetic Poetry*?

Do you have great intuition and insight?

Do you get lots and lots of creative ideas,
to the point they burst at the seams?

Are you quick-witted and inventive?

Do you have great empathy and curiosity?

Are you good at expressing ideas?

Can you explain almost any concept clearly?

Are you naturally talkative?

Do you often find yourself randomly
introducing interesting facts when chatting
with friends: “Did you know...?”

Do you consider yourself knowledgeable, informative, imaginative, prolific, positive, energetic,
clear-minded, discerning, resourceful, eloquent, poetic, decisive, confident and clever...?



What we are looking for:

We want writers who are extremely good at what they do. *They have decades of deliberate practice, driven by relentless passion, to build up the mental repository of tremendous skill and a level of supreme mastery.* The work is conceived instantly in the mind, and flows out effortlessly; it's as natural and easy as breathing.

These anecdotal accounts give a very good illustration:



Graydon Carter: Christopher wrote better drunk than most of us do sober, he wrote faster than most of us speak, and he wrote better ill than most of us write when we are well, he was an extraordinary person, he required very little editing... It's staggering to realize how ill he was, and how little energy he had, when he wrote this 1,700 word piece that was just absolutely pitch perfect.



Ian McEwan: He had immense memory of practically everything, of what he'd read, of every conversation he'd ever been in, was instantly available to him. Passionate love for English literature...

He did have the most extraordinary, quite unreal, level of fluency, I mean, editors could expect Hitch to turn in a piece, more or less at the speed of typing... Because he had such extraordinary memory for everything he'd ever read, and anything that anyone had ever said... he'd hardly have to reach for a book from the shelves. He did have gifts that left the rest of us stunned, spending an evening at his house, often to fall asleep to him turning in a piece for the Nation or Slate, and wake up to the sound of him typing for someone else.

Last time... then we helped him out of his bed with his pole and all the feeds into his body, pumped up with morphine and very, very weary, uh, because he wanted to turn in 3,000 words on Chesterton. And indeed that's exactly what he did. He did just keep going right to the very end... even after that piece, he thought he would turn in a piece before tea time...



John Wilson: You must've had some very fond, if not hazy, memory of nights out with Hitch?

Francis Wheen: Well, my memories were a bit hazy, while his never were! When I went to stay with his in Washington, whenever I went to the apartment, I'd be staggering to bed at 4 in the morning, with an empty bottle of Whisky, and about three hours later, I would hear this 'tap, tap, tap' from the room next door which was his study. I'd get up, and there was Hitch, in his dressing gown, he'd say "Ah, you are awake; I'll make us some coffee in a minute... I'm just writing a 2,000 word piece for the..." By breakfast he'd already written several columns and articles.

He could dash off perfectly formed, I mean they weren't sort of hurried in anyway, perfectly formed, and very thoughtful piece, in the time for the rest of us to make a cup of tea.

He LOVED it, he was never happier than when he could skip away to his keyboard, and write another few thousand words, and even when he was dying, in Texas, in his final weeks, he would sort of stagger across to a desk, even when he was heavily under morphine and the rest of it, and write another piece for Vanity Fair or one of his many other outlets. He lived to write.

Moral of the story: We want writers who absolutely love what they do. Someone who feels that writing is life's utmost necessity; that it is the ultimate pleasure; the most enjoyable activity.

When someone is really good at, and really enjoys writing, then it is possible to write at the speed of typing, and produce marvellous, seamless and thoughtful, pitch perfect text, and it's the most delightful experience.

What is the writing task?



*Write some text to fill this space here...Write a paragraph.
Explain an idea. Explain it from another narrative. Tell a story.
Tell more, as if you were in a conversation with a student.*

Basically we want to produce meaningful paragraphs. They are always three lines.

We want to use these short paragraphs to form a corpus, that each of these is a piece of learning material, that gives a glimpse of how the language is spoken (and written).

We want these paragraphs to have a ‘free-flowing feel’ that they represent how eloquent native speakers would naturally speak. They are beautiful examples that illustrate how ideas are expressed and communicated across in that language.

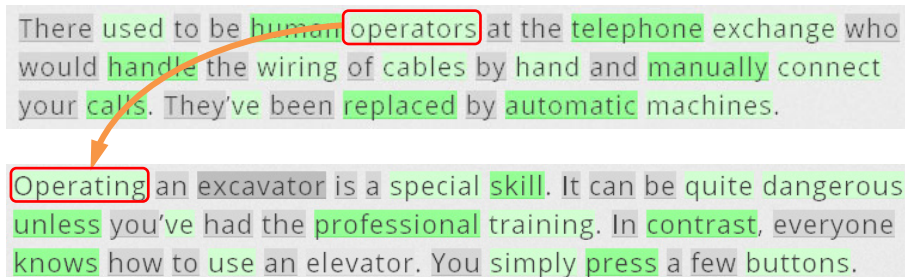
We also want these paragraphs to explain (and give context to) various concepts – like a dictionary – but with concrete and live samples of natural speech (composition of text).

Flowing from one topic to another

Imagine we are in a casual conversation.

The topic of discussion can drift freely from one thing to another: *we talk about vegetables, about gardening, about farming, about tractors, about machinery, about mechanics, about engineering, about physics, about the universe, about the Earth, about the environment, about soil, about potatoes, then back to vegetables again.*

This seems to be the way we naturally chat ... and we want the sample paragraphs to resemble that:



There used to be human operators at the telephone exchange who would handle the wiring of cables by hand and manually connect your calls. They've been replaced by automatic machines.

Operating an excavator is a special skill. It can be quite dangerous unless you've had the professional training. In contrast, everyone knows how to use an elevator. You simply press a few buttons.

An orange arrow points from the word 'operators' in the first paragraph to the word 'Operating' in the second paragraph, illustrating a shift in topic.

The ultimate goal is to have thousands of these; you can continuously explore, going from one concept to another, then to another, and so on, possibly ad infinitum...

These paragraphs are meaningful

They explain certain concepts. Sometimes a word can have multiple sets of meaning; each set is a 'concept' – and a paragraph will have a focus, or emphasis, on explaining and illustrating that concept, that idea, that cluster of meaning.

For example, the word **'define'** can focus on three concepts:

define →
hint: meaning, essence

In a **mathematics** handbook, you can **find** the **definition** for **prime** numbers. We **construct** a 'filter', a **set** of **criteria** in **specific terms** to help **determine** **whether** a number **qualifies** as a **prime** or not.

define →
hint: specify, decide

Now you have **definitely** gone past that stage of **hesitation** and **doubt**. You've **made up** your mind. Your **decisions** are **clear**, **firm** and **final**. You've **reached** a **definitive** **conclusion** on the **issue**.

define →
hint: demarcate

You **define** a **boundary** by **drawing** a clear line to **distinguish** what is inside from what is outside. Each **major city** has a **signature** **sky-line** **defined** by the **various** **shapes** of its **high-rise** buildings.

In each paragraph, an idea is being expounded and amplified (and contextualized). After reading the paragraph you get a more concrete understanding of that concept.

More examples:

equity →

hint: fairness

Equity is an area of study in Philosophy, Law and Economics. It's concerned with the question of fairness, mainly in distributing resources and opportunities to different members of the society.

equity →

hint: net value

In Accounting, a company's net worth is measured by its equity: what it owns minus what it owes. For a house purchased on loans, equity refers to its market value minus the outstanding mortgage.

equity →

hint: stocks

When investors provide capital to a company in exchange of its shares, they acquire equity in that company and become its partial owners. The ownership may entitle them to received dividends.

manual →

hint: by hand

There used to be human operators at the telephone exchange who would handle the wiring of cables by hand and manually connect your calls. They've been replaced by automatic machines.

manual →

hint: handbook

This printer ships with an instruction manual that explains how to use its various functions and features. However, we have yet to discover a helpful handbook on how to live meaningful lives.

It's good to be able to look up the meaning



In fact, let's compile a dictionary this way. Not for all the words, just for some high frequency words, starting with a handful, a few hundred of them.

Remember how the topic of a conversation drifts from one idea to another, and imagine you are speaking with a learner of the language, and imagine you just said: “We used to manually plant the potatoes...” and the learner asks: “What does ‘*manually*’ mean?”

Then voila! You have this paragraph for **'manual (by hand)'** to explain the meaning! At least after reading that paragraph, the learner gets of better idea of the concept. Plus, there will be many paragraphs that intentionally or inadvertently included 'manual' or 'manually' – they come together to give a more extensive illustration of the concept.

Because these paragraphs are designed to help learners, the language is also ‘learner-friendly’, that is, the vocabulary, while being diverse and incorporating great variety, is highly concentrated towards ‘high frequency words’, about 2,500 of common words.

As shown in previous examples, the light-green are 'very basic words', the green are 'common but not too basic', which we want to encourage for vocabulary building.

A good paragraph would have a blend of desirable features:

Learner-Friendly, Definitive

Clear explanation, helpful for understanding the concept...

Vocabulary-Rich, Associative

Introduce more related concepts, help build vocabulary...

Poetic, Lyrical, Eloquent

Exemplify good use of the language...

Interesting, Witty & Delightful

Spark curiosity, a blend of education and entertainment...

If we must prioritize, which is more important, then being meaningful (illustrative) and learner-friendly (understandable) is certainly the primary concern.

Write paragraphs that:

- * Clearly explain the meaning; bringing a context to life;
- * Consist of natural and complete sentences; while expanding vocabulary;
- * Use as many green words as possible; while promoting variety.

So what is the writing task again?



- There is a list of concepts.
- Write a paragraph to illustrate and explain each concept.
- You can freely choose any 'form' of that concept, e.g. for 'imagine', you can write a paragraph for 'imagination', or 'imaginary', or 'imaginative' as long as it points to approximately the same concept, the same idea.
- Or you can just ramble: write a beautiful paragraph as it comes to you; then later on find a concept to dedicate it to.
- The paragraph is ***mindfully crafted*** with the learner in mind; it uses mostly green words; while promoting variety and expansion of vocabulary.
- It has plain and easy-to-understand language, resembling the style of natural speech, and as engaging as a personal conversation for the learner; while ***exemplifying eloquence and expressiveness***.

Good style guide: making it memorable

*“How it came back to me! That peculiar feeling ... That was the world I went back to when I saw the poster ... For a moment **I didn’t merely remember it, I was IN it.**”*

- George Orwell

Go visual.

The ideal paragraph involves a mental picture. Test it this way: imagine, can an illustrator draw a particularly fitting picture to accompany this paragraph?

define →
hint: demarcate

You define a boundary by drawing a clear line to distinguish what is inside from what is outside. Each major city has a signature skyline defined by the various shapes of its high-rise buildings.

Construct a visual image.

Use allusions to hint a picture, or an image – to portray the concept with imagination.

*Bill Bryson: "The trousers were so **copiously flair**, when I walk, you can't see my legs move."*

The main job, in fact, is to come up with these creative ‘designs’ to illustrate conceptual ideas.

Give concrete examples. Describe a process, tell a story.

generate →
hint: produce

Wind farms capture the **energy** of natural air **flow**, **convert** it to **mechanical** forces that drive magnetic generators to produce electric power. This **process** **generates** **minimal** waste heat.

Rather than saying “a manual is a book of instructions”:

manual →
hint: handbook

This printer ships with an **instruction manual** that **explains** how to use its **various** functions and **features**. **However**, we have **yet** to discover a helpful handbook on how to live **meaningful** lives.

Concrete examples: printer, functions and features vs. ‘something’)

Amplify: ‘that explains how to...’ vs. only ‘instructions’)

Introduce additional vocabulary: ‘various’, ‘functions’, ‘features’, etc.

Build context

The more you tell, the easier it is to remember – because the idea is then woven into a network. Imagine being shown a person’s first name in passing, after a while the recollection can be elusive because there’s only one bit of isolated information.

Imagine that if you get to learn the first name, the last name, and the family history – and a few stories about the name – and why the parents picked that first name... Now the first name is much easier to remember; because there are so many ‘handles’ and ‘reminders’ tracing back and linking to its retrieval.

Show insights and perspective. Use metaphors and wild imagination.

To explain a concept is to find a brilliant way of looking at it.

define →
hint: meaning, essence

In a **mathematics** handbook, you can **find** the **definition** for **prime** numbers. We **construct** a 'filter', a **set** of **criteria** in **specific terms** to help **determine** **whether** a number **qualifies** as a **prime** or not.

Compound the illustrative effect.

Reiterate (different words, same theme) to amplify the meaning.

define →
hint: specify, decide

Now you have **definitely** gone past that stage of **hesitation** and **doubt**. You've **made up** your mind. Your decisions are clear, **firm** and **final**. You've **reached** a **definitive conclusion** on the **issue**.

country →
hint: rural

The **countryside** is **characterized** by **vast areas** of **agricultural** land, **away** from the urban **population**. It **consists** of farms and quiet **villages**. Country music **originated** from **similar** rural **settings**.

Use comparison and contrast to make ideas more distinct.

operate →
hint: skill, machine

Operating an excavator is a special **skill**. It can be quite dangerous **unless** you've had the **professional** training. In **contrast**, everyone **knows** how to **use** an elevator. You simply **press** a few buttons.

Making it memorable: emotional impact

*“In a good play every speech should be as
fully flavoured as a nut or apple.”*

- John Millington Synge

A large part of learning is about building memories – ‘knowing’ often involves being able to recall information, or having a specific combination of reminiscent feelings re-surface, that is, to bring experience into the present context, at the prompt of a hint.

When the learner sees a **word**, it’s a sign/hint/symbol that triggers a ‘bringing back’ of all the connected traces learned about that word. The more vivid and alive this recall is, the better the learner is able to fully understand that word at that instant.

For this reason, we want to make the learning materials more memorable.

What elements make it more memorable?

Anything that’s unusual, humorous, bizarre or emotionally charged can make a strong impact. Our brain tends to block out and ignore mundane and bland surroundings, through habituation and latent inhibition. But anything out of the ordinary would easily enter our attention. Sharp, strange, salient elements help the story stand out, or jump out – making it come to mind instantly and forcibly for the learner.

Go emotional. Tell a 'story'.

Tell a 'full story' with actors, events and plot, and best, imbued with emotion. Stories work their magic when it comes to weaving and connecting ideas together and making them memorable. People can remember epic songs and tales with embedded information that helps them navigate through hundreds of miles of seemingly featureless desert terrains. It makes a world of difference from just dry facts.

reveal →
hint: expose

The journalist **published** an article that enraged a **number of prominent politicians**, because it did not portray them in a flattering light. In fact, it **revealed** some **embarrassing** scandals.

Rather than 'To defeat means to overcome in battle':

defeat →
hint: overcome

The **defence** line was utterly destroyed; a few **soldiers remained** and **kept on fighting** from the **ruins**. They **suffered** one devastating **defeat** after another, and **eventually** surrendered in **despair**.

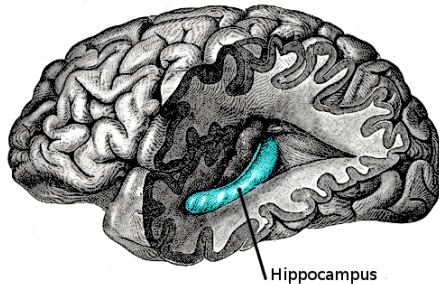
Sentiments are almost always easier to remember than facts. You can even adapt some aphorisms (making the text learner-friendly and vocabulary-rich).

This example comes from Adam Smith:

pursue →
hint: goal

What **motivates** us to **pursue** our **ambitions of acquiring wealth, power, and status**? It's the desire to be **noticed**, to be **treated well**. We want to be **attended to** with **sympathy, kindness, and approval**.

Why strong emotions make strong memory



A great amount of things happen around us every day. Most of them never even enter our attention; some register, for a few seconds, then quietly fade away.

But the strong, intense stimuli, do linger.

When a striking image, for example, comes to the visual cortex; it gets relayed to the hippocampus, which loops the sensory impression, going over it and processing it; then echoes it back to and visual cortex causing a 'replay'.

When you close your eyes and recall a vivid vision, it's this mechanism at work.

This cycle can happen many times afterwards, if the sensory experience is potent enough, or the emotion is strong enough, it gets played over and over again, and the neural links get ignited repeatedly, eventually forming a permanent path.

Any hint or reminiscent trace of can then trigger the hippocampus to retrieve and replay the sensory experience with the emotions and feelings associated to it, pulling the various components from distributed storage; re-creating and reliving it.

** The hippocampus plays an important role in converting short-term memory to long-term memory; exciting experiences help with this process (whereas fear and stress inhibit it).*

Intuitive resourcefulness

It's more than just defining a word. You are illustrating a concept, an idea. Think about the meaning, instead of the word itself. Think of the headline word only as a hint, a road sign that points to the meaning. Circling around the sign would be very ineffective. Think about where it's pointing. Yes, that place. Imagine you are there. Immerse in that idea, that situation. What does it reminds you of? What stories pop up? How do you feel? Then describe these pictures and emotions.

If you try to force your brain to squeeze out a definition for 'area' (maths) – it would be quite dry. Instead, let your thoughts drift freely, like flowing in a stream, and take you somewhere. Does it bring you to a geometry class many years ago?

The capacity of our 'working memory', e.g. holding interim bits while working through a maths equation, is rather limited. Whereas, if you drove to work in the morning, and couldn't even recall what happened, how you completed such a complex task of operating a vehicle and navigating through the traffic environment – that's your brain automatically tapping into the 'deeper resources' for you. This works for creativity too. If the conscious intention is a cubic foot, the rest of the brain is the Milky Way.

Recommend video: "[Your Brain at Work](http://youtu.be/XeJSXfXep4M)" <http://youtu.be/XeJSXfXep4M>

Let imagination run free and bring to surface an abundance of wild ideas; then afterwards, use rigorous thinking to edit them into a masterpiece.

Fill in the blank. Design the blank.

There are two ways to help make a word understood:

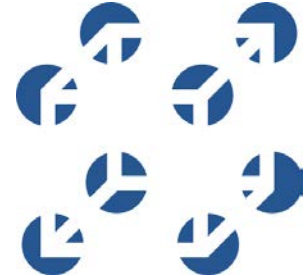
1. Create a concrete example; describe a situation in which the keyword is a 'capstone' concept that makes everything else fit together and make sense. The example situation illustrates and highlights the word's usage – the word is particularly suitable and fitting to for that situation.
2. Discuss the concept. Delve deeper. What is the nature and essence of the situation. Make comparisons and clearly identify the criteria: in which situations this word will be most appropriate and descriptive. This is in fact, analyzing what elements make up the most suitable concrete examples.

Construct a 'situation' that the reader can visualize; then discuss it:

- *She walked back to the front row, and ___ down in her chair.*
- *To rest weight on the bottom, usually with upper body upright and thighs level.*

Imagine the learner doesn't know the meaning of 'sat (sit)' – there's only a few scenarios that can fill into the blank and fits in there perfectly – then look at the 'definition', it becomes much more comprehensible, clear and alive – the reader would suddenly experience an 'Aha' moment and 'get it'.

In the same paragraph, we want to combine 'example' with 'definition' – the two approaches combine to make good illustrations and explain the meaning.



A few specific points

Think of the paragraph space as valuable real estate.

- Make good use of every millimetre of it; fill the 3 lines fully;
- Introduce a variety of useful words; build up the vocabulary;
- Eliminate obscure words; limit words that are too simple;
- Flavour the sentence with a variety of expressions and ways of wording;
- Be amply meaningful; lavish with intelligent and interesting information;
- Write full and beautiful sentences. Explain ideas; tell stories.

Be eloquent and succinct.

Some verbose example from a book:

- *~~After working though that first chapter, you'll be able to ...~~*

Here's the refined version:

- *The first chapter enables you to ...*

Make an effort to under-represent 'structure words'.

Such as 'a', 'and', 'the', 'that' etc. Make them occur less often than in general text.
Reduce the number of prepositions to a minimum (to a level of necessity as long as the sentence can still read naturally and smoothly).

Replace general pronouns etc. with specific terms:

Instead of saying: *"If someone **performs** something..."*

Try: *"The same actor played several distinct characters in the play; the **performance** was exceptional..."* or *"The band **performed** their latest new songs to a live audience..."*

Introduce as many unique ingredients into the paragraph as possible.

Exercise good sense (when interpreting the hint).

If the task is to write a paragraph for a word, and the usage of its common meaning happens to be too basic: e.g. the word 'zero' (yes, it's a number, that's very self-explanatory) – then instead of telling the learner what they already know, try to go beyond defining the concept: introduce phrases like 'to zero in', or expressions like 'zero sum game' and ramble on; make it interesting.

Reiterating the key points

- **Make words “green”.**

Instead of ‘wind turbine’, make it ‘wind farms’ (‘turbine’ ranks after 8,000th in terms of vocabulary frequency; ‘farm’ is a more common word). Instead of ‘superseded’, use ‘replaced’. Instead of ‘fortification’, use ‘defence line’. It doesn’t even have to be a word with similar meaning, feel free to alter the story any way you like, as long as it fits nicely into that space and context.

- **The paragraphs are meaningful.**

They help the learner understand concepts and ideas. They amplify the meaning through a context. They illustrate the ideas and concepts and bring them to life.

- **The paragraphs are the corpus.**

They are examples of the language in its natural style. They are beautifully written ‘example sentences’. They show how the language is eloquently spoken.

- **Make it personal.**

While demonstrating eloquence, explain the concepts in a free-flowing, natural style, as if you were speaking with a learner in a casual conversation.

- **Balance clarity and expansion.**

On one hand, the paragraphs can almost be used as dictionary entries. If the learner wants to find out about the meaning of an unknown word – we have just the right paragraph to explain that word (the relevant concept or idea).

We want the paragraph to resemble a clear definition with understandable words and natural wording; so that the learner can read it, and experience an ‘Aha’ moment of realization of what that word (concept) actually means.

Usually several paragraphs work together to achieve this: there is a main paragraph (which comes from the writing task specifically for that concept), which is like a definition or a very lucid illustration; then there would be several other examples, where other paragraphs made ‘by-product’ references to the same concept.

On the other hand, we also want the writers to be creative and expansive – to ramble on – to introduce more information and different words (with a focus on efficiency, i.e. an optimal range of words) – this way the learner can explore and discover, spreading out from one concept, to four or five, even ten; collecting them along the way and building up the vocabulary.

And at all times, we want the paragraphs to sound smooth and natural, to be beautifully crafted with readable composition, with the learner in mind.

The most important point

We want the text to have a **natural flow**, to have **organic** connection and **thoughtfulness**; furthermore, we want see that it is the doing of that brilliant flair, who breathes spirit and soul into the text – as if inspired by a lightning, a heartbeat, a living pulse, a burst of flowing torrents, a flash of a thousand light bulbs, a trance visit of a genius.

Thank you for reading. And here's a picture of a giraffe defying gravity. ☺ Please do get in touch. Looking forward to having you onboard!

