

WANT TO BE TAKEN SERIOUSLY? BECOME A BETTER WRITER

Dave Kerpen – February 21, 2013

<http://www.linkedin.com/today/post/article/20130221123241-15077789-want-to-be-taken-seriously-become-a-better-writer>

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The number of poorly written emails, resumes and blog posts I come across each month is both staggering and saddening. Grammar is off. There are tons of misspellings. Language is much wordier or more complex than necessary. Some things I read literally make no sense at all to me.

Writing is a lost art, and many professionals don't realize how essential a job skill it is. Even if you're not a writer by trade, every time you click "Publish" on a blog, "Post" on a LinkedIn update, or "Send" on an email, you are putting your writing out into the world.

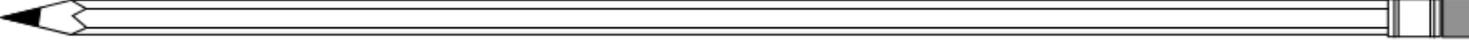
Your writing is a reflection of your thinking. Clear, succinct, convincing writing will differentiate you as a great thinker and a valuable asset to your team.

If you want to be thought of as a smart thinker, you must become a better writer. If you want to be taken seriously by your manager, colleagues, potential employers, clients and prospects, you must become a better writer.

It's not just you who must become a better writer – it's all of us. I'll be the first to admit, I too have had to learn to become a better writer. So here are five ways that I've become a better writer over the last several years:

- 1. Practice, practice, practice.** The old joke comes to mind: A tourist in New York asked a woman on the street, "How do I get to Carnegie Hall?" and she replied, "Practice, practice, practice." The truth is, the best way to get better at anything is to do it repeatedly. Write a personal blog or begin that novel you've always wanted to write. Offer to write some content for your company's marketing team. Write a short, interesting LinkedIn update each day. The more you write, the better you'll become at writing. That's why I write here on LinkedIn every Monday and Thursday, no matter what.



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2. **Say it out loud.** I read all of my articles and books out loud before I publish them, and many of my emails out loud as well. It's great to hear my writing the way others will "hear" it as they read. Especially since tone in emails is difficult to convey, it's valuable to say what you're writing aloud, and then consider a quick edit, before you put it out there.
 3. **Make it more concise.** Less is often more, so during my editing process, I'll often ask, "How can I say the same thing in fewer words?" People don't have time to read a long email, or memo, or article, so out of respect for your intended audience, practice making your writing short and sweet. I'd even argue that tweeting has helped me a lot with this, as it obviously limits you to 140 characters...
 4. **Work on your headlines.** A mentor once told me that 50% of your writing is the headline. So, spend equal time and energy working on your headline as you do the piece itself. Whether it's the headline of a blog post or an inter-office memo, or a subject line for an email to a sales prospect, your headlines will either grab your reader's attention, and get them interested in what you have to say, or not. Lists and questions work very well as headlines and subject lines. Practice them.
 5. **Read.** Besides practicing writing, the number one way to improve your writing skills is to read great work. I read at least one book per month, at least 20 articles per week, and countless tweets, Facebook posts and emails per day. I know we all have limited time, but truly the best way to become a better writer is to become a better reader.

