

11 Ways to Write Better

By [Joshua Fields Millburn](#)

We are all writers now. Whether you write books, blogposts, emails, tweets, or text messages, *you* are a writer. No matter your preferred medium, here are a few tips to help you write more effectively:

Treat text messages like prose. Before hitting the send button, look over your text: check spelling, content, punctuation. Ask yourself: What am I attempting to *communicate*? What am I attempting to *express*? Be more deliberate with your most common form of casual writing, and you'll automatically become more deliberate in other mediums.

Words are tools. Expand your vocabulary to make your writing more precise. There's no need to use a ten-dollar word when a ten-cent word will suffice, but having more tools in your toolbox will allow you to select the most appropriate tool for the job. Because sometimes you need an ax, sometimes you need a scalpel. So pick one new word each day, and then use it at least 21 times in your conversations with others that day. The most useful words will stick, and your vocabulary will expand over time.

Do it daily. If you want to improve your writing, write every day—make it a daily habit. Writing is a muscle: if you don't use it, you lose it. For me, the best way to guarantee consistent writing was to start a blog. (Related article: [How to Start a Successful Blog Today](#).)

Punctuation. Is. Pace. To add variety, velocity, and cadence to your writing, play around with different punctuation: periods, commas, em dashes, colons, semicolons. Short sentences communicate tension. Longer run-on sentences, on the other hand, help establish a frantic, hurried rhythm—a feeling that the pace is picking up as the words tumble onto the page.

Avoid throat-clearing. Blogs, books, and social media posts are littered with unnecessary intros, solipsistic digressions, and avoidable drivel. Ditch the nonsense and state your points. When in doubt, delete your first two paragraphs and see whether the writing improves.

Don't waste the reader's time. Our time and our attention are two of our most precious resources. It is selfish to force a reader to spend fifteen minutes reading something you could've and should've communicated in 90 seconds. If you want to earn your reader's trust, don't waste her time.

30% composition, 70% editing. For every hour you spend writing, spend three hours editing, shaping your work into something more concise, more powerful—more beautiful. Writing truly is rewriting.

Narrative urgency. Every sentence must serve a purpose: Your first sentence must make the reader *want* to read the second. The second sentence must propel the reader to the third. So forth and so on until the very end. If a sentence doesn't move the narrative forward—if it doesn't make

the writing more urgent—then it must hit the cuttingroom floor, no matter how clever or precious it seems.

Avoid too many adverbs. A sure sign of amateur writing is the overuse of adverbs, especially -ly adverbs. A woman in a story isn't *incredibly* pretty—she's beautiful; the sky isn't *very* blue—it's azure. Find the right words to avoid using adverbs as crutches.

Follow the rules, and then *unfollow* the rules. Learn the rules so you can break them effectively. I recommend two books to my writing students to help them understand the guidelines of good writing: *Grammatically Correct* and *Garner's Modern Usage*.

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