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10 TIPS FOR BETTER WRITING

By Tim North

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As a proofreader, I see many of the same errors made again and again. Errors in your writing (be they in e-mail or in web site text) are more serious, I believe, than most people realize.

Why? Well, the standard of your writing has always been important. Today, though, more than ever before, **FIRST IMPRESSIONS COUNT**. We are bombarded by the written word in its many forms — books, pamphlets, magazines, signs, e-mail, web sites and many other media.

We are all suffering from information overload and are forced to find ways of screening out as much as we can. We thus tend to make quick decisions on what to read and what not to. First impressions increasingly determine what we read and what we don't, and poor writing leads to a poor first impression.

The following list of tips should help you to avoid some of the most common slip-ups.

1. Capitals: Avoid the temptation to capitalize words in the middle of a sentence Just To Provide Emphasis Like This. If you want to be more emphatic consider using bold face, italics, color or larger text.

2. Commas: The most common use of the comma is to join together short sentences to make a single longer sentence. We do this with one of the following small joining words: and, or, but, yet, for, nor, or so. For example:

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We have finished the work, and we are looking forward to the weekend.

Notice that the two halves of this sentence could each be sentences in their own right. They thus need to be separated with a comma and joining word. In the next example, though, we don't need a comma:

We have finished the work and are looking forward to the weekend.

The halves of that sentence could not stand alone, so no comma was used.

3. Ellipsis: The ellipsis is a series of three — and ONLY THREE — full stops used to mark missing words, an uncertain pause, or an abrupt interruption. Avoid the temptation to use six or seven dots — it looks amateurish. For example, we write:

Niles: But Miss Fine's age is only ...

Fran: Young! Miss Fine's age is only young!

4. Excessive punctuation: Only one exclamation mark or question mark should be used at a time. Consider the following over-punctuated examples:

Buy now!!!

Great bargains!!!!!!!!!!!!

Excessive punctuation looks too much like hysteria and detracts from your credibility. Avoid it.

5. Headings: For long works, establish a clear hierarchy of headings. Microsoft Word's heading styles are great for this. (They also allow you to automatically create a table of contents.)

6. Hyphenating prefixes: Most prefixes don't need a hyphen; i.e. we write "coexist", not "co-exist". There are exceptions, though. The prefixes "self-" and "ex-" are almost always hyphenated.

7. Numbers: Numbers of ten or less are normally written as words.

8. Quotation marks: Users of American English should use double quotes (" "). Users of British English should choose either single quotes (' ') or double quotes and stick with them for the whole document. Incidentally, British English usage is increasingly moving towards single quotes.

9. Spaces: Modern style is to use a single space at the end of a sentence, not two. Also, most punctuation marks (e.g. commas, full stops, question marks) are not preceded by a space.

10. Tables: Set table text one or two points smaller than the main body text and in a sans-serif font such as Arial or Verdana. Avoid vertical lines as they tend to add unnecessary clutter.

Armed with these simple guidelines, your writing should be well received every time. Good luck!

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Have You Plotted Your Story Before Writing It?

By Nick Vernon

Creative Writing Tips -

The writer, who doesn't have the time to plot, always finds the time to rewrite.

Sound familiar?

I've been guilty of this too, back in the early days of my writing apprenticeship. I was so eager to get stuck into writing my story that I wouldn't bother with plotting.

Plotting gives you a sense of direction. It's your map, which will lead you to write your story. Leaping into the unknown rarely works. Without a plot several things can happen.... Our stories aren't focused

We lose our way Our characters don't come to life because we don't take the time to develop them

We get stuck The story strays from us

And all this happens when we haven't figured everything out first.

Your plot is the foundation of your story. It's the skeleton, which will hold your story together. Your plot is there to work everything out first - to see if it can be worked out, and then flesh out that skeleton with

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other elements that make a story.

Plotting is the difference between writing a story for yourself and writing one for an audience. Writing for ourselves doesn't require too much strain because we only have ourselves to please. It's when we have to please our readers that the hard work begins.

If you are aiming to sell your stories, plotting is a must.

Have you plotted your story before writing it?

Besides his passion for writing, Nick Vernon runs an online gift site where you will find gift information, articles and readers' funny stories. Visit

Have You Plotted Your Story Before Writing It?

3 Main Tips for Writing Articles along with 3 mini tips on your word choice

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