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**How Writing Radio Can Help You Become a Better Writer**

**By Michele Pariza Wacek**

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Knowing how to write, and write well, is a skill that will come in handy in all sorts of situations. And if you combine good writing skills with the persuasive selling tactics found in, say, copywriting, you'll be that much more ahead of your competition.

Of all the different types of writing I've done in my life (and believe me, I've tried practically all of them) writing radio has made one of the bigger impacts on my writing style.

Below are three ways writing radio can help strengthen your writing style. (Oh, and these tips will also help you write better radio copy too.)

1. Follow the rules. Sometimes rules are good. Especially rules that force you to write a certain way. (Think poetry -- mastering those rules can have an amazing effect on your writing style.) Rules require you to slow down and think, to analyze your word, sentence, grammar, punctuation, etc., choices. And that can be very beneficial to your development as a writer.

Radio is short. You have to write something that fits into a 30- or 60-second slot. Not a lot of time or a lot of words. In that 30 or 60 seconds, you need to capture the listener's attention, explain why they should be interested in buying what you're selling, then let them know what you'd like their next step to be. Oh, and did I mention you need to have the business name in there at least twice and probably a tag line as well? And don't forget about music. Or sound effects.

Now the beauty of this is once you've mastered radio rules, you can apply it to all sorts of things. A 30-second pitch for your business you can tell people at networking events. A 15-second introduction before a speech. A quick product spiel for your voice mail. A 15-second pitch for your novel to spit out at agents and editors at writers' conferences. The possibilities are endless.

2. Forces you to write tight. Remember, radio is short. Yet, there's still a lot you have to shove into it. So what's the solution? Absolutely no extra words allowed.

## How Writing Radio Can Help You Become a Better Writer

Be brutal. Cut out anything you don't need. In fact, radio is where I first learned to start cutting "that" out. Most "thats" you don't need, and nothing shows you this like radio.

Here's how I write radio. I start with a first draft. I read it over. I think it's pretty good — I have all the salient points in there. I read it out loud.

Now the fun begins.

Usually it's too long. You see, I time myself reading. So I have to start chopping words.

When you have to make a script fit into a certain time frame, it's amazing how many words you suddenly discover can be deleted. Or replaced with simpler, shorter words. Or how many sentences

can be trimmed. Or phrases made more concise.

As you can imagine, writing radio has really honed my editing skills.

3. Writing for the ear. Writing for the ear is different than writing for the eye. The eye is far more forgiving. Oh that sentence is a bit too long, but it's okay. Hmm, yes I do see that awkward phrase, but I'm fine with it.

Not the ear. The ear is brutal. It's like one of those headmasters from a Dickens' novel, standing in front of the classroom with a stick and banging it every time a student stutters on an answer.

The ear catches everything — sentences that are too long and don't allow you to take a breath; sentences that don't flow properly; long, complicated five-dollar words that twist the tongue in a knot and much, much more.

Focus on writing shorter sentences. Simpler sentences. Vary your sentences. Use simple words.

And that's just plain good old writing advice no matter what you happen to be writing.

Creativity Exercises — Write a Radio Ad

Now it's your turn. Time to sit down and write a radio ad.

First, choose something you want the ad to be about. Maybe one of your products or services. But choose only one. More than one and you're just asking for trouble. (Rule of thumb — one message per ad. No more. Otherwise you run the risk of losing your target market. Pick one message and make it very simple and very clear.)

Now do what I do. Write the ad. Start by keeping it under a general word count — 100 words for a 30-second ad and 190 words for a 60-second spot.

Finished your first draft? Great. Now read it. And time yourself. (Those clocks on the computer desktop

are great for this.)

What, you went over your limit? Better start cutting. See how many words you can take out and sentences you can tighten. Or replace words and phrases with something shorter.

Now read it again. Still too long? Or maybe now it's too awkward. See previous paragraph. Keep repeating until you end up with something that sounds smooth and fits in the allotted time.

## **What Publications Should Look for in a Technology Writer**

**By David Geer**

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What to look for in a technology writer.

A good technology writer has a good portfolio. The writer you want will have samples that parallel the content you're looking for. A good portfolio sample can be found at <http://www.GeerCom.com/samples.html>.

A good technology writer is a good investigator. A professional technology writer takes time to get to know you, your publication, and your goals. What do you really want to get out of this project? A great writer will ask because a disciplined professional needs to know.

A good technology writer is a team player. Professional writing requires top-notch communications skills on all levels, not just in the text of your articles and features. The writer you want should be able to carry on a dialogue with you and your team to discover your needs, and to make sure that they are met.

A good technology writer is prepared to work with you and your team until you're satisfied. Consultations, revisions and changes should be built into the fee. These are part of the process and should be foreseen by the writer.

Finally, a good technology writer instills confidence. After providing the necessary requirements and information, you should feel comfortable letting the writer drive where the story is concerned. You should be able to rely on their responsiveness to your queries. You should be assured that they will deliver all that you expect and more.

About the Author David Geer is chief technology writer, technical journalist and owner of Geer Communications, which helps print and electronic publications meet their content needs. E-mail him at [David@GeerCom.com](mailto:David@GeerCom.com), call him at 440-964-9832, or check out the Geer Communications Website at [www.GeerCom.com](http://www.GeerCom.com).



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