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The Five Rules Of Influential Web Writing

By Robert Warren

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Building a professional reputation requires a campaign founded on your words: the positions you endorse, the motions you advocate, the accuracy of your vision. Writing for the Web can either establish your expert credibility or destroy it.

When your business requires powerful words online, follow these five rules for promoting the message that will serve you well in the digital world:

Stay on message. To write is to influence: always remember that the goal of good writing is to encourage thought and action. Look beyond the facts and statements, and focus on themes and positions. Decide on what you believe and then promote it with the facts; find your message and stick to it.

Make your points quickly but securely. The average visitor to your website will stay no longer than a few minutes, clicking through no more than three links before moving on. You must either make your point quickly or not at all. Be direct, confident and brief: use simple language and don't use any more words than necessary.

Write to the future reader, not the present one. The malleable nature of the Web creates the illusion that web writing has a short shelf life. The opposite is actually true: with mass data archiving and storage, putting information into the Internet is far easier than taking it out. Relevant points today have a way of becoming embarrassing cliches tomorrow.

The most influential web content is timeless. Write for the long term: avoid posting information online that won't still be valid and useful in twenty years. When you write about a controversy, assume that the reader knows how it was resolved. When you write about a product or service, assume that the reader knows whether it was a success or failure. Assume that your deepest secrets are now public knowledge. Write for a reader who knows more about your future than you do.

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Bring it home. If you want to use your articles to promote your reputation, your readers must know how to find you. Plan your contact information for the long term: if you don't have your own domain, get one. Plan to keep it for at least the next five to ten years. Don't use an email address that may no longer exist when your article is being read.

Keep your personal life out of it. Nothing outdates – and bores – faster than personal information. Don't engage in public self-reflection; don't mention your personal relationships, neuroses, or the day-to-day trials of your home life. Your writing will be available somewhere online for many years after your situation has changed, which can prove embarrassing (or even dangerous) at a later date.

What works in the print world often doesn't work in the digital one. If you want your words to serve you long after they are published online, write the web content that ages well and reflects the power of your expert vision.

Your future clients will thank you for it.

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) is a business marketing writer and editorial consultant. His

Florida practice specializes in promoting independent professionals with the power of the written word.

For more writing articles by Robert Warren, see his website at

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How To Write

By Michael LaRocca

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LEARNING HOW TO WRITE

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As a student of Spanish, my goal was to think in Spanish. Skip the word-by-word translation so I'd have the necessary speed to speak and listen. I know words in Spanish that I'd be hard pressed to translate. Usually profanity, I confess. Chingow!

For years my students here in China have studied grammar, and know it better than you or I. They read. They write. But speaking involves moving faster than that. In conversation, we don't have time to write it first and make sure it's all

grammatically flawless, then read it aloud, perhaps after a bit of rehearsal.

So, I try to give them a chance to practice putting words together on the fly, rules be damned. The rules they've internalized will kick in and keep them comprehensible, which will build their confidence in their ability to keep creating conversation that way.

This is not unlike what we go through as authors. First we study rulebooks, perhaps take some classes, and conclude just about everything we're is doing is wrong. So many rules to memorize. We might dread sitting down to write with all those constraints.

But really, it's not about memorizing rules at all. It's about internalizing the rules, following them (or not if you prefer) without being consciously aware of what they are. They're there, but in the background.

The story's what matters. You're supposed to be having fun, not "working." At least not during the creation phase.

We don't always take the time to say, "I've written ten active sentences in a row so maybe I'll whip in a passive one now" or "I need a beat for every X lines of dialogue." I published four novels and edited dozens more before I learned what a beat was. (It's a pause so the reader can catch his/her breath.)

And, of course, since it is writing and not speaking, we can

always go back and revise later. Then rely on editors to catch what we missed, or at least make us wonder why we wrote it this way instead of that way.

Some authors aren't even consciously aware of "the rules." They've never taken a class, never read a book about writing. They're simply avid readers who one day decided to write. But they've internalized the rules as well. It comes from reading.

I've said it before and I'll say it again. If you want to write, you must read. If you don't like reading, maybe writing isn't for you. It's not about writing because you want to say, "I am a writer." It's about writing because you enjoy writing.

And, it's really nice when you've been writing for a long time

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to go back and read a book about how to write. You might find one or two things to tweak in your technique, as opposed to a daunting laundry list of flaws. It's much easier to internalize one or two new rules than 50 or 100!

Michael LaRocca's website at <http://freereads.topcities.com> was chosen by WRITER'S DIGEST as one of The 101 Best Websites For Writers in 2001 and 2002. He published two novels in 2002 and has two more scheduled for publication in 2004. He also works as an editor for an e-publisher. He teaches English at a university in Shaoxing, Zhejiang Province, China, and publishes the free weekly newsletter Mad About Books.

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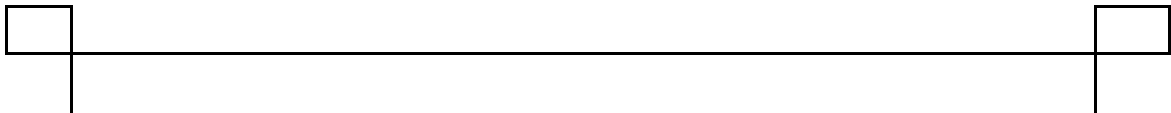
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