

All About / Writing

The staff you're on doesn't matter. Your years of experience don't matter. Your audience wants to be informed and entertained. Writing is the way to accomplish this. Whether your work is printed in the newspaper or broadcast on the daily announcements, good writing is the base ingredient for a fantastic product.

PRACTICE

Here are the things you really, really need to do but don't want to. But the key to great writing is to write. And write. And write some more. Seriously. There are a variety of ways to do this.

- 1) Keep a journal or blog. Any kind of writing is appropriate.
- 2) Write articles about fictional or make-believe events.
- 3) Copy, word-for-word, an article from the newspaper or transcribe a TV report.
- 4) Take articles from the newspaper and condense them to a shorter article.

REPORT

Now remember, technically you're a reporter. As such, don't get tied up in trying to impress readers or viewers with your splendiferous vocabulary. Report! Tell people the facts. Be succinct. Let quotes and facts drive your story. Don't editorialize. Being a reporter is like putting a puzzle together. Find the pieces, don't create them.

LIGHTEN UP

Don't be stubborn about your writing. Even the best get help. Have your peers edit what you have done. Don't settle on a first or second draft. Take the time and care to present your best work. Know your deadlines and plan ahead.

READ

Just don't write a lot, read a lot, too. Spend time reading good writers and bad writers. Make note of the differences. Pick a good writer to follow. Learn their style and practice how they write to help develop your own style.

RESEARCH

We're not just talking for stories here. Find resources to help you write. Google will get you started. Also, bookmark sites that feature strong examples you can visit for inspiration.

IDEAS

Stuck for an idea? Just look around. The old adage says everyone has a story, and that's true. But keep looking around. A simple object might provide inspiration. See that clock? Did you think daily schedule, time it takes to clean the building, what time kids get up to get ready, how the bell system works, and on and on. . . see how easy that was?

Now once you've got those ideas, get a notebook and write them down! There is no worse feeling than thinking of the next big story and then forgetting it 24 hours later. Keep ideas you see from other places here, too. Sometimes you can adopt ideas the pro's use for your own purposes.

KNOW STYLE

Again, it's not the most exciting stuff, but learn AP Style or whatever style you adhere to in your reporting. Consistency is important for writers and their audience. Keep a stylebook at your side whenever you write.

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So, you got some advice. Good writers write a lot. And they write about anything. Here are some of my favorite prompts for getting to work.

- Write the next book chapter or act of a TV show or movie. Or, rewrite the end of those things mentioned. Add yourself as a character in an already-established work.
- Write about the things that make you really mad or really happy. I prefer writing about the things that annoy me. We tend to be passionate about the stuff we don't agree with.
- Write letters. In this day of age, communication is much different than it used to be. While we can e-mail, text and post on walls, there is something extra special about getting a hand-written piece of correspondence from someone. Your grandparents for one will really appreciate a hand-written note.
- Treat a children's story or fairy tale like breaking news and write about it like it's page one material. This is a fun way to take something silly and make it serious. Here is a time when creating quotes is OK to do.
- People watch and write backstories based on what you see. This is a fun activity if you are out-and-about and have some time on your hands.
- Write about your life with different word limits. What you would say about yourself will vary greatly when going from 500 words to 100 words.
- Imagine you are running to be president. Develop and describe what your platform would be. Who would be in your cabinet? Explain your decisions.