

The Marketer's
Pocket Guide to
~~Writing Good~~
Well

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YOU CAN WRITE.

There are a million reasons why you “can’t” write.

So what’s your reason?

It’s not your job. You don’t like it. You haven’t done it in forever. It’s hard. You’re more of a math person.

Those are all bullshit.

They may be true, but they’re still bullshit. There’s no reason you can’t write – no matter how “unqualified” you are for the task. This pocket guide is something to keep with you to remind you of that.

YOU CAN WRITE.

There are a million courses you could take, books you could read, and experts you could talk to that would make you more “qualified” to write. But there’s no bigger step to take than simply getting the inspiration and the confidence you need to get started.

Keep this pocket guide with you, and flip through to whatever section you need that day to get the small daily reminders you need that writing gooder – sorry, weller – is within your grasp.

It’s not easy. But you can write.

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①

Getting Over the Fear.

“I’M NOT A WRITER.”

“It’s none of their business that you have to learn to write.
Let them think you were born that way.”

- Ernest Hemingway

What makes you a writer is that you’ve written something. What other sign are you waiting for? A book deal? For the Queen to appoint you Poet Laureate? A LinkedIn Skills endorsement? No one needs to know that you “are” or “are not” a writer; it’s of no consequence. Write something. And then write something else.

“I HAVEN’T WRITTEN SINCE COLLEGE.”

“Everywhere I go I'm asked if I think the university stifles writers. My opinion is that they don't stifle enough of them. There's many a best-seller that could have been prevented by a good teacher.”

- Flannery O'Connor

University education has no bearing on your ability to write. If you need proof, just go pull an old term paper. You'd be astounded how ridiculous spending \$40,000 a year makes you sound.

“I’M NOT GOOD ENOUGH.”

“This is how you do it: You sit down at the keyboard and you put one word after another until it’s done. It’s that easy, and that hard.”

- Neil Gaiman

You might be right – perhaps you’re not very good. But to get good, you’ll need to sit down and **just do it already**. (Have faith. Most people won’t even get this far. So you’re already better at writing than them.)

“WRITING TAKES ME FOREVER.”

“If you want to be a writer, you must do two things above all others: Read a lot and write a lot. ”

- Stephen King

The more you do it, the less time it will take – because you’ll be over the fear. (Or at least you’ll have learned to suppress it deep, deep down.)

“I DON T HAVE ANYTHING TO SAY.”

“What really knocks me out is a book that, when you're all done reading it, you wish the author that wrote it was a terrific friend of yours and you could call him up on the phone whenever you felt like it.”

- J.D. Salinger

You have value in just being you. Let that show through in your writing – very few others will have the guts. Be genuine. Be open. Show someone why you care. That passion delivers value enough.

“I ALWAYS GET WRITER’S BLOCK.”

“The scariest moment is always just before you start.”

- Stephen King

Writer’s block is an annoyance, but it’s not a reason not to write. Force yourself to get started wherever it’s easiest – jotting down an outline, pulling quotes, conceiving storylines – just for the sake of making a blank screen less intimidating.

“WORDS ARE HARD FOR ME.”

“Get it down. Take chances. It may be bad, but it’s the only way you can do anything really good.”

- William Faulkner

Just *start*. Begin writing, even if you have to delete it later. Putting words to paper – brilliant words, stupid words, any words – is the only way you have a chance at creating something worthwhile.

Part

2

Becoming a Writer.

HAVE YOUR OWN VOICE.

“Be yourself; everyone else is already taken.”

- Oscar Wilde

You may have to change your tone, or your language, or your format, or a million other things to make a piece of writing better. But none of that should inhibit the inherent “you-ness” of what you write. Don’t try to adopt someone else’s voice. (Even if it sounds really, really good.) They’re better at being them than you are, anyway.

WRITE FOR YOUR AUDIENCE.

“You can wear what you like linguistically or sartorially when you’re at home or with friends, but most people accept the need to smarten up under some circumstances.”

- Stephen Fry

If a tree falls in a forest and there’s no one there to hear it, does it make a sound? If you write something no one understands, does it have any merit? While some might argue it does, writing should meet the needs of your audience if you’d like it to meet any practical end.

DETERMINE YOUR 'SO WHAT?'

“If there's a book that you want to read, but it hasn't been written yet, then you must write it.”

- Toni Morrison

Your “so what?” is the reason you’re writing a piece. If you have the urge to write something, there must be some purpose. Take the time to articulate to yourself exactly what that reason is so you can articulate that reason to your readers, and create a purposeful piece of writing.

BE DELIBERATE ABOUT FORMAT.

“Prose is architecture, not interior decoration.”

- Ernest Hemingway

There are poems and short stories. Tweets and feature-length films. Articles and cartoons. One-acts and puppet shows. Which one are you writing? Choose a format that can support what you’re building, or your story will collapse.

Part

3

Writing and Words.

CHOOSE THE RIGHT WORDS.

“The difference between the right word and the almost right word is the difference between lightning and a lightning bug.”

- Mark Twain

Lazy writers fart out words. Actually, no – most writers fart out words; lazy writers don't re-read to swap out the vague words for clear ones. Time spent thinking of the word that best describes what you're trying to say is time well spent.

FOCUS ON SUBSTANCE, NOT ART.

“I am so clever that sometimes I don't understand a single word of what I am saying.”

- Oscar Wilde

Don't sacrifice clarity to show off a big vocabulary. As Kerouac said, “One day I will find the right words, and they will be simple.”

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WRITE WITH EMPATHY.

“A writer without interest or sympathy for the foibles of his fellow man is not conceivable as a writer.”

- Joseph Conrad

Use empathy to guide your editorial decisions. Empathy will tell you what to write or when to make a joke. It'll tell you to delete a comma, then to add it back in, and that even though only a few readers will get a reference, they'll enjoy the delicious high of being “in on something” enough to forgive you for how long this sentence has gone on. 😊

WRITE WITH RHYTHM.

“This sentence has five words. Here are five more words. Five-word sentences are fine. But several together become monotonous. Listen to what is happening. The writing is getting boring. The sound of it drones. It’s like a stuck record. The ear demands some variety. Now listen. I vary the sentence length, and I create music. Music. The writing sings. It has a pleasant rhythm, a lilt, a harmony. I use short sentences. And I use sentences of medium length. And sometimes, when I am certain the reader is rested, I will engage him with a sentence of considerable length, a sentence that burns with energy and builds with all the impetus of a crescendo, the roll of the drums, the crash of the cymbals—sounds that say listen to this, it is important.”

- Gary Provost

WRITE WITH EMOTION.

“Don't tell me the moon is shining; show me the glint of light on broken glass.”

- Anton Chekhov

Figurative language, imagery, metaphors, all those literary devices you learned in school – look them up again. Practice creating evocative descriptions that show rather than tell.

TELL A STORY.

“If you can tell stories, create characters, devise incidents, and have sincerity and passion, it doesn’t matter a damn how you write.”

- Somerset Maugham

It’s remarkable how much slack people will cut you when they’re entertained by you. If you can transfix someone enough that they read your writing from beginning to end, you’ll find they forgive you the occasional literary misstep.

CUT YOURSELF SOME SLACK.

“The only people who seem to bother with language in public today bother with it in quite the wrong way. They write letters to broadcasters and newspapers in which they are rude and haughty about other people’s usage and in which they show off their own superior knowledge of how language should be ... When asked to join in a “let’s persuade this supermarket chain to get rid of their ‘5 items or less’ sign,” I never join in. Yes, I am aware of the technical distinction between less and fewer ... but none of these are of importance to me. None of these are of importance. The old pedantic me would have insisted on “none of them is of importance.” But I’m glad to say I’ve outgrown that silly approach to language.”

- Stephen Fry

Part

4

Being Done.

REVISE YOUR WRITING.

“The first draft of anything is shit.”

- Ernest Hemingway

John Irving quipped, “Half my life is an act of revision.” If you want to be an okay writer, don’t revise. (Wanting to be okay is, by the way, okay.) If you want to be extraordinary, do what the extraordinary do: revise.

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GET THEE TO AN EDITOR.

“It is perfectly okay to write garbage—as long as you edit brilliantly.”

- C. J. Cherryh

You're encouraged to just get stuff down on paper, and tidy it up later. Don't concern yourself with perfection from the get-go. But you must delete, reword, add, move, and let go in your second, third, or thirtieth go-around. You, or a well-paid editor. (You don't want the cheap ones.)

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BE BRIEF.

“Not that the story need be long, but it will take a long while to make it short.”

- Henry David Thoreau

Somewhere, for some reason, wordiness became an indicator of skill. Look how hard-working he is – his story is *so* long! You know what’s harder? Brevity. It forces you to make tough decisions – what to change, what to cut, what to keep – that you don’t always get right. But it’ll elevate your skill and your end-product. **Be that disciplined.**

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DO SOME COPYEDITS.

“I’ll leave you to tidy up the woulds and shoulds, wills and shalls, that’s and whiches.”

- Oscar Wilde, to his publisher

It doesn’t matter who does it, but someone should polish up your end-product. Knowing proper grammar and spelling doesn’t make you a world-class writer. In fact, it doesn’t even make you a good one. It merely saves you from looking things up in Google.

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JUST FINISH IT.

“I went for years not finishing anything. Because, of course, when you finish something you can be judged.”

- Erica Jong

Don't linger in the comments section of anywhere your writing appears. At least you wrote something. What did they do today?

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Conclusion / Additional
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CONCLUSION: THERE IS NO MAGIC.

There's this idea out there that there are a bunch of secrets to writing good well. There are principles, sure, but memorizing them won't get you any closer to becoming a writer. The only way is to *just write*.

“People on the outside think there’s something magical about writing, that you go up in the attic at midnight and cast the bones and come down in the morning with a story. But it isn’t like that. You sit in back of the typewriter and you work, and that’s all there is to it.”

- Harlan Ellison

Learn More

HOW TO CREATE A CONTENT MACHINE.



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5 BLOG POST TEMPLATES EVERY MARKETER NEEDS.



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16 TOOLS THAT MAKE CONTENT CREATION WAY EASIER.

16 Free Tools That Make Content Creation Way Easier

by Jay Acunzo

December 16, 2013 at 8:00 AM

About two years ago, while on vacation from my job prior to HubSpot, a friend sent me an Instagrammed photo captioned, "Meet Content Bot 3000!" The picture showed a cardboard box upside down in my desk chair back at the office, a face drawn crudely on one side with duct tape and marker.



For the rest of my vacation, I received one photo a day of Content Bot trying to do various parts of my job. From writing a blog post, to brainstorming for clients, to, I think at one point, drinking coffee from my mug (how dare you, Content Bot).

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LEARN FROM THE BEST BUSINESS BLOGGERS.

What the Best Business Bloggers Do (And You Should Too)

by [Corey Erdon](#)

September 25, 2013 at 11:00 AM

You know those business bloggers who never run out of innovative ideas, churn out a piece of content like it ain't no thang, and are always one step ahead of industry trends?

How annoying are they?

Well, the good news is *you* can be like them! That's right, *you!* All for the low, low price of reading this blog post!



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GETTING PAST WRITER'S BLOCK.

How to Get Past the 10 Most Debilitating Sources of Writer's Block [SlideShare]

by [Corey Eridon](#)

🕒 April 4, 2013 at 9:00 AM

Writer's block. We've all suffered it. Whether we write once in a while or every day, love creating content or absolutely hate it, we've all experienced this productivity killer.

And it's not just a mild frustration we can brush off, either. As inbound marketers, we're all used to the pressure of having to [create content at a moment's notice](#). Sometimes, our *jobs* even depend on it.

Yikes. So what do we do when plagued by this debilitating malady?



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THANK YOU.



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MARKETING ANALYTICS

Analyze your web traffic and see which sources are generating the most leads.



SEARCH OPTIMIZATION

Improve your rank in search engines by finding and tracking your most effective keywords.



BLOGGING

Create blog content quickly while getting SEO tips and best practice pointers as you type.



EMAIL

Send personalized, segmented emails based on any information in your contact database.



LEAD MANAGEMENT

Track leads with a complete timeline-view of their interactions with your company



SOCIAL MEDIA

Publish content to your social accounts, then nurture leads based on their social engagement.