

*Nancy Eichhorn, PhD*

FREELANCE WRITER • EDITOR • MENTOR

PROFESSIONAL WORDSMITHING FOR YOUR PUBLICATION NEEDS



## **Ten Tips for Effective Writing**

After you've created your first draft—please note that I highly recommend not worrying with externally imposed expectations while initially writing, it will only stymie your progress—so after you have written your first draft and you are ready to read and revise, these ten tips will guide your organization and help you craft a clear and engaging article.

One: Always keep the reader in mind. Assume your readers are smart but in reality they know little to nothing about your specific topic—you are the expert in this moment, and it is your job to fill them in.

Two: Consider your tone. How do you want to sound? How do you want your characters to sound? What voice do you want to project so that readers will hear you as you want to be heard? Play around, talk aloud, tape record yourself as you imitate the voices as you hear them and then write to that.

If you are writing an academic paper you want to be formal but not too formal. When you are talking about yourself use "I" do not say "the researcher" or "the author". Know that contractions are not allowed. And be restrained with putting forth claims. Use sentence starters such as:

Evidence suggests that

One may infer that

Perhaps

It is plausible that

And avoid using these:

It is a fact that

This proves that

We know that

I feel that

Three: A major tripping stone for readers is language. Define words that are specific to a particular field, slang, sub/micro culture, and so forth. For example, an Italian writer hired me to revise his article for a peer reviewed Journal. He wrote “four different anamneses are evaluated.” Of course my mind went to words that sounded similar, like amnesia, so I thought it might reference something related to memory and memory loss. Turns out he was talking about a patient case history using the patient’s recollection. Then I came across this phrase: ‘eziopathogenic’ variables. I know what variables are and thanks to the online dictionary learned that he was writing about variables that cause the development of a disease or abnormal condition.

Four: Imagine yourself conversing with your readers and listen to their remarks. Write with them in mind. Anticipate their questions, their objections, their needs when reading your text. And if you have to use precise terms for a specific topic, define them, don’t make your readers leave off to search for meanings so they can make sense of your text.

Five: Clarity. Readers crave clarity. Confusion causes them to close the book.

What creates clarity?

Structure.

What creates structure?

Paragraphs.

Paragraphs are the building block of your organizational structure.

Six: Every paragraph in the paper must convey one and only one main idea. Any sentence in a paragraph that is not directly relevant to the paragraph’s main idea needs to be eliminated or moved to a paragraph where it is supportive of the main focus.

Paragraphs have their own structure. For starters, each paragraph begins with a lead or topic sentence. The topic sentence is where you state the main idea of the paragraph and every one that follows must address this one idea.

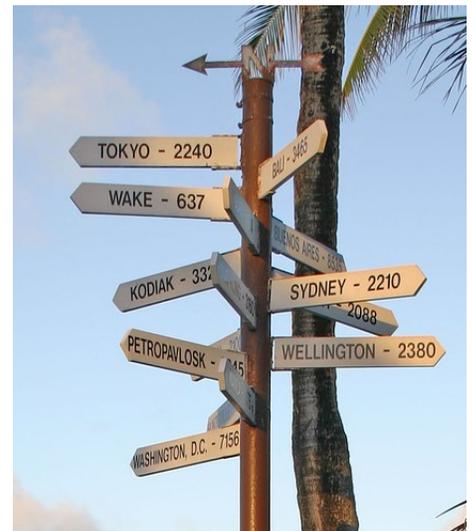
While the topic sentence tells the reader what the paragraph's one main idea is, it also tells the reader how this paragraph relates to the previous paragraph. They include transition words that link one paragraph to the next.

Seven: Each sentence/paragraph/section needs to follow logically from the one before it. It is your job to make the logical connections between the points clear to the reader. Transition words are helpful to bridge ideas presented (therefore, in addition to, in contrast), to guide readers from paragraph to paragraph (and sometimes from sentence to sentence), and to help readers to know where they are in the document (first, and in conclusion.) Transition words can clarify:

- Exceptions/Contrasts: but, however, on the one hand. Notwithstanding, on the contrary, on contrast to, still, yet, that said
- Time: after, afterward, at last, before, currently, during, later, now, recently, subsequently, when, while, finally
- Examples: for example, for instance, namely, to illustrate, that is
- Emphasis: even, indeed, in fact
- Places/Positions: above, adjacent, below, beyond, here, in front, in back, nearby, there, farther on, opposite, close, to the left
- Cause and Effect: accordingly, consequently, hence, so, thus, if . . . then, as a result, for this reason

Eight: Road signs let readers know where they are going. At key places in your story or academic paper, you need to draw a road map—set up guide posts that alert readers and indicate what just happened and what to be on the lookout for next. For example, "Having discussed the literature on bulimia, I will now review research on the vagus nerve and make new connections." I tell the reader what I just did, what I am going to do next and that I will make the connections clear.

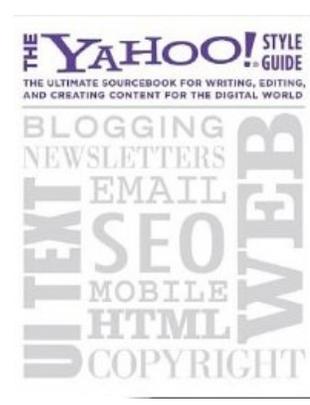
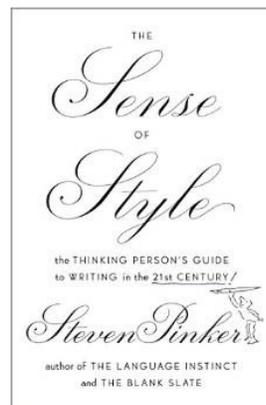
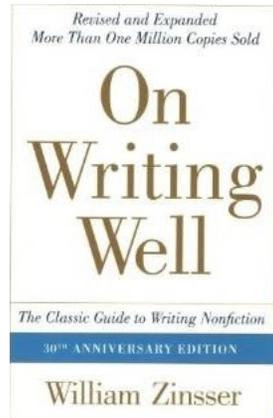
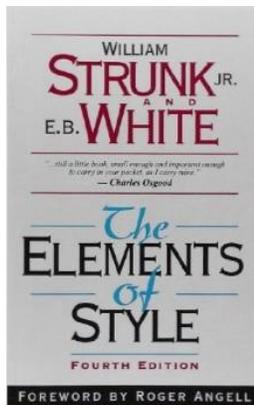
Nine: Readers want writers to be precise. They want to know that you, as the writer, know what you are talking about. And if you make any claims, support



them. Do not go overboard; simply writing more is not enough to convince your reader of anything. The exact word at just the right moment makes a difference.

So be precise in your word choice. Choose accurate words. Use strong nouns and verbs, limit adjectives and adverbs. If you are writing an academic paper remember that this is not an emotional paper. It is data based and data driven. You are presenting facts and must support those facts.

Ten: Grammar. Proper grammar creates clarity.



Strunk and White (*The Elements of Style*) reigned for years as the go-to-guidebook. William Zinsser (*On Writing Well*) offered advice for nonfiction writing. Stephen Pinker's 2014 release, *The Sense of Style: The Thinking Person's Guide to Writing in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* adds his voice to the writing scene as well as *The Yahoo! Style Guide: the Ultimate Source book for Writing, Editing and Creating Content for the Digital World*.

Find the right resource for you and keep it handy for times when you just aren't sure. When formatting an academic paper, I have the American Psychological Association's 6th Edition style guide online for easy access as well.

Another useful tip: When revising for grammar, read your paper aloud to yourself. You will hear when a sentence goes astray.

And while reading aloud ask yourself the following three questions:

- Do I understand the point that is being made?
- Do I understand why that point is being made?
- Basically what function does this information serve?

Revise according to your response.

I write with these ten tips in the back of my mind and find the results well received. People connect with your writing because of your story. The details matter and yet it is the person telling the story that keep readers engaged. It is your job as a writer to present yourself be it first person or third, from a narrator's voice or different characters' reality and how they interweave in your storyline (be it a person, plant, animal, or cosmic ray of stratified detritus) (see how big words jump out!)

Some people recommend outlining the story, creating a structural framework to build on—before and/or after the draft is complete. I think it depends on the writer and the writing task. Scholastic papers can benefit from an outline to insure all components are covered and all content supports the focus. Writing the Abstract last is a given; it is much easier when the paper is complete. If your story involves research, it can help to outline the areas where facts augment the text so you can do the legwork and then weave it into the background, phase it in seamlessly so it feels smooth and part of the overall story.

I offer these ten tips to assist you in your first phase of revision. And with time and use, they can become part of your writing repertoire without conscious effort.

If you have questions or want to talk further, please contact me:

[Nancy@nancyeichhorn.com](mailto:Nancy@nancyeichhorn.com)