



# dawnjosephson

MASTER WRITING COACH

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**The “Write” Way to Enhance Your Business:  
How to Hone Your Writing Skills for Professional Success  
By Dawn Josephson, The Master Writing Coach™**

The sales letter you can’t put down...the advertising copy that makes you want the product...the resume that prompts you to call the job candidate this second...all these are examples of exceptional business writing. While you certainly know good writing when you see it, can you write with the same pizzazz the professionals use to hold your attention for pages on end?

In today’s business world, writing skills have taken a backseat to other seemingly more important professional development activities. Most executives would rather attend a seminar on negotiation strategies or marketing tactics rather than learn the proper usage of “that” or “which” in a sentence. What they fail to realize, however, is that good writing skills are just as important to their future success as is their ability to locate prospects and close deals. Without good writing skills, your printed documents may very well undermine the professional image you work so hard to achieve.

The fact is that your prospects, your customers, and even the community judge you and your company based on the written documents you put out to the world. Sales letters riddled with errors, advertising copy that is boring, and media announcements that ramble on for pages send the message that you’re careless, uncreative, and possibly incapable of delivering quality service. People want to do business with those individuals they perceive as knowledgeable and competent. Your writing is the perfect opportunity to showcase your professionalism and close the sale.

Fortunately, you don’t have to be a professional editor or journalist to write effectively. In fact, there are a number of self-editing techniques professional writers use to catch embarrassing errors that could cost them the deal. Use these guidelines as a way to proofread your own writing so you can make all your printed materials reflect the professionalism you display in every other business activity.

### **1. Reread your work out loud.**

After they write a document, most people reread it to themselves to scan for errors. While this is certainly a good start, it should not be your sole means of proofreading. After scanning the document silently, read it out loud and really listen to the words you're saying. Does your tongue stumble over a block of words? Do certain phrases sound funny or out of place? Is a sentence so long that you're gasping for breath by the time you reach the period? Do your own words put you to sleep? All these are signs that a section of your document needs some tweaking.

When you read a document to yourself, you're relying on only your eyes to catch writing errors. However, when you read a document out loud, you're activating your sense of hearing and forcing your brain to concentrate on each individual word rather than visual cluster. Now you not only see missing commas, incorrect words, or subject-verb disagreements, but you can also hear when something sounds out of place. When you hear as well as see what you're writing, you can catch more errors and produce a written document that holds the reader's attention.

### **2. Rely on yourself, not your spell check.**

The spell check feature on your computer is both a blessing and a hindrance to writing success. While spell check can locate and correct blatantly misspelled words, it can't catch those words that are spelled correctly but used incorrectly. You know the words: right/write, meet/meat, you're/your, there/their/they're, no/know, plus a host of others. Such words, called homonyms, are often immune to computerized spell check features and can single-handedly undermine your writing skills.

As you reread your document, both silently and out loud, pay special attention to known homonyms and read out your contractions. So if your text reads, "Please know which word \*you're\* supposed to use," proofread it as "Please know which word \*you are\* supposed to use." This way you'll be able to catch those instances when you write, "You're writing skills are impeccable," but really mean "Your writing skills are impeccable."

### **3. Start from the end.**

The more you read something, the more your brain begins to memorize it. If you reread a document over and over, you eventually get to the point where your brain knows what's coming next, so your eyes go into scan mode. While you think you're really reading the document closely, your brain is only picking up key words and drawing on memory to fill in the blanks. So even though your 50<sup>th</sup> read-through confirms that your document is error-free, your reader (who has never seen the document before) will quickly spot careless errors you scanned right over.

When you feel that you've read your document too many times and can't get past scan mode, mix things up for your brain. Read the last sentence of your

document first just to check for things like sentence structure, grammar, spelling, etc. Then read the sentence above the last and do the same. Pull sentences out of the text at random and check for errors. By treating each sentence as a stand alone unit rather than as part of a flowing document, your brain will perk up and not be anticipating the next memorized line. You'll catch more errors when you look at the individual elements of your document instead of focusing on the overall content.

#### **4. Go to the experts.**

You may have a dictionary on your office bookshelf and perhaps even a thesaurus. But do you have a good grammar guide? Anyone who produces written documents can quickly improve his or her writing simply by referring to a grammar guide for writing tips.

Your local bookstore has many grammar guides available. Browse through a few to determine which one adequately addresses your particular writing challenges. Some guides focus specifically on grammar issues, while others pay particular attention to matters of writing tone and style. Some target news writing, while others angle their topics to business writing. Choose a guide you're comfortable with, refer to it often, and watch your writing improve.

#### **Better Writing Now**

Competition in business is fierce these days. Don't let a misspelled word or incorrect sentence kill the deal. Practice the tricks of self-editing so every written document you produce showcases your knowledge, competence, and professionalism. Before you know it, your customers will be unable to resist your written messages, and your sales figures will soar.

#### **About the Author:**

Dawn Josephson, the Master Writing Coach, has been helping professional speakers and business leaders write better to earn more since 1998. As the author of *Write It Right: The Ground Rules for Self-Editing Like the Pros* and *Putting It On Paper: The Ground Rules for Creating Promotional Pieces that Sell Books*, she empowers leaders to master the printed word for enhanced credibility, positioning, and profits. Contact her at [dawn@masterwritingcoach.com](mailto:dawn@masterwritingcoach.com).