KILLER CAMPAIGNS #1:

THE POWER OF THE PRINTED WORD

Sponsored by the 'Fort Knox' of Copy
In the 1980s, International Paper was locked in a no-holds-barred struggle with five major competitors whose products varied little.

International Paper set out to create a reason why customers should prefer I.P. above the rest, even if only for a feeling of the “warm and fuzzies.”

But can that translate to sales and customer loyalty, especially for a commodity product like paper?

The campaign -- “We believe in the power of the printed word” -- was a smashing success.

It was conceived by Ogilvy creative director, Billings S. Fuess, who relied on celebrities with credibility in education, like Kurt Vonnegut: “How To Write With Style,” Bill Cosby (before he became a TV sitcom superstar): “How To Read Faster,” Malcolm Forbes: “How To Write a Business Letter, Walter Cronkite: “How To Read A Newspaper,” and George Plimpton: “How To Make a Speech,” among others.

While the ads were written under the bylines of these well knowns, it was Fuess who spent three to four weeks researching each ad and one week writing the first draft.

27 Million Requests for Copies of These Ads

The initial campaign targeted the 15–to–30 age group, mainly those in high school or college, under the banner of the “College Survival Kit.”

But as these two-page spreads gained attention from widespread insertions, I.P. was inundated with requests for copies of these ads from all age groups. They later spun off the “Business Survival Kit.”

Doubleday was one of four publishers to put in a bid to publish a compilation of these ads after the fourth ad hit the press.

Can you imagine anything so crazy... print ads being turned into a book?

But the copies were swept up and out of print copies now sell on Amazon for $273 and up.

Most wouldn’t peg a paper manufacturer as the source of such ingenious product and brand differentiation.
It just goes to show there are countless ideas for creating a competitive advantage out of thin air.

Always swipe responsibly,

Lawrence Bernstein

Thousands of direct response ads....

It’s the ultimate copywriter’s and direct marketer’s playground.

[The Ultimate Online Swipe File]
Help!" you say. "I can't read all those books, I can't write that paper by tomorrow!" Don't despair. Send for our free College Survival Kit. The kit explains the basics of college reading and writing in a simple, straightforward way by experts you can relate to.

You're spending a lot of time, effort, and money on your college education. Get the most out of it.

Send for your free International Paper College Survival Kit now.

INTERNATIONAL PAPER COMPANY
We believe in the power of the printed word.

Please send to: International Paper Co., College Survival Kit, Dept. FSE, P.O. Box 954, Madison Square Station, New York, N.Y. 10010.

© 1982 International Paper Company
BUSINESS SURVIVAL KIT
Free From International Paper
Survival in today's business climate calls for more than being able to understand a balance sheet. Survival also calls for better abilities at reading, writing, communicating.

If you or your employees need help in coping with the written word, send for sets of your free Business Survival Kit. It contains concise, information-packed articles like these.

Write: Business Survival Kit, International Paper Company, Dept. CT, PO. Box 954, Madison Square Station, New York, N.Y. 10010.

How to write a business letter

Some thoughts from Malcolm Forbes

A good business letter can get you a lot more than your usual credit.

Or get you money.

It's really news to how many businessmen who want to write, but who feel there is something wrong with their writing.

The first place to begin is with the letter. If you are in business, you can't go wrong.

If you can get your own letter in to him, or to his mother, it will make a lot of difference.

Plunge right in. You can't do better.

I say this with a little bit of pride.

And you can do it.

It's not as easy as it looks.

But it's not as hard as you think.

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How to write with style

By Kurt Vonnegut

Simplicity of language is not only reputable, but perhaps even sacred. The Bible opens with a sentence well within the writing skills of a lively fourteen-year-old: "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth."

1. Find a subject you care about

Find a subject you care about and which you are afraid to neglect. Those little girls were in the room, but I am not afraid of them. If I must write a book, I am not afraid of it. If I am not afraid of it, I am not afraid of it. If I am not afraid of it, I am not afraid of it. If I am not afraid of it, I am not afraid of it. If I am not afraid of it, I am not afraid of it. If I am not afraid of it, I am not afraid of it. If I am not afraid of it, I am not afraid of it. If I am not afraid of it, I am not afraid of it.

2. Do not ramble, though

I won't ramble on about that.

3. Keep it simple

As for your use of language: Remember that two great masters of language, William Shakespeare and James Joyce, wrote sentences which were almost childlike when their subjects were most profound. "To be or not to be?" asks Shakespeare's Hamlet. The longest word is three letters long. Joyce, when he was frisky, could put together a sentence as intricate and as glittering as a neck-piece for Cleopatra, but my favorite sentence is in his short story "Eveline" is this one: "She was tired.

At that point in the story, no other words could break the heart of a reader as those three words do.

4. Have the guts to cut

It may be that you, too, are capable of making necklaces for Cleopatra, so to speak. But your eloquence should be the servant of your words. If your theme is a horse, you should be the servant of your words. If you wrote one, you provided you genuinely cared about something. A petition to the mayor about a pothole in front of your house or a love letter to the girl next door will do.

5. Sound like yourself

The writing style which is most natural for you is bound to echo the speech you heard when a child. English was the novelist Joseph Conrad's third language, and much that seems piquant in his use of English was no doubt colored by his first language, which was Polish. And luckily the writer who has grown up in Ireland, for the English spoken there is so amusing and musical. I myself grew up in Indianapolis, where common speech sounds like a hand saw cutting galvanized tin, and employs a vocabulary as unornamental as a monkey wrench.

In some of the more remote hollows of Appalachia, children still grow up hearing songs and stories of Elizabethan times. Yes, and many Americans grow up hearing a language other than English, or an English dialect a majority of Americans cannot understand.

All these varieties of speech are beautiful, just as the varieties of butterflies are beautiful. No matter what your first language, you should treasure it all your life. If it happens not to be standard English, and it if it appears to you when you write standard English, the result is usually delightful, like a very pretty girl with one eye that is green and one that is blue.

I myself find that I trust my own writing most, and others seem to trust it most, too, when I sound most like a person from Indianapolis, which is what I am. What alternatives do I have? The one most vehemently recommended by teachers has no doubt been pressed on you, as well: to write like cultivated Englishmen of a century or more ago.

6. Say what you mean to say

I used to be exasperated by such teachers, but am no more. I understand now that all those an- tique essays and stories with which I was to compare my own work were not magnificent for their dat- edness or foreignness, but for saying precisely what their authors meant them to say. My teachers wished me to write accurately, always selecting the most effective words, and relating the words to one another unambiguously, rigidly, like parts of a machine. The teachers did not want to turn me into an Englishman after all. They hoped that I would become understandable and therefore understood.

And there went my dream of doing with words what Pablo Picasso did with paint or what any number of jazz idols did with music. If broke all the rules of punctuation, had words mean whatever I wanted them to mean, and strung them together higgledy-piggledy, I would simply not be understood. So you, too, had better avoid Picasso-style or jazz-style writing, if you have something worthy saying and wish to be understood.

Readers want our pages to look like much like pages they have seen before. Why? This is because they themselves have a tough job to do, and they need a little oomph, so they cut us from at.

7. Pick the readers

They have to identify thousands of little marks on paper, and make sense of them immediately. They have to read an art so difficult that most people don't really master it even after having studied it all through grade school and high school -- twelve long years.

So this discussion must finally acknowledge that our stylistic options as writers are neither numerous nor glamorous, since our readers are bound to be such imperfect artists. Our audience requires us to be sympathetic and patient teachers, ever willing to simplify and clarify -- whereas we would rather soar high above the crowd, singing like nightingales.

That is the bad news. The good news is that we Americans are governed under a unique Constitution, which allows us to write whenever we please without fear of punishment. So the most meaningful aspect of our styles, which is what we choose to write about, is utterly unlimited.

8. For really detailed advice

For a discussion of literary style in a narrower sense, in a more technical sense, I commend to your attention The Elements of Style, by William Strunk Jr., and E.B. White (Macmillan, 1979). E.B. White is, of course, one of the most admirable literary stylists this country has so far produced.

You should realize, too, that no one would care how well or badly Mr. White expressed himself, if he did not have perfectly enchanting things to say.

Years ago, International Paper sponsored a series of advertisements, "Send me a man who reads," to help make Americans more aware of the value of reading.

Today, the printed word is more vital than ever. Now there is more need than ever for all of us to read better, write better, and communicate better. International Paper offers this new series in the hope that, even in a small way, we can help.

For reprints of this advertisement, write: "Power of the Printed Word," International Paper Co., Dept. 5-T, P.O. Box 900, Elmsford, New York 10523, (718) 671-2256.
By Bill Cosby

Am not, I said.
Are so, he said.
I told him the monsters were going to eat him at midnight.
He started to cry. My dad came in and told the monster to beat it.
Then he told us to go to sleep.
"If I heard anything more about monsters," he said, "I'll spank you.
We want to sleep fast. And you know something? They never did come back.

Skimming can give you a very good idea of this story in about half.

Then read the entire last two paragraphs.

Previewing doesn't give you all the details. But it does keep you from spending time on things you don't really want—or need—to read.

And, once you know what you expect to read, you get a quick, overall view of long, unfamiliar material. For short, light reading, there's a better technique:

2. Skim—If it's short and simple.

Skimming is a way to get a general idea of light reading—like popular magazines or the sports and entertainment sections of the paper.

You should be able to skim a weekly popular magazine or the second section of your daily paper in less than half the time it takes you to read it now.

And the way to do this is to train your eyes to read

Here's how to skim:

Think of your eyes as magnets. Force them to move fast. Sweep them across each and every line of type. Pick up only a few key words in each line. Everybody skims differently. You and I may not pick up exactly the same words when we skim the same piece, but we both get a pretty similar idea of what it's all about.

To show you how it works, I circled the words I picked out when I skimmed the following story.

Then read only the first sentence of each successive paragraph.

Learning to read clusters is not something your eyes do naturally. It takes constant practice.

Here's how to do it:

Pick something light to read. Read it as fast as you can. Concentrate on picking up 3 to 4 words at once rather than one word at a time. Then read faster.

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International Paper offers this new series in the hope that, even in a small way, we can help.

For reprint of this advertisement, write: "Power of the Printed Word," International Paper Co., Dept. 34T, P.O. Box 600, Elmford, New York 10523.
How to improve your vocabulary

By Tony Randall

You can often get at least part of a word's meaning—just from how it's used in a sentence. That's why it's so important to read as much as you can—different kinds of things: magazines, books, newspapers, you don't normally read. More you expose yourself to new words, the more you'll pick up just by seeing how they're used.

For example, say you run across the word "manacle":"The manacles had been on John's wrists for 30 years. Only one person had used them—his wife."

You have a good idea of what "manacles" are, just from the context of the sentence. But let's find out exactly what the word means and where it comes from. The only way to do this, and build an extensive vocabulary fast, is to go to the dictionary. (How lucky you can—Shakespeare couldn't. There wasn't an English dictionary in his day.)

So you go to the dictionary. (NOTE: Don't let dictionary abbreviations put you off. The front tells you what they mean and even has a guide to pronunciation.)

2. Look it up

Here's the definition for "manacle" in the American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language:

man-a-clé (man' a-klé) n. 1. A device for confining the hands, usually consisting of two metal rings that are fastened about the wrists and joined by a metal chain, a handcuff. 2. Anything that confines or restrains: a manacle, cincture, circlet. 3. To restrain with manacles. 2. To confine or restrain as if with manacles; shackles; fetters. [Middle English manacle, from Old French, from Latin manaculis, little hand, handle, diminutive of manus, hand. See man- in Appendix.] (The word is from the Latin meaning "hand").

That's what you thought it meant. But what's the idea behind the word? What are its roots? To really understand a word, you need to know where it comes from. Here's the detective work—and the fun—begins.

3. Dig the meaning out by the roots

The root is the basic part of the word—its heritage, its origin. (Most of our roots come from Latin and Greek words at least 2,000 years old—which come from even earlier Indo-European tongues.)

Learning the roots: 1) Helps us remember words. 2) Gives us a deeper understanding of the words we already know. And 3) allows us to pick up whole families of new words at a time. That's why learning the root is the most important part of going to the dictionary.

Notice the root of "manacle" is manu (Latin) meaning "hand." Well, that makes sense. Now, other words with this root, maybe start to make sense, too.

Take manual—something done "by hand" (quotation marks). Or a "handbook." And manage—to "handle" something (as a manager). When you appreciate someone, you're taking him "from the hands of" someone else.

When you manufacture something, you make it "by hand" (in its original meaning). And when you finish your first novel, your publisher will see your originally "hardwritten" manuscript.

Imagine! A whole new world of words opens up—just from one simple root! The root gives the basic clue to the meaning of a word. But there's another important clue that runs on a second closer-the prefix.

4. Get the powerful prefixes under your belt

A prefix is the part that's sometimes attached to the front of a word. Like—well, "m-" There aren't many—fewer than 100 major prefixes—and you'll learn them that time at all just by becoming more aware of the meanings of words you already know. Here are a few. (Some of the How-to vocabulary-building books will give you the others.)

- "Fatigue" has a Latin root. Learn it and you'll know other words at a glance.

Now, see how the prefix (along with the context) helps you get the meaning of the radical words: 1) "If you're going to be my witness, your story must corroborate my story." (The literal meaning of corroborate is "strengthen together.")

2) "You told me on day—you now call me another. Don't contradict yourself." (The literal meaning of contradict is "say against.")

3) "Oh, that snake's not poisonous. It's a completely innocuous little garden snake." (The literal meaning of innocuous is "not harmful.")

Now, you've got some new words. What are you going to do with them?

5. Put your new words to work at once

Use them several times the first day you learn them. Say them out loud! Write them in sentences. Should you "use" them on your friends? Careful—you don't want them to think you're a stuffed shirt. (It depends on the situation. You know when a word sounds right—and when it sounds stuffy.)

How about your enemies? You'll have their blessing. Ask one of them if he's read that article on pneumo-natrium scopic silicovesicular calcosiliconoxane.

Today, the printed word is more vital than ever. Now there's more need than ever for all of us to read better, write better, and communicate better.

International Paper offers this series in the hope that, even in a small way, we can help. If you'd like to share this article with others—students, friends, employees, family—well, gladly send you reprints. So far we've sent out over 8,000,000 in response to requests from people everywhere. Please write: "Power of the Printed Word," International Paper Company, Dept. ST, P.O. Box 954, Madison Square Station, New York, N.Y. 10010.

We believe in the power of the printed word.
How to write a business letter

Some thoughts from Malcolm Forbes
President and Editor-in-Chief of Forbes Magazine

I've found that separates the winners from the losers (most of it's just good common sense)–it starts before you write your letter:

Know what you want
If you don't write it down in one sentence, "I want to get an interview with the next two weeks." That simple. List the major points you want to get across—it will keep you on course.

If you're answering a letter, check the points that need answering and keep the letter in front of you while you write. This way you won't forget anything—that would cause another round of letters.

And for goodness' sake, answer promptly if you're going to answer at all. Don't sit on a letter—that invites the person on the other end to sit on whatever you want from him.

Plunge right in
Call him by his name—not "Dear Sir, Madam, or Ms."—"Dear Mr. Chaitshapoulos"—and be sure to spell it right. That'll get him (thus, you) off to a good start.

Usually you can get his name just by phoning his company—or from a business directory in your nearest library.

Tell what your letter is about in the first paragraph. One or two sentences. Don't keep your reader guessing or he might file your letter away—ever before he finishes it.

In the round file, if you're answering a letter, refer to the date it was written. So the reader won't waste time hunting for it.

People who read business letters are as human as thee and me. Reading a letter shouldn't be a chore—round the reader for the time he gave you.

Write so he'll enjoy it
Write the entire letter from his point of view—what's it in for him? Beat him to the draw—surprise him by answering the questions and objections he might have.

Be positive—be more receptive to what you have to say.

Be nice. Contrary to the cliché, genuinely nice guys most often hit the first very near it. It's not easy when you've got a gripe.

To be agreeable while disagreeing—that's art.

Be natural—write the way you talk. Imagine him sitting in front of you—what would you say to him? Business jargon too often is cold, stiff, unnatural.

Suppose I came up to you and said, "I acknowledge receipt of your letter and I beg to thank you." You'd think, "Huh? You're putting me on."

The acid test—read your letter out loud when you're done. You might get a shock—but you'll know for sure if it sounds natural.

Don't be cute or flippant. The reader won't take you seriously. This doesn't mean you've got to be dull. You prefer your letter to knock 'em dead rather than bore 'em to death.

Three points to remember:

Have a sense of humor. That's refreshing anywhere—a nice surprise in a business letter.

Be specific. If I tell you there's a new fuel that can save gasoline, you might not believe me. But suppose I tell you this:

"Gasohol"—10% alcohol, 90% gasoline—works as well as straight gasoline. Since you can make alcohol from grain or corn storks, wood or wood waste, coal— even garbage, it's worth some real follow-through.

Now you've got something to sink your teeth into.

Learn how to use nouns and verbs. Better on adjectives. Use the active voice instead of the passive. Your writing will have more guts. Which of these is stronger?

Active voice: "He kicked my money manager." Passive voice: "My money manager was kicked out by me." By the way, neither is true. My son, Malcolm Jr., manages most Forbes money—he's a brilliant manymaker.

Give it the best you've got
When you don't want something enough to make the effort, making an effort is a waste.

Make your letter look appetizing—or you'll strike out before you even get to bat. Type it—on good-quality 8½" x 11" stationary. Keep it neat. And use paragraphing that makes it easier to read.

Keep your letter short—to one page, if possible. Keep your paragraphs short. After all, who's going to benefit if your letter is quick and easy to read?

You.

You'll also be grateful to you.

For emphasis, underline important words. And sometimes indented sentences as well as paragraphs.

Like this. See how well it works? (But save it for something special.)

Make it perfect. No typos, no misspellings, no factual errors. If you're slumpy and let mistakes slip by, the person reading your letter will think you don't know better or don't care. Do you?

Be crystal clear. You won't get what you want if your reader doesn't get the message.

Use good English. If you're still in school, take all the English and writing courses you can. The way you write and speak can really help—or hurt.

If you're not in school (even if you can), get the little 76-page gem by Strunk & White. Elements of Style. It's in paperback. It's fun to read and loaded with tips on good English and good writing.

Don't put on airs. Pretense invariably impresses only the pretender. Don't exaggerate. Even once. Your reader will suspect everything else you write.

Distinguish opinions from facts. Your opinions may be the best in the world. But they're not gospel. You owe it to your reader to let him know which is which. He'll appreciate it and he'll admire you. The dumber people I know are those who Knew it All.

Be honest. I'll get you further in the long run. If you're not, you won't rest easy until you're found out. (The latter, not speaking from experience.)

Edit ruthlessly. Somebody has said that words are like inflated money—the more of them that you use, the less each one of them is worth. Right on. Go through your entire letter out as many times as it takes. Make sure you there are no unnecessary words, sentences—even unnecessary paragraphs.

Sum it up and get out
The last paragraph should tell the reader exactly what you want him to do—or what you're going to do. Short and sweet. "May I have an appointment? Next Monday, the 16th, I'll call your secretary to see when it'll be most convenient for you.

Close with something simple, like, "Sincerely." And for heaven's sake sign legibly. The biggest ego trip I know is a completely illegible signature.

Good luck.
I hope you get what you want.

Sincerely,

Malcolm L. Forbes

Years ago, International Paper sponsored a series of advertisements, "Send me a man who reads," to help make Americans more aware of the value of reading.

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We believe in the power of the printed word.
How to read an annual report

By Jane Bryant Quinn

officers and their addresses so you can write for annual reports. So now Galactic Industries' latest annual report is sitting in front of you ready to be cracked. How do you crack it?

Where do we start? Not at the front. At the back! We don't want to be surprised at the end of this story.

Start at the back
First, turn back to the report of the certified public accountant. This third-party auditor will tell you right off the bat if Galactic's report conforms with "generally accepted accounting principles."

Watch out for the word "subject to." They mean the financial report is clean only if you take the company's word about a particular piece of business, and the accountant isn't sure you should. Doubts like this are usually settled behind closed doors. When a "subject to" makes it into the annual report, it could mean trouble.

What else should you know before you check the numbers? Stay in the back of the book and go to the footnotes. Yep! The whole profits story is sometimes in the footnotes.

Are earnings down? If it's only because of a change in accounting, maybe that's good! The company owes less tax and has more money in its pocket. Are earnings up? Maybe that's bad. They may be up because of a special windfall that won't happen again next year. The footnotes know.

For what happened and why
Now turn to the letter from the chairman. Usually addressed "to our stockholders," it's up front, and should be in more ways than one. The chairman's tone reflects the personality, the well-being of his company.

In his letter he should tell you how his company fared this year. But more important, he should tell you why. Keep an eye out for sentences that start with "Except for..." and "Despite the..." They're clues to problems.

Insights into the future
On the positive side, a chairman's letter should give you insights into the company's future and its stance on economic or political trends that may affect it.

While you're up front, look for what's new in each line of business. Is management getting the company in good shape to weather the tough and competitive 1980s?

"Reading an annual report can be (almost) as exciting as a spy thriller—if you know how to find the clues. I'll show you how to find the most important ones here.

Now—and no sooner—should you dig into the numbers! One source is the balance sheet. It is a snapshot of how the company stands at a single point in time. On the left are assets—everything the company owns. Things that can
quickly be turned into cash are current assets. On the right are liabilities—everything the company owes. Current liabilities are the debts due in one year, which are paid out of current assets.

The difference between current assets and current liabilities is net working capital, a key figure to watch from one annual (and quarterly) report to another. If working capital shrinks, it could mean trouble. One possibility: the company may not be able to keep dividends growing rapidly.

Look for growth here

Stockholders’ equity is the difference between total assets and liabilities. It is the presumed dollar value of what stockholders own. You want it to grow.

Another important number to watch is long-term debt. High and rising debt, relative to equity, may be no problem for a growing business. But it shows weakness in a company that’s leveling out. (More on that later.)

The second basic source of numbers is the income statement. It shows how much money Galactic made or lost over the year.

Most people look at one figure first. It’s in the income statement at the bottom: net earnings per share. Watch out. It can fool you. Galactic’s management could boost earnings by selling off a plant. Or by cutting the budget for research and advertising. (See the footnotes!) So don’t be smug about net earnings until you’ve found out how they happened—and how they might happen next year.

Check net sales first

The number you should look at first in the income statement is net sales. Ask yourself: Are sales going up at a faster rate than the last time around? When sales increases start to slow, the company may be in trouble. Also ask: Have sales gone up faster than inflation? If not, the company’s real sales may be behind. And ask yourself once more: Have sales gone down because the company is selling off a losing business?

If so, profits may be soaring. (I never promised you that figuring out an annual report was going to be easy!)

Get out your calculator

Another important thing to study today is the company’s debt. Get out your pocket calculator, and turn to the balance sheet. Divide long-term liabilities by stockholders’ equity. That’s the debt-to-equity ratio.

A high ratio means that the company borrows a lot of money to spark its growth. That’s okay—if sales grow, too, and if there’s enough cash on hand to meet the payments. A company doing well on borrowed money can earn big profits for its stockholders. But if sales fall, watch out. The whole enterprise may slowly sink. Some companies can handle high ratios; others can’t.

You have to compare

That brings up the most important thing of all: One annual report, one chairman’s letter, one ratio won’t tell you much. You have to compare. Is the company’s debt-to-equity ratio better or worse than it used to be? Better or worse than the industry norms? Better or worse, after this recession, than it was after the last recession? In company-watching, comparisons are all. They tell you if management is staying on top of things.

Financial analysts work out many other ratios to tell them how the company is doing. You can learn more about them from books on the subject. Ask your librarian.

But one thing you will never learn from an annual report is how much to pay for a company’s stock. Galactic may be running well. But if investors expected it to run better, the stock might fall. Or Galactic could be slumping badly. But if investors see a better day tomorrow, the stock could rise.

Two important suggestions

Those are some basics for weighing a company’s health from its annual report. But if you want to know all you can about a company, you need to do a little more homework. First, see what the business press has been saying about it over recent years. Again, ask your librarian.

Finally, you should keep up with what’s going on in business, economics and politics here and around the world. All can—and will—affect you and the companies you’re interested in.

Each year, companies give you more and more information in their annual reports. Profiting from that information is up to you. I hope you profit from mine.

———

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We believe in the power of the printed word.
How to make a speech

By George Plimpton

Points set down on a 3" x 5" index cards — the next problem is the actual pronunciation of the speech. Ideally, a speech should not be read. At least it should never appear or sound as if you are reading it. An audience is dismayed to see a speaker peering down at a thick sheaf of papers on the lectern, wetting his thumb to turn to the next page.

How to sound spontaneous

The best speakers are those who make their words sound spontaneous even if memorized. I've found it's best to learn a speech point by point, not word for word. Careful preparation and a great deal of practicing are required to make it come together smoothly and easily.

Mark Twaun once said, "It takes three weeks to prepare a good ad-lib speech."

Don't be fooled when you rehearse. It takes longer to deliver a speech than to read it. Most speakers rely on about 100 words a minute.

Brevity is an asset

A sensible plan, if you have been asked to speak to an exact limit, is to talk your speech into a minute and stop at your allotted time; then cut the speech accordingly.

The more familiar you become with your speech, the more confidently you can deliver it.

As anyone who listens to speeches knows, brevity is an asset.

In mentioning brevity, it is worth mentioning that the shortest inaugural address was George Washington's, just 135 words. The longest was William Henry Harrison's in 1841. He delivered a two-hour one-word speech into the teeth of a freezing northeast wind. He came down with a cold the following day, and a month later he died of pneumonia.

Check your grammar

Consult a dictionary for proper meanings and pronunciations. Your audience won't know if you're a bad speller, but they will know if you use or pronounce a word improperly.

In my first requests on the dais, I used to thank people for their "fulsome introduction." Until I discovered to my dismay that "fulsome" means offensive and insincere.

Tintem, say, but a technical talk or an informative speech can be enriched with a question period.

The crowd

The larger the crowd, the easier it is to speak, because the response is multiplied and increased. Most people don't mind this. They seek out from behind the curtain and if the auditorium is filled to the rafters they will mob softly in the back of their throats.

What about stage fright?

Very few speakers escape the so-called "butterflies." There does not seem to be any cure for them, except to realize that they are beneficial rather than harmful, and never fatal.

The tension usually means that the speaker is beginning to realize he has been asked to speak and that he has no idea how to organize what he has to say.

On the podium

It helps one's nerves to pick out three or four people in the audience — preferably in different sectors so that the speaker is apparently giving his attention to the entire room — on whom to focus. Pick out people who seem to be having a good time.

How questions help

A question period at the end of a speech is a good notion. One would not ask questions following a tribute to the company treasurer on his retirement, say, but a technical talk or an informative speech can be enriched with a question period.

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If you'd like to share this article with others — students, friends, employees, family — we'd gladly send you reprints. So far we've sent out over 8,000,000 in response to requests from people everywhere.


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How to write clearly

By Edward T. Thompson

Editor-in-Chief, Reader's Digest

"Cut your teeth and cut the fat. That's one of the suggestions I offer here to help you write clearly. The image. Those are second/third-degree words."

International Paper asked Edward T. Thompson to share some of what he has learned in nineteen years with Reader's Digest, a magazine famous for making complicated subjects understandable to millions of readers.

If you are afraid to write, don't be. If you think you've got to string together big fancy words and high-flying phrases, forget it.

"It's not easy. But it is easier than you might imagine. There are only three basic requirements."

1. First, you must want to write clearly. And I believe you really do, if you've stayed this far with me. Second, you must be willing to work hard. Thinking means work--and that's what it takes to do anything well.

2. Third, you must know and follow some basic guidelines.

If, while you're writing for clarity, some lovely, dramatic or inspired phrases or sentences come to you, fine. Put them in. But then with cold, objective eyes and mind ask yourself: "Do they detract from clarity?" If they do, grit your teeth and cut the fat.

Follow some basic guidelines

I can't give you a complete list of "do's and don'ts" for every writing problem you'll ever face.

But I can give you some fundamental guidelines that cover the most common problems.

I. Outline what you want to say.

1. Know that sounds grade-schoolish. But you can't write clearly until, before you start, you know where you will stop.

2. Ironically, that's even a problem, in writing an outline (i.e., knowing the ending before you begin). So try this method:

   - On 3"x5" cards, write--one point to a card--all the points you need to make.
   - Divide the cards into piles--one pile for each group of points closely related to each other. (If you were describing an automobile, you'd put all the points about mileage in one pile, all the points about safety in another, and so on.)
   - Arrange your piles of points in a sequence. Which are most important and should be given first or saved for last? Which must you present before others in order to make the others understandable?

   - Now, within each pile, do the same thing--arrange the points in logical, understandable order.

   - Then you have your outline, needing only an introduction and conclusion.

   - This is a practical way to outline. It's also flexible. You can add, delete or change the location of points easily.

2. Start where your readers are.

   - How much do they know about the subject? Don't write to a level higher than your readers' knowledge of it.

   - CAUTION: Forget that old--and wrong--advice about writing to a 12-year-old mentality. That's insulting. But do remember that your prime purpose is to explain something, not prove that you're smarter than your readers.

3. Avoid jargon.

   - Don't use new words, expressions, phrases known only to people with specific knowledge or interests.

   - Example: A scientist, using scientific jargon, wrote, "The beta exhibited a one hundred percent mortality response." He could have written: "All the fish died."

4. Use familiar combinations of words.

   - A speech writer for President Franklin D. Roosevelt wrote, "We are endeavoring to construct a more inclusive society." E.D.R. changed it to, "We're going to make a country in which no one is left out."

   - CAUTION: By familiar combinations of words, I do not mean incorrect grammar. That can be unclear. Example: John's father says, "he can't go out Friday. (Who can't go out? John or his father?)"

5. Use "first-degree" words.

   - These words immediately bring an image to your mind. Other words must be "translated" through the first-degree word before you see

"Outline for clarity. Write your points on 3"x5" cards--nine points to a card. Then you can easily add to, or change the order of, points, even delete some."

6. Stick to the point.

   - Your outline--which was more work in the beginning--now saves you work. Because now you can ask any sentence you write: "Does it relate to a point in the outline? If it doesn't, should I add it to the outline? If not, I'm getting off the track." Then, full steam ahead--on the main line.

7. Be as brief as possible.

   - Whenever you write, shortening--condensing--almost always makes it tighter, straighter, easier to read and understand.

   - Condensing, as Reader's Digest does it, is in large part artistry. But it involves techniques that anyone can learn and use.

   - Present only your points in logical ABC order. Here again, your outline should save you work because, if you did it right, your points already stand in logical ABC order--A makes B understandable, B makes C understandable and so on. To write in a straight line is to say something clearly in the fewest possible words.

   - Don't waste words telling people what they already know. Notice how we edited this: "Have you ever wondered how banks rate you as a credit risk? Many banks have a scoring system . . ."

   - Cut out excess evidence and unnecessary anecdotes: Usually one fact or example (at most, two) will support a point. More just belabor it. And while writing about something

   - thing may remind you of a good story, ask yourself: "Does it really help to tell the story, or does it slow me down?"

   - (Many people think Reader's Digest articles are filled with anecdotes. Actually, we use them sparingly and usually for one of two reasons: either the subject is so dry it needs some "humanity" to give it life; or the subject is so hard to grasp, it needs anecdotes to help readers understand. If the subject is both lively and easy to grasp, we move right along.)

   - Look for the most common word wasters: windy phrases.

"Windy phrases at the present time

at the present time... often... in the event of... in the majority of instances... usually..."

   - Look for passive verbs you can make active: Invariably, this produces a shorter sentence. "The cherry tree was chopped down by George Washington." (Passive verb and nine words.) "George Washington chopped down the cherry tree." (Active verb and seven words.)

   - Look for positive/negative sections from which you can cut the negative: See how we did it here: "The answer is having enough people to do the job."

   - Finally, to write more clearly by saying it in fewer words: when you've finished, stop.

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How to use a library

By James A. Michener

Who knows what your library can open up for you? My first suggestion for making the most of your library is to do what I did: read and read and read. For pleasure—and for understanding.

How to kick the TV habit

If TV that keeps you from cultivating this delicious habit, I can offer a sure remedy. Take home from the library a stack of books that might look interesting. Try them on the TV set. Next time you are tempted to turn on a program you really don't want to see, reach for a book instead.

Over the years, some people collect a mental list of books they mean to read. If you don't have such a list, here is a suggestion. Take home from the library some of the books you have read, but have not been read by you. Like Remarque's "All Quiet on the Western Front," Clavel's "The Hobbit," Tolkien's "The Hobbit," or Victor Hugo's "Les Misérables." If you like what you read, you can follow up with other satisfying books by the same authors.

Some people in their reading limit themselves to current talk-about-best sellers. Oh, what they miss! The library is full of yesterday's best sellers, and they still make compelling reading today. Some of the best reads are "The Big Sky," Carl Van Doren's "Benjamin Franklin," Muriel Spark's "Old Jules," and Norman Mailer's "The Naked and the Dead." How do you find these or any other books you're looking for? It's easy—with the card catalog.

Learn to use the card catalog

Every time I go to the library—and I go more than once a week—I invariably make a bee-line to the card catalog before anything else. It's the nucleus of any public library.

The card catalog lists every book in the library by author, title, subject. Let's pick an interesting subject to look up. I have always been fascinated by astronomy. You'll be surprised at the wealth of material you will find under "astronomy" to draw upon. And the absorbing books you didn't know existed in on it.

CAUTION: Always have a pencil and paper when you use the card catalog. Once you jot down the numbers of the books you are interested in, you are ready to find them on the shelves.

Learn to use the stacks

Libraries call the shelves the "stacks." In many smaller libraries which you'll be using, the stacks will be open for you to browse.

To me there is a special thrill in tracking down the books I want in the stacks! For invariably I find books about which I knew nothing, and these often turn out to be the very ones I need. You will find the same thing happening to you when you start to browse in the stacks.

"A learned mind is the end product of browsing."

Every time I go to the library, I make a bee-line to the card catalog. Learn to use it. It's easy.

CAUTION: If you take a book from the stacks to your work desk, do not try to return it to its proper place. That's work for the experts. If you replace it incorrectly, the next seeker won't be able to find it.

Learn to know the reference librarian

Some of the brightest and best informed men and women in America are the librarians who specialize in providing reference help.

Introduce yourself. State your problem. And be amazed at how much help you will receive. CAUTION: Do not waste the time of this expert by asking silly questions you ought to solve yourself. Save the reference librarian for the really big ones.

Learn to use the Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature

This green-bound index is one of the most useful items in any library. It indexes all the articles in the major magazines, including newspaper magazine supplements. Thus it provides a guide to the latest report on any subject that interests you. So if you want to do a really in-depth job, find out which magazines your library subscribes to, then consult the Reader's Guide and track down recent articles on your subject. When you use this wonderful tool effectively, you show the mark of a real scholar.

Four personal hints

Since you can take most books home, but not magazines, take full notes when using the latter. Many libraries today provide a reprographic machine that can quickly copy pages you need from magazines and books. Ask about it. If you are working on a project of some size which will require repeated library visits, keep a small notebook in which you record the identification numbers of the books you will be using frequently. This will save you valuable time, because you won't have to consult the card catalog or search uselessly through the stacks each time you visit for material you seek. Some of the very best books in any library are the letters you have written, but may be taken home. Learn what topics they cover and how best to use them, for these books are wonderful repositories of human knowledge.

Your business and legal advisor

Your library can give you help on any subject. It can even be your business and legal advisor.

How many times have you scratched your head over how to get a tax rebate on your summer job? You'll find answers in tax guides at the library. Thinking of buying or renting a house? You'll find guides to that. Want to defend yourself in traffic court? Find out how in legal books at the library.

Library projects can be fun—and rewarding

Here are a few ideas:

1. What are your roots? Trace your ancestry. Many libraries specialize in genealogy.

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We believe in the power of the printed word.
How to enjoy the classics

By Steve Allen

International Paper asked Steve Allen, television comedian, composer, writer of the television series "Making of Man," author of 22 books and several plays, to show how you can appreciate man's greatest written words.

Why is it? In school we learn one of the most amazing and difficult facts man has ever accomplished — how to read — and at the same time we learn to hate to read the things worth reading most.

It's happened to us all — with assignment reading! It happened to me. The teacher assigned Moby Dick. I didn't want to read it. So I bought it. I disliked it. I thought I won.

But I lost. My struggle to keep at arm's length from Moby Dick cost me all the good things that can come from learning to come to terms with those special few books we call the "classics." I've come back to Moby Dick on my own since, and I like it. And I've discovered a new level of pleasure from it with each reading.

What is a classic? A classic is a book that gives you that exhilarating feeling, if only for a moment, that you've finally uncovered part of the meaning of life.

A classic is a book that's stood the test of time, a book that men and women all over the world keep reaching for throughout the ages for its special enlightenment.

Not many books can survive such a test. Considering all the volumes that have been produced since man first put chisel to stone, classics account for an infinitesimal share of the total — less than .001 percent. That's just a few thousand books. Of those, only 100 make up the special field of classics.

Why should you tackle the classics? Why try to enjoy them? I suggest three good reasons:


2. Classics help you understand your life, your world, yourself.

That last one is the big one. A classic can give you insights into yourself that you will never have before. You can get pleasure out of almost any book. But a classic, once you penetrate it, lifts you up.

6. Classics are written over a period of time — 2,500 years ago and it still knocks me out.

But I can hear you saying, "I've tried reading classics. They are hard to understand. I can't get into them."

Let me offer some suggestions that will help you open up this wondrous world. Pick up a classic you've always promised to try. Then take Dr. Allen's advice.

Now what you're reading:

1. Is it a novel, a drama, or a biography? To find out, check the table of contents, read the book cover, the preface, or look up the title or author in The Reader's Encyclopedia.

2. Don't read in bed.

Classics can be tough going; I'll admit it. You need to be alert, with your senses sharp. When you read in bed you're courting sleep — and you'll blame it on the book when you start nodding off.

Don't let a lot of characters throw you:

Dostoevsky writes fifty major characters in you in The Brothers Karamazov. In the very first chapter of War and Peace, Tolstoy bombards you with twenty-two names long, complicated ones like Anna Pavlovna Scherbatova, Anatole and Prince Bolkonski. Don't scurry for cover. Stick with it. The characters will gradually sort themselves out and you'll feel comfortable with them as you do with your own dear friends who are strangers,

GIVE THE AUTHOR A CHANCE:

Don't say "I don't get it!" too soon. Keep reading right to the end.

Sometimes, though, you may not be ready for the book you're trying to get into. Tackled Plato's Republic three times before it finally opened up to me. And man, was it worth it! So if you really can't make it a go of the book in your lap, put it aside for another day, or year, and take on another one.

Read in big bites:

Don't read in short nibbles. How can you expect to understand a whole book? Start with the first chapter, the opening and mood — and the more pleasure you get from it. When you finish, turn to the Greek try putting bouzouki music on the record player. Frost, a little Debussy. Shakespeare, Elizabethan theater music.

READ THE BOOK AGAIN:

All classics bear rereading. If after you finish the book you're intrigued but still confused, reread it then and there. It'll open up some more to you.

If you did read a classic a few years back and loved it, read it again. The book will have so many new things to say to you, you'll hardly believe it's the same one.

A FEW CLASSICS TO ENJOY

You can find excellent lists of the basic classics compiled by helpful experts. A few of my favorites:


How to enjoy poetry
by James Dickey

The most beautiful constellation in the winter sky is Orion, which ancient poets thought looked like a hunter. What is there, moving across heaven with his dog Sirius. What is this hunter made out of stars hunting for? What does he mean? Who owns him, if anybody? The poet Aldous Huxley felt that he did, and so, in Aldous Huxley’s unawareness of personal emotion, he did.

Up among the emblems of the wind tree, in heart of power:
The Hunterman climes, and all his clan,
Are bright, and all are mine.

Where to start
The beginning of your true encounter with poetry and the way to enjoy it is to open yourself to the poet’s world and to experience his world.

The possibilities of rhyme are great. Some of the best fun is in making up your own limericks. There’s no reason you can’t invent limericks about anything that comes to your mind. Don’t even try to make your limerick rhyme or to make your limerick rhyme. Just let your imagination run wild and let your limerick be free.

Writing poetry is a lot like a contest with yourself, and if you like sports and games and competitions of all kinds, you might like to try writing some. Why not?

connections between things will exist for you in ways that they never did before. They will shine with unexpectedness, wide-openness, and you will go toward them, on your own path. “Then...” as Dante says, “Then will your feet be filled with good desire.” You will know this is happening the first time you see, of something you never would have noticed before. “Well, would you look at that! What a surprise!” (Pause, full of new light)

“I think it!”

James Dickey

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If you’d like to share this article with others—students, friends, employees—make copies, distribute them to others. Let each of these things call up an image out of your own life.

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INTERNATIONAL PAPER COMPANY
How to punctuate

By Russell Baker

The role of body language. It helps readers hear the way you want to be heard.

"Gee, Dad, have I got to learn all them rules?"
Don't let the rules scare you. For they aren't hard and fast. Think of them as guidelines.

"Am I saying, "Go ahead and punctuate as you please?" Absolutely not. Use your own common sense, remembering that you can't expect readers to work to decipher what you're trying to say.

There are basic systems of punctuation:

1. The loose or open system, which tries to capture the way body language punctuates talk.
2. The tight, closed structural system, which hews closely to the sentence's grammatical structure.

Most writers use a little of both. In any case, we use much less punctuation than they used 200 or even 50 years ago. (Glance into Edward Gibbon's "Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire," first published in 1776.)

Comma

This is the most widely used mark of all. It's also the toughest and most controversial. I've seen aging editors almost come to blows over the comma. If you can handle it without sweating, the others will be easier.

1. Use a comma after a long introductory phrase or clause: After stealing the crown jewels from the Tower of London, I went home for tea.
2. If the introductory material is short, forget the comma: After the theft, I went home for tea.
3. But use it if the sentence would be confusing without it, like this: The day before I robbed the Bank of England.
4. Use a comma to separate elements in a series: I robbed the Denver Mint, the Bank of England, the Tower of London, and my piggy bank.

Notice there is no comma before and in the series. This is common style nowadays, but some publishers use a comma there, too.

5. Use a comma to separate independent clauses that are joined by a conjunction like and. But, for, or, nor, because, or so: I shall return the crown jewels, for they are too heavy to wear.
6. Use a comma to set off a mildly parenthetical word grouping that isn't essential to the sentence:

Girls, who have always interested me, usually differ from boys.

Do not use commas if the word grouping is essential to the sentence's meaning: Girls who interest me know how to talk.

7. Use a comma in direct address: Your majesty, please hand over the crown jewels.

8. And between proper names and titles: Montague Stanol, Director of Scotland Yard, was assigned the case.


Generally speaking, use a comma where you'd pause briefly in speech. For a long pause or completion of thought, use a period. If you confuse the comma with the period, you'll get a run-on sentence: The Bank of England is located in London, I rushed right over to rob it.

Semicolon

A more sophisticated mark than the comma, the semicolon separates two main clauses, but it keeps those two thoughts more tightly linked than a period: I stole crown jewels; she steals hearts.

Dash

There's no dash like a good dash. The dash shouts. Punctuation whispers. Shout too often, people stop listening; whisper too much, people become suspicious of you.

The dash creates a dramatic pause to prepare for an expression needing emphasis.

Parentheses

Parentheses help you pause quickly to drop in some charity information not vital to your story:

Despite Betty's despair ("I love nothing but my piggy bank," she often said), she was a terrible dancer.

Apostrophe

The big headache is with possessive nouns. If the noun is singular, add 's: I hated Betty's Tango. If the noun is plural, simply add an apostrophe after the s: Those are the girls' costs.

The same applies for singular nouns ending in s, like Dickens: This is Dickens's best book.

And plural: This is the Dickens's estate.

The possessive pronouns hers and its have no apostrophe.

If you write it, you are saying it.

Keep cool

You know about ending a sentence with a period (.) or a question mark (?).

Quotation marks (" ")

These tell the reader you're quoting the exact words someone said or wrote: Betty said, "I can't dance."

Colons ( : )

A colon is a tip-off to get ready for what's next: a list, a long quotation or an explanation. This article is riddled with colons. Too many, maybe, but the message is: Stay on your toes, it's coming at you.

Today, the printed word is more vital than ever. Now there is more need than ever for all of us to read better, write better, and communicate better.

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We believe in the power of the printed word.
by Walter Cronkite

How to read a newspaper

A good newspaper provides four basic ingredients to help you wrap your mind around the news: information, background, analysis and interpretation. The American Journalism Review put it this way: "The American people don't know how to read them."

News has a responsibility, and do so you. Our job is to report the news fairly, accurately, completely. You are to keep yourself informed every day.

First, you’ll never forget the quotation hanging in Edward R. Murrow’s CBS office. It was from Thoreau: “It takes two to speak the truth—ones to speak and one to hear.”

Take a three-minute overview

Here’s how I tackle a paper. For starters, I take a three-minute overview of the news. No need to go to the sports section first, or the TV listings. With this overview, you’ll get there quick enough. First, I scan the front-page headlines, look at the pictures and read the captions. I do the same thing page by page front to back. Then only then do I go back for the whole feast.

The way the front page is "made up" tells you plenty. For one, headline type size will tell you how the paper’s editor ranks the stories on relative importance. A major crop failure in Russia should get larger type than an over-turned Mack truck of wheat on the interstate, for example.

Which is the main story?

You’ll find the main or lead story in the farthest upper right-hand corner. Why? Tradition. Newspapers use to appear on newspapers folded and displayed with their top right-hand corner showing. They made up the front page with the lead story there to entice readers. You’ll find the second most important story at the top far left, unless it is related to the lead story. Do you have to read all the stories in the paper? Of course, no. But should you check them all? Maybe, the one that appears at first to be the least appealing will be the one that will most affect your life.

News is information, period

A good newspaper provides four basic ingredients to help you wrap your mind around the news:

- Information: the facts
- Background: the context
- Analysis: the interpretation
- Interpretation: the evaluation

These are sometimes flanked by "sidebars." These are stories that offer, not news, but the "why" and "how." These stories can include analysis and evaluation.

Background offers helpful facts. Another frequent inclusion is the "front page" or "editorial" page. Look for it in the newspapers you read. It will appear on the front page next to the editorial page.

Form your own opinion first

I form my own opinions. I turn to the editorial page for the pithy views. I don’t want them to tell me what to think until I’ve wrestled the issue through to my own conclusion. Once I’ve done that, I may find myself in a different place.

Here’s an idea I firmly believe and act upon. When you read something that motivates you, do something about it. Learn more about it. Join a cause. Write a letter. You can communicate on issues by writing letters to your congressman or state or local representative. And if you don’t find yourself with any more understanding of the event.

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If you’d like to share this article, you’ll find it attached on the inside of your newspaper. If you’d like to send your own reprints, we’ve sent out over 2,000 reprints in response to requests from people everywhere. Write: How to Read a Newspaper, "Power of the Printed Word," International Paper Company, Dept. 1ST, B.O. Box 594, Madison Square Station, New York, N.Y. 10010.
How to spell

By John Irving


Let's begin with the bad news. If you’re a bad speller, you probably think you always will be. There are exceptions to every spelling rule, and the rules themselves are easy to forget. George Bernard Shaw demonstrated how ridiculous some spelling rules are. By following the rules, he said, we could spell fish this way: ghoti. The “f” as it sounds in enough, the “gh” as it sounds in whgen, and the “i” as it sounds in fiction.

With such rules to follow, no one should feel stupid for being a bad speller. But there are ways to improve. Start by acknowledging that the mess that English spelling is in—but have sympathy: English spelling changed with foreign influences. Chaucer wrote “gesse,” but “guess,” imported earlier by the Norman invaders, finally replaced it. Most early printers in England came from Holland; they brought “ghost” and “gorkin” with them.

If you’d like to intimidate yourself and remain a bad speller forever—just try to remember

the 13 different ways the sound "sh" can be written:

shoe suspicion sugar naugahyde
ogden conscious iugue chaperone
nation mansion schist fish

Now the good news.

The good news is that 90 percent of all writing consists of 1,000 basic words. There is, also, a method to most English spelling and a great number of how-to-spell books. Remarkably, all these books propose learning the same rules! Not surprisingly, most of these books are humorless.

Just keep this in mind: If you’re familiar with the words you use, you’ll probably spell them correctly—and you shouldn’t be writing words you’re unfamiliar with anyway. USE a word—out loud, and more than once—before you try writing it, and make sure (with a new word) that you know what it means before you use it. This means you’ll have to look it up in a dictionary, where you’ll not only learn what it means, but you’ll see how it’s spelled. Choose a dictionary you enjoy browsing in, and guard it as you would a diary. You wouldn’t lend a diary, would you?

A tip on looking it up:

Besides every word I look up in my dictionary, I make a mark.

Beside every word I look up more than once, I write a note to myself — about why I looked it up. I have looked up "strictly" 14 times since 1964. I prefer to spell it with a "k" as in "strictly." I have looked up "ubiquitous" a dozen times. I can’t remember what it means.

Another good way to use your dictionary: When you have to look up a word, for any reason, learn—and learn to spell—a new word at the same time. It can be any useful word on the same page as the word you looked up. Put the date beside this new word and see how quickly, or in what way, you forget it. Eventually, you’ll learn it.

Almost as important as knowing what a word means (in order to spell it) is knowing how its pronounced. It’s government, not government. It’s February, not Febrary. And if you know that anti-means against, you should know how to spell antiguarde and antibiographic and antifreeze. If you know that ante-means before, you shouldn’t have trouble spelling antechamber or antecedent.

Some rules, exceptions, and two tricks:

don’t have room to touch on all the rules here. It would take a book to do that. But I can share a few that help me most:

Some spelling problems that seem hard are really easy. What about "-ary" or "-ary"? Just remember that there are only six common words in English that end in "ary." Memorize them, and feel fairly secure that all the rest end in "ary."

Here’s another easy rule. Only four words end in -euf. Most people mispronounce "-euf," which is usually correct. Just memorize these, and too, and use -euf for all the rest.

stupify purefry raref

As a former bad speller, I have learned a few valuable tricks. Any good how-to-spell book will teach you more than these two, but these too are my favorites. Of the 800,000 words in the English language, the most frequently misspelled is "admiral," just remember that "admiral" is all wrong. You wouldn’t write "alwron," would you? That’s how you know you should write all right.

The other trick is for the truly worst spellers. I mean those of you who spell so badly that you can’t get close enough to spell a word in order to even try it in the dictionary. The word you’re looking for is there, of course, but you won’t find it. Why you’re trying to spell it. What to do is look up a word—another that means the same thing. Chances are you’ll find the word you’re looking for under the definition of the synonym.

Demon words and bugsbear

Everyone has a few demon words—they never look right, even when they’re spelled correctly. Three of my demons are: CAESAR, CAJUS, and THYME. I have learned to hate these words, but I have not learned to spell them; I have to look them up every time.

And everyone at a spelling rule that’s a bugsbear—it’s either too difficult to learn or it’s impossible to remember. My personal bugbear among the rules is the one governing whether you add "able" to a word.

Remember it yourself.

You add "able" to a full word: adapt, adaptable, work, workable.

You add "able" to words that end in "e"—just remember to drop the "e"—love, lovely. But if the word ends in two "e's," like agree, you keep them both: agreeable.

You add "ible" if the base is not a full word that can stand on its own: credible, tangible, horrible, terrible. You add "ble," if the root word ends in -ge: responsible. You add "ible" if the root word ends in -ise: permissible. You add "ible" if the root word ends in -c:

Poor President Jackson

You must remember that it is permissible for spelling to drive you crazy. Spelling had this effect on Andrew Jackson, who once blew his stack while trying to write a Presidential paper. "It’s a damn poor thing," he said, "that can think of only one way to spell a word!" The President cried.

When you have trouble, think of poor Andrew Jackson and know that you’re not alone.

What’s really important

And remember what’s really important about good writing is not good spelling. If you spell badly but write well, you should hold your head up. As the poet T.S. Eliot recommended, "Write for as large and miscellaneous an audience as possible"—and don’t be overly concerned if you can’t spell "miscellaneous." Also remember that you can spell correctly and write well and still be misunderstood. Hold your head up about that, too. As good old G.C. Lichtenberg said, "A book is a mirror: if an ass peers into it, you can’t expect it to look at you"—whether you spell "aforitis" correctly or not.

Incomprehensibilities

"This is one of the longest English words in common use. But don’t let the length of a word frighten you! There’s a rule for how to spell this one, and you can learn it.

(but remember, to drop the final "e") force, forceful.

Gut that! I don’t have it, and I was introduced to that rule in pee school. With that rule, I still learn one word at a time.

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