

HOW TO IMPROVE YOUR WRITING

Ten tips to help you write with clarity and impact



the **WRITE**
STRATEGY PROGRAM

JAQUI LANE

www.thebookadviser.com.au

Introduction



One of the main reasons business people don't write their book is because they're not sure if they can write a high-quality book (both in terms of the content and the actual writing) that will receive good reviews from their peer group/industry.

Which is a shame as many business people have decades of knowledge and insights that can help other people, but it's locked away and only shared one-to-one.

The right words can share your knowledge in a way that helps people with some of the challenges they are facing and to avoid the mistakes that you and others have made.

The right words show the reader that you understand them and what's important to them and, they make sure they understand you.

I'm going to share a secret with you. Even the most famous and successful writers don't write on their own. Well, they might write their first and subsequent drafts on their own but after that these great, well-known writers have a support team of reviewers, editors, proof readers and friends who help them craft the best possible book.

So, how can you write better, move past your fear of 'not writing well enough', of being judged?

In this book I share my **Top 10 tips to writing with clarity and impact.**

Jaqui



01 Put your reader first

When we write we tend to focus on what we think is important, on what we know. And most of us know quite a lot after 10, 20 or 30 years, so the first tip is to change your perspective.

Stop thinking about your book as a way to brain dump all your knowledge, and start to see things from your reader's (target audiences) point of view.

Of course, you have to know who your target audience is first and this requires some thinking and research. Once you deeply know who you are writing for ask yourself these questions about them:

What are their main challenges and needs?

How often do they face these challenges?

Where and who do they currently go to for knowledge and insights?

How would they feel if they can solve their challenges?



Tell a positive story, but keep it real and get to the point

“ *Let's start at the very beginning,
it's a very good place to start.* ”

From the musical The Sound of Music

The Sound of Music got it wrong. The beginning (well your beginning/ life story) is probably NOT the best place to start your business book. What your reader wants to know apart from how you can help them is **why they should listen to you** – what's your authority?

Are you a practitioner? Have you implemented what you're writing about and sharing? Everything else they can research from your website, LinkedIn, industry associations, your social media and the wider media.

Alongside this you need to paint a picture of how your book (knowledge and insights) can change the readers' future.

Get them imagining the possibilities.

What if....?

Then share with them how you can help them make it happen. Provide clear, concise and actionable steps the reader can implement.

Provide case studies and examples where ever you can to illustrate a point/insight. These create connections with the reader, provide them with a way to relate to their specific situation or challenge.



03

Plan what you're going to write BEFORE you start writing

The single biggest mistake most first time business authors make is that they start writing (and some even publish) their book without a clear content plan.

To write a business book that delivers actionable knowledge and insight in a clear and concise way you have to plan your content BEFORE you start writing.

Most business people have more knowledge and insight than they could ever put into one book, so the real 'art' to writing a successful business book is to work out what to put in and what to leave out.

If you're not sure about what should be in your book, circle back to Tip 1, what are the challenges your target audience faces . . . this is what you write about.



04 Go easy on the jargon and TLAs*

Jargon, including TLAs* are special words or expressions used by a profession or group that are difficult for others to understand.

Most of us use jargon every day and social media is full of it. Depending on your age LOL means Lots of Love OR Laughing out Loud while ROTFL, LMAO and countless others have seeped into books.

Then there's the rampant use of specific words/descriptions across the financial sector, corporate world, health sector, construction, IT – pretty much every specialisation has it's own specific set of words and TLAs, IMO.

Avoid using jargon and three letter acronyms where ever possible.

You don't need to show-off or appear more knowledgeable than you are – quite the opposite – you want to make your knowledge and insights as accessible as possible to as wide an audience as possible.

As Einstein said:

“ *If you can't explain it simply, you don't understand it well enough.* ”

Given he came up with the most fundamental law of physics, $E=mc^2$ (oops jargon) he's worth paying attention to.

* Three letter acronyms.

05 Know your style

Just like fashion, business writing has different styles: formal, technical, persuasive, instructional, informative, academic . . .

Select the style that 'fits' you and your target audience and stick with it.

The words you write have to reflect you as a person, your voice. If you're not humorous in real life, don't try it in your book. If you don't use analogies on a daily basis don't suddenly burst into them in your book.

Separately, part of your style is choosing what style of English you're going to use: USA, Oxford English, Australian . . . other. Unlike fashion where you can get away with mixing and matching, it doesn't work in writing.

And, make sure you apply whatever style rules you choose when using titles for people, numbers, dates, times, measurements, place names, company names etc

'It's really off-putting for the reader if you use different styles throughout your manuscript. Your readers won't know why your book is hard to read and they'll stop reading it.

And, resist the urge to use hackneyed phrases and clichés. They're boring to read and show you're being lazy. For example:

'At the end of the day, in today's business world, you can break down the silos, take it off line, drink the Kool-Aid while you're opening up the kimono and still get the low hanging fruit in order to pivot before circling back to see how far you've moved the needle.'



Spelling and punctuation matter



There's nothing more of putting than bad spelling and punctuation.

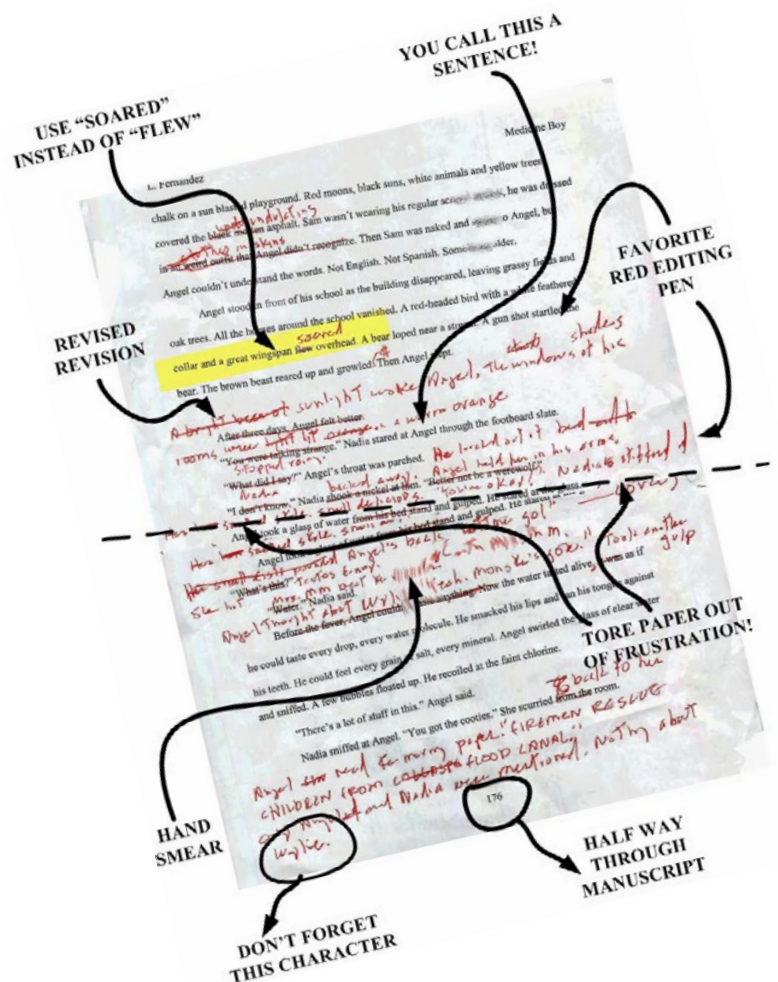
It's lazy and the reader won't continue reading your book now matter how great the content is.

And, don't rely on automated spell-checking systems as they won't pick up words that are spelled correctly but used in the wrong context: there, their, they're.

There's also the challenge of different spellings in different countries for the same word. We have Labor for the political party and labour (as in worker), the USA has labour; we have colour, the USA has color; we have specialise, the USA specialize. Do you prefer programme or program? Choose your word style and stick with it.

As per Tip 4 create a Style Guide for the words, names, descriptions, terminology you will be using and apply them.

When you've finished your final draft (the emphasis being on the word draft), pay an editor and/or a proofreader to review your manuscript. You may even need to have your manuscript proof read a couple of times. It's worth it.



06 Write first then cut, cut and cut some more

I am often asked how I know how much I should write, especially if I am commissioned to write a specific number of words.

My advice is not to count the number of words you are writing, just write whatever you need to because you will revise, edit down and reorganise your first and subsequent drafts.

“ *The critical thing is to get what’s in your head out of it and onto the screen (or paper). You can’t edit a blank page.* ”

And write the whole book rather than writing a chapter at a time and reworking/editing that. It’s only by writing the whole book that you can often ‘see’ what’s missing, whether the flow of what you’ve written makes sense, where you need more or less information.

As a general rule, well in my experience anyway, **most first** writing **drafts need** a trim here and a chop there. Actually, they probably need **cutting by** something in the region of **30-50%**. It’s easy to do, **so** don’t panic: just **delete anything that** you think **isn’t relevant**. Once you’ve done that, **then go back** to the very beginning **and take out** all those **unnecessary words** that don’t add anything. **Keep on** repeating what you’re **doing** again and again (**it** sounds boring but it’s actually quite empowering) **until** you’re happy that **what’s left is** as **short and relevant** as you can possibly make it.



Short sentences sound bold, confident and decisive.

They break up your writing nicely.

Give it rhythm, and pace.

Wake your reader up!

Surprise and engage.

Short rocks.

Period.

08 A picture is worth a thousand words

While this is true for the front and back cover of your book it's not true as far as the internal pages. That said, you need to think about the visual impact of your book by the time you're on your 2nd or 3rd draft.

Reading page after page of dense text is hard work so you need to break up your writing with some visual elements.

Use sub headings

Sub headings break up sections of your text and make it easier for your reader to read and find what they're most interested in.

Lists are also great visual tools as are:

1. pull-out quotes
2. case studies
3. simple diagrams
4. charts
5. illustrations, and
6. photos.

They help break up the text.

“Think about including a check list or summary at the end of each chapter.”



09 Listen up

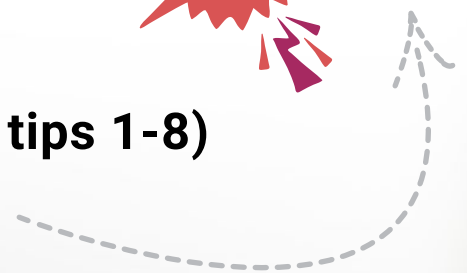
Read what you've written out loud.

Then ask yourself: Do you 'sound' confident, convincing and natural?



Yes – keep going.

No (go back through tips 1-8)



10 Read

This may sound like odd advice, especially if you're trying to focus on writing but look at it this way.

“ **Reading is like breathing in
Writing is like breathing out** ”

Reading makes you a better writer and you subconsciously absorb the structure and style of the author's writing. This is in addition to acquiring knowledge and insights.

I mostly read non-fiction and a wide variety of it. You never know what you might learn from a particular book and how it might be useful for your own writing.

Three authors whose writing I simply love and admire are Umberto Eco, Christopher Hitchens and Kevin Kelly. Eco's books *Chronicles of a Liquid Society* and *On Literature* are wonderful examples of clear, concise and

thoughtful writing. Christopher Hitchens' *Hitch 22* and *Arguably* are compilations of various articles he wrote. I often disagree with his perspective but am in awe of his writing. Kevin Kelly's book, *The Inevitable, Understanding the 12 technological forces that will shape our future*, completely changed my view about the future of books and learning.

Typically, when you read, you have more time to think. Reading gives you a unique pause button for comprehension and insight.





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Feeling inspired?

We'd love to talk to you about your book idea and help you make it a reality. To find out more get in touch with us.

jaqui@thebookadviser.com.au

www.thebookadviser.com.au



Front cover image: Umberto Eco, Italian novelist, literary critic, philosopher, semiotician, and university professor. 1932- 2016

Thanks to the freepik team



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