

# 2 Mind-blowing Tips that will Transform Your Writing

*Writing Strategies Corporate America can Really Use*



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# Write Every Day. Yes, Every Day (and Emails Don't Count!)

People usually don't expect to do things perfectly the first time. That's why we invest in lessons for everything from violin to dance to cake-decorating to golf. As humans, we know that practice is required for most things we want to master, whether that means going to the batting cage three times a week or rehearsing a sales presentation over and over.

Writing is no different. It is a skill that can be mastered with practice. Yet, too many people believe that people are born being good writers or have a natural affinity for it (the left brain, right brain argument), and while some people may *enjoy* writing more than others, that doesn't mean that those who don't like it can't learn—they can. The real reason that many professionals aren't good writers because they a) don't practice and b) have no strategy.

Ray Bradbury, author of *Fahrenheit 451* and dozens of other books, once said, "Quantity produces quality. If you only write a few things, you're doomed."

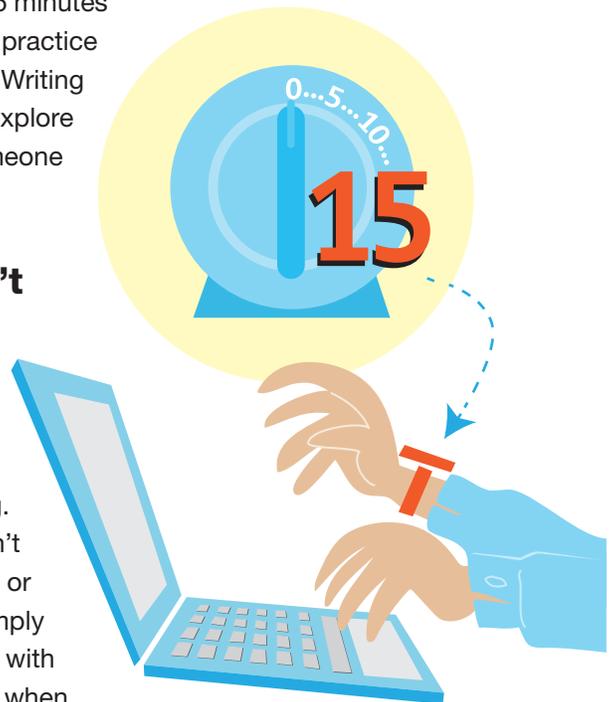
So, when an engineer has that one report to write and she waits until the last minute to write it, she's sabotaging herself in that she's not writing a lot and she's not practicing. Let's talk about practice first. There is real research that suggests that practicing writing helps (this shouldn't be a surprise, since practice should, theoretically, make us better at everything we do). And practicing writing doesn't take much in terms of time and/or energy (certainly less than practicing to become proficient at golf!).

## Write

Experts suggest writing for at least 15 minutes a day. As professor Katherine Black puts it, "Write **without editing** in your journal for 15 minutes every day. It will change your life." Granted, Black is a poet and creative writing professor, but whether you're writing poetry or a technical report, the idea is the same. Writing for 15 minutes a day accomplishes two things: it 1) forces you to practice and 2) makes writing part of your everyday routine. Writing without editing is key here: this is an opportunity to explore ideas without the constraint of worrying about someone else reading it—they won't unless you let them.

## "15 Minutes a Day is a Lot—I Don't have that Kind of Time."

But you do. You probably spend 15 minutes a day at the water cooler talking about the latest sports event. Keep in mind that when we say 15 minutes, we mean just 15 minutes of uninterrupted writing. During this 15 minutes (and writing emails doesn't count) you don't worry about grammar, punctuation, or even your topic (again, no editing!). The idea is simply to get ideas on paper without concerning yourself with any of the other things you typically worry about when writing. If you must, get to the office 15 minutes early or stay 15 minutes late; the payoff will be tremendous. Or, write at home.



## Avoid the “I Write Better under Stress” Excuse

Since we’re using our brains when we write (writing is thinking on paper, after all), we shouldn’t fool ourselves into thinking that we write better under stress. You may think you do, but chances are pretty good that you don’t. If you can, begin writing before you’re up against a deadline and forced to rush. When you’re rushed, you’re not giving your brain the opportunity to work, and when we rush to do anything, we’re typically sloppy.

### The Benefits

Setting aside 15 minutes a day, every day, to write has several positive results:

- If you have writer’s block or detest writing, writing every day encourages you to get started.
- This kind of writing can act as a “brain dump,” so that you get all those unwanted ideas on paper before you begin the “real” process of writing (and who knows, you may come up with a gem or two!).
- It gives you a chance to practice—and practice, as we’ve discussed, will make you a better writer.
- This kind of writing removes the pressure to create a “perfect” document and therefore should result in your being less stressed about writing.

You’ll be amazed at the difference you’ll see if you write 15 minutes a day for 15 days. Try it, and then let us know how it “changed your life.”

## Planning? I don’t need no stinkin’ planning!

Well, you probably do. Many professionals cringe at the thought of spending any more time than is absolutely necessary when writing, but planning can save you time because when you plan, you actually spend less time writing! Planning may seem like an extra step in the process, but it can save you time, and here’s how:

1.

**Readers.** When we take the time to learn everything we can about our readers (no, not whether they prefer hamburgers to hot dogs), we’re better able to write *for them*. You don’t have to know your readers personally; in fact, sometimes we can figure out what we need to know about our reader based simply on their role within an organization. For instance, a CEO is probably busy, with low tolerance for verbosity and he may want the bottom line upfront (BLUF). Once we know our readers’ attributes, we can then create what we call a “reader rubric.”

2.

**Reader Rubric.** As you probably know, a rubric is simply a checklist. In most cases, teachers use rubrics to grade writing and give students an idea of their strengths and weaknesses. In this case, we’re using rubric differently; in other words, it is a checklist, but it’s a checklist to help us determine

the strategies we can use to engage our reader. For instance, if I know that my reader is busy, the question that I would need to answer is “How do I help this busy reader find the information she needs?” One strategy may be to use subheadings, while another may be to ensure that the bottom line is first in the document. We use our reader rubric as a planning tool; in other words, it lets you work out,

on paper, the problem of how to appeal to your reader. [Download an example of a reader rubric.](#)

### 3.

**Outcome Statement.** An outcome statement is our objective for the document (what we want the document to achieve) or the action we want our reader to take. When we write an outcome statement, however, we need to ensure that the action or objectives are measurable. In other words, if I write an outcome statement that says the goal of the document is so that Steve will understand the process, how will I measure Steve’s understanding? An outcome statement is effective because it, if done well, will limit the kind and amount of information you include in the document. For instance, if I want Steve to understand, why do I want him to understand? What do I want him to be able to do with his knowledge? The outcome statement is a tool for you; it won’t wind up in the document, so you don’t need to worry about how it’s written—it should act as a roadmap for you to write the document.

So, whether you’re writing a formal document or an email to a colleague or client, take the time to plan; at the very least, create a checklist that lists the most important things you need to know about your reader(s). And incorporate writing into your everyday work routine; as we’ve suggested, practice makes perfect!

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