

One Trick to Revolutionize Your Research Writing

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Do you spend hours writing chapters and articles and find that it still never sounds quite right? Many people think the only way to improve their writing is to keep hacking away at it. But that's not the case. The trick that most people don't know is that the best way to improve your writing is to read.

Read to Improve Your Writing

Optimally, you should set aside at least one hour a day to improve your writing. Spend 50% of your available time reading authors that you would like to emulate. Do you want the crisp, precise language of a scientific journal? The expressive yet professional eloquence of a classical music reviewer? Or maybe you want to be the next Hemingway: clean, true, and real. Read the stuff you want to write.

Spend the other 50% of your time reading anything you can get your hands on. This will help you to eventually develop your [own style](#). And when I say "read anything," I mean it. Make this 50% varied. Read as many different authors and genres as possible. Whether it's Harry Potter or The London Times, it will improve your writing.

Be a Good Student: Take Notes

In order to study writing, you must be ready to take notes. So, while you read, keep a pencil in hand and a reading journal ready. Write the title of what you are reading and any other information you might want to recall about the piece later. As you read, consider a few of the following questions and jot down your answers:

- If I had to draw an image to correlate with this writing, what would it look like? Would it be an even line of sharp black dots? Or a waving trail of blurry blues?
- What is the goal of this author? Inform, convince, entertain, create emotion?
- Is this piece easy to understand? If not, what makes it difficult to understand?
- What is the average length of the sentences? Less than one line? Multiple lines? A half of a page?

Find & Apply Patterns

Soon you'll begin to notice patterns. Do you generally find that longer sentences are more difficult to understand on a first read through? Or maybe you notice that most newspaper articles have short sentences, like staccato black dots in a line. Compare that to sentences in journal articles in your field. Note patterns when you discover them.

Once you feel confident that you've identified some patterns, you're ready to start translating that into writing. This exercise is fun and can be repeated with different material every time you use it:

- Pick one paragraph from an academic book/article in your field. Introductory paragraphs often work well for this exercise.
- While thinking about the patterns you've noticed in your readings, re-write the paragraph as a short news article.
- Then, re-write it again as poetry.

Now you're applying those patterns, which means you have really learned them. Keep putting aside a little time every day to practice your writing—and keep reading and taking notes, too. Over time you will begin to notice that writing becomes easier for you and your results are improving. This means not only will your written work become easier to read and more polished, but you will save time editing and tweaking.

Before you know it, people will be saying they admire your writing!

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