20 Writing Terms Translated into Plain English
A Guide for Your 30-Day Writer's Training Plan

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

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Paul's passion for storytelling inspired him to form WordWrite. His book on the importance of storytelling in business communications, Finding Your Capital S Story, is available on Amazon. The book details the business success of authentic stories shared by fluent storytellers who continually read their audiences to ensure they are engaged. The book builds on WordWrite's proprietary storytelling process, StoryCrafting.

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Here's a handy glossary of important writing terms that will make you sound like Ernest Hemingway – at least when it comes to describing the mechanics of writing.

1. **Acronym**: An abbreviation for a technical term. Many professionals use acronyms to create a kind of insider's language that separates them from everyone else. Avoid acronyms at all costs! The goal of good communication and good writing is clarity, not confusion! Sadly, even savvy inbound marketers fall prey to acronyms that can be off-putting to our audiences (such as "TOFU" instead of saying, Top of the Funnel content).

2. **Art**: A visual element that accompanies long-form writing. The knock on writers is that they can't think visually. Wrong! The best writers are capable of creating words with pictures – and using pictures when they are most appropriate (see **Infographic** and **Pictures**).

3. **Attribution**: A fancy term that describes the process of making sure important quotes, statistics and thinking in your writing are properly credited to the experts who spoke them or developed them. Using attributions in your writing gives it credibility and increases your stature as an expert worthy of your reader's attention. Proper attribution also creates nice opportunities for appropriate linking to source materials.

4. **Attribution Part 2:** Attribution also refers to the words you use with quotes, as in "And this is the way writers do it," Furiga said. Said or says are the greatest four-letter attributions in the world. Don't be cute with attributions. Stay away from commented, exclaimed, averred or any other attributions that, at first glance, seem to provide variety to your writing. Really, they don't. What they create are linguistic speed bumps to comprehension. Good attribution should be like breathing – you don't think about it; you just do it.

5. **Call to Action (CTA):** Here's a major way in which online writing differs from that of past centuries: It's all about engagement. And

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what does nearly all research about online content tell us? If you don't ask your readers to do something, they probably won't. Duh. So, ask your readers to like a post, click a button, share your content, share their thoughts, etc., etc. There's no excuse for a lack of engagement in your writing online – that's what makes online writing unique!

6. **Golden Coins:** If you're writing a long blog (or let's say a downloadable offer), you want to keep the reader's attention. Golden coins are the interesting nuggets that you place at intervals in your writing to keep the reader engaged. A good example would be using small stories along the way to illustrate whatever principles you are sharing.

7. **Graf:** Not to be confused with a graph or graphic, Graf is writerly shorthand for PARAGRAPH. Just one of those terms to make you seem, well, martini sophisticated when you talk about your writing.

8. **Infographic:** One of the newest and, in my mind, most fun writing opportunities, a total creature of the internet. An infographic is a compelling, engaging combination of writing and visuals that, in a very attractive presentation, share far more valuable content than you could share in words or pictures alone. But don't mistake infographics as merely pretty pictures. They require strategic thinking (and writing) as well as great images before they can become truly remarkable content.

9. **Inverted Pyramid:** Unless you want to be bored to tears, NEVER ask a journalist about the inverted pyramid and NEVER use it in your writing. If you care to know, back in the 1860s, when battlefield reporters in the American Civil War were first able to electronically send their stories back to their newspapers via telegraph, the inverted pyramid meant, send the most important paragraphs in descending order from most important to least important, just in case part of the story was lost in transmission. No good storyteller begins a great yarn with the punch line, so why should you when it comes to your writing? This is one of the great benefits of the internet. Go long, go short, go tell the story the way it works best!

10. **Lead:** The first paragraph of whatever you are writing (obviously, not a concern in social media when writing for channels such as X).

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The goal of a good lead is to capture your readers' attention and draw them in. The shorter the better. Fewer than 30 words is essential; if you can do it in less than 25, pat yourself on the back. If you can do it in 15 or fewer, your blog is tweet-ready from the start!

11. **Nut Graf:** In every piece of long-form writing (in inbound marketing, usually a blog), there should be a paragraph within the first four or five that succinctly summarizes the purpose of the blog or piece. It's called a nut graf because it gives you "everything in a nutshell." There are alternative terms for this practice (see WIIFM).

12. **Pictures:** Every piece of online content (blogs especially but really, any content for any social media platform) should have a visual component (see Art). Every time you're writing for an online medium, you should be thinking about the pictures that will draw interest to your great thinking and content.

13. **Proofread:** Because any of us can jump on the internet and share whatever we might be thinking at that moment, online content is unfortunately filled with grammatical errors, missing words and other speed bumps to comprehension that either leave your readers asking, "huh?" or thinking that they are not important enough to you to merit careful consideration of what you wrote before you hit "send." Do yourself a favor: have someone else read your writing before you post it online. Yes, even most of your social media posts. Good inbound marketers and social media practitioners plan out a significant percentage of their social media content and there's no excuse for NOT making sure those are letter-perfect. When you are reacting in real time to a major news event on X, no one expects you to proofread your reaction. They do expect you will be commenting on the right revolution in the right country or that you'll properly spell the name of the big star who just died. Think before you send! (See **Spell check**).

14. **Rights:** It's very easy on the internet to copy anybody else's content and claim it as your own, whether it's a great picture for your blog or, sadly, that witty tweet that some folks steal and present as their own. Don't do this! First, if you're using pictures from other sources, there are great resources for free or nearly free art. Use them. In terms of content, aside from the ethical and moral issues,

hey folks, it's the internet! Two clicks and you can find out who really came up with an original idea. Don't embarrass yourself. See Attribution for more.

15. **Spell check:** Any good word processing program (I use MS Word) has a spell check function. Use it, but don't rely on it. Good writing and good language are too important to be left in the hands of a subroutine in a software program that's been mass produced and delivered to something like a billion users over the course of time. As with anything else in life, common sense trumps convenience. Here's a trick: Print out what you're writing before you post it (especially with blogs) and look at it on that old stuff called paper. I guarantee you will see things that spell check missed. Spell check will never be 100 percent accurate on common terms such as there or their or its or it's.

16. **Stylebook:** Every good writer has one. The two most common are the Associated Press Stylebook (available in book form or as an online subscription) and the Chicago Manual of Style. You need one because it answers questions you don't want to think about, such as when to capitalize or hyphenate words. You don't want to make this stuff up as you go along, because even an unsophisticated reader will be driven to insanity if you spell or capitalize the same word three different ways in one blog. I prefer the AP guide because it's what the major news organizations use, and let's face it, CNN, the New York Times, the AP and the Wall Street Journal (to name a few) are among the most trafficked content sites on the internet and if you use the same rules of the writing road as they do, you will save yourself an enormous amount of time personally and with your readers.

17. **Variety:** Experts such as HubSpot, the inbound marketing leader, will tell you that a good blog is 600 words. Well, just remember that's an average. And nobody wants to be average, right? The most important thing you can do to grow your writing skills (and the engagement of your audience) is to understand that good writing is not like making bricks – every blog should not be the same shape and size so that it creates a monotonous wall of boring content. Your blogs should be occasionally short (150 words, maybe with a great YouTube video), 350 words to share a quick and important reaction to a news event in your industry, 600 words to share an important

concept, and yes, sometimes, maybe 1,200 words to share that really critical bit of thinking that makes you and your organization different from everybody else who does what you do.

18. **Variety Part 2:** Within each blog or piece of writing, variety is also important. Paragraphs and sentences also should not be like bricks – all 30 words long and neatly formatted so that, from a distance, your writing looks like a slab of content formed from equally spaced and sized gibberish. Write short when it works. Use it for effect. Write long when it makes sense to get that point across in a way that works. (See what I just did? Sentences of 5, 4 and 16 words used for effect.)

19. **WIIFM:** An acronym (yes, we should generally avoid them) that stands for What's In It For Me. This is the key question that ANY writing you do must answer for your intended audience. It doesn't matter how artful your writing may be, or how smart your statistics may be, if you can't put all that remarkable content together in a way that answers this question for your audience, you've lost the battle for their hearts, minds – and attention.

20. **Word Economy:** Good writers understand that, in the 21st century, short attention spans demand that communication be clear, catchy – and to the point. Unfortunately, the Internet allows us to write long circular blogs that meander around the barnyard and back before making their point, because the old economics of the cost of paper or ink don't apply. Please don't do this to your readers. Treat your words like million-dollar assets. Dole them out as frugally as you would any other treasure. Your readers will thank you for getting to the point quickly and with the fewest words possible. After all, two texts and five tweets came in while you were circling your barnyard and you just may lose your readers' attention if you can't say what you mean as quickly as possible.

Contact Us:

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Interested in learning more about how effective writing can power your inbound marketing and online content creation? Contact us for an initial consultation.

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