

Rachel Toor's Top Ten Tips for Writing Well

1. **Read like a writer**

Who are the best stylists in your field?
What keeps you interested?
Steal actual moves

2. **Write for your ideal—and actual—reader**

Who do you most want to impress?
What would your most competitive and obnoxious frenemy say?
How can you compel the attention of a busy and intimidating person?

3. **Write like the best, smartest version of yourself**

What's your persona? Who will the reader imagine?
Will someone who knows you say “this sounds just like you”?
Would your best undergraduate enjoy reading your work?

4. **Don't be afraid to tell stories**

Soylent Green is people
Use the first person—what got you interested in the topic?

5. **Avoid jargon and pretentious language**

Can you make the case without jargon?
Do you use it because you're lazy or uncertain or afraid?

6. **Write muscular prose**

Write with nouns and verbs; beware of adverbs and qualifying statements
Control F forms of “to be”
Zombie nouns

7. **Write lean (omit needless words)**

This, that, there
Word packages, redundancies, defaulting to the negative

8. **Read drafts in a different font**

Nothing looks smart in 14 point Arial
Constant revision can lead to memorization

9. **Read it out loud**

Or, have someone read it aloud and note where they stumble, where they autocorrect for you

10. **Don't write like a suburb**

What will the reader expect when she looks it over before reading?
Shrink View to 50% and see how it looks

Some Resources for Writing Better

- ✦ Strunk and White, *The Elements of Style*
- ✦ Joseph Williams, *Style: Toward Clarity and Grace*
- ✦ Helen Sword, *Stylish Academic Writing*
- ✦ Stanley Fish, *How To Read A Sentence*
- ✦ Deirdre McClosky, *Economical Writing*
- ✦ Susan Rabiner, *Thinking Like Your Editor*
- ✦ William Zinsser, *On Writing Well*
- ✦ William Germano, *Getting it Published*
- ✦ William Germano, *Dissertation into Book*
- ✦ John R. Trimble, *Writing with Style*
- ✦ Gerald Graff and Cathy Birkenstein, *They Say/I Say*
- ✦ Anne Lamott, *Bird by Bird*
- ✦ Natalie Goldberg, *Writing Down the Bones*
- ✦ Stephen King, *On Writing*
- ✦ Betsy Lerner, *The Forest for the Trees*
- ✦ Patricia T. O'Connor, *Woe Is I*
- ✦ George Orwell, "Politics and the English Language"
- ✦ Lewis Thomas, "Notes on Punctuation"
- ✦ Patricia Limerick, "Dancing with Professors"

Columns by me:

<http://www.chronicle.com/article/My-Little-Bag-of-Writing/141309/>
<http://www.chronicle.com/article/Bad-WritingBad-Thinking/65031/>
<http://www.chronicle.com/article/The-Habits-of-Highly/150053>

Column by Michael Munger

<http://www.chronicle.com/article/10-Tips-on-How-to-Write-Less/124268/>

Booklet by Steven Pinker and Others

<http://stevenpinker.com/why-academics-stink-writing>